

## Bicycle theft scan of the Dutch Cyclists' Union

### Bad racks and naive cyclists

The Dutch Cyclists' Union investigated the opportunities and problems of a local approach to bicycle theft. One of the conclusions: with respect to bicycle policy too, there is still a lot of work to be done.

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Bicycle theft is a major obstacle to getting people on their bicycles. A survey among 12,000 cyclists conducted by the Dutch Cyclists' Union in the framework of the bicycle theft scan showed that 45% of people did not cycle to some destinations, such as the station or town centre, for fear of theft. For the same reason, 32% were not prepared to buy a new bicycle. These conclusions confirm previous research results and emphasise that attention for bicycle theft is an urgent priority in bicycle policy. But bicycle theft is a security problem and is therefore not directly the responsibility of the traffic official.

### **Top-3**

Various developments in the field of 'safety' policy have highlighted the problem of bicycle theft. As a result, the directing role of municipalities for local safety has been strengthened. Municipalities often start by defining the main safety problems in the district and the whole municipality. Bicycle theft is almost always among the top 3 common offences. In addition there are national policy objectives that generate interest in bicycle theft. For example there is the objective '20 to 25% fewer problems and criminality in the public space in the period 2003-2006'. Tackling bicycle theft could help achieve this goal. More attention for frequent offenders - an important aspect in the policy plans of all police forces - also helps.

Because among frequent offenders, there are also bicycle thieves. The climate is therefore favourable. But how is the present practice? In the past year, the Dutch Cyclists' Union carried out a Bicycle Theft Scan in twelve municipalities (thirteen are still pending). In each municipality, the policy of municipality and police is studied, the present activities are analysed and a 'location scan' is carried out. This involves examining the main risk locations. Are there enough bicycle racks? Are these good quality? What about social safety and monitoring? The results thus obtained provide a picture of the opportunities and problems of the local approach to bicycle theft. And it all starts with bicycle parking policy, because this is an area with much room for improvement, for which the Traffic department is usually responsible itself.

### **FietsParkeur**

Good bicycle parking facilities can prevent theft. In the twelve municipalities, most seem to have some provisions related to bicycle parking policy, but the focus is almost always only on the town centre. In half of these municipalities, there is a written recommendation that they purchase racks with FietsParkeur in the future. However, this was not a hard and fast arrangement.

When we look on the street, we see a different picture. As part of the location scan, areas with high bicycle theft figures were studied, i.e. risk locations. Apart from station environments which had already been tackled in the framework of Space for the Bicycle, there were many bad racks,

i.e. racks with no attachment system and little space between the bicycles. This particularly applies to risk locations outside the centre, like swimming pools or schools. Bicycle parking policy should be much more directed at preventing bicycle theft by providing good racks. Another significant conclusion from the location scan is that cyclists do not secure their bicycles properly. The majority of bicycles, also at risk locations, are only secured with one lock. If there are good racks, cyclists often tend not to secure their bicycle to the attachment system. They tend to be more sensible in station environments, but even here, with the exception of The Hague, never more than 50% of the bicycles are secured with two locks. Do cyclists underestimate the risks, particularly in relation to the time element? Is it too much trouble to secure bicycles properly? Or do they reckon with the possibility of theft by using very old bicycles? The reason is certainly not clear. Nevertheless, efforts directed at communication can certainly be valuable. So install sufficient high quality racks (with attachment system) and inform cyclists about the correct use. The fact that focusing on communication can have success is proved by the example of Harlingen. Here, four policemen managed to achieve a 32% reduction in bicycle theft by clearly informing cyclists on how to secure their bicycles better at the station. For more good examples, see [www.Dutch Cyclists' Union.nl/aanpakfietsendiefstal](http://www.Dutch Cyclists' Union.nl/aanpakfietsendiefstal).

### **Living environment**

With respect to bicycle parking policy, an important gap became evident: the living environment. The survey conducted in the framework of the Bicycle Theft Scan showed that over 30% of bicycles were stolen in the living environment, but that people were completely oblivious to this fact. Their own home and living environment was always right at the bottom of risk locations to be identified. Of course, the term 'living locations' covers such a broad area that the number of bicycle thefts is not very significant, but the fact remains that the total of all bicycle thefts near people's homes is surprisingly high.

Policy makers do not take much account of the living environment either. The main focus of bicycle parking policy is the town centre and some public transport locations. The Building and Housing departments have few requirements regarding bicycle parking, as seen from the answers to the questionnaire distributed in the framework of the Bicycle Theft Scan.

Since bicycle parking is no longer included in the Buildings Decree and is no longer part of the specifications for new building, sheds which are suitable for storing bicycles will probably become rarer in new building projects. This would mean a return of the problem of many 19<sup>th</sup> century residential districts in large towns. Another instrument has been introduced: the Police Certification Safe Housing. So far this certification has mainly been used to make the facade burglar and vandal-proof. But as of 1 January 2005, the requirements have been modified and many are now relevant for preventing bicycle theft.

Although the certification does not really make it obligatory to provide a bicycle shed, it does assume a burglar-proof storage area. The limiting conditions of urban planning state unequivocally that 'the number of bicycle parking facilities must correspond with the number of users and visitors'. Bicycle parking places should have Fiets-Parkeur and be fitted with an attachment system, be as near to the centre as possible and be visible from the public road'. There are also requirements for lighting in parking facilities.

If municipalities start to fulfil these requirements more often, or at least encourage housing associations and project developers to do their utmost in this field, we will be a huge step further.

### **Important partner**

The police is naturally an important partner in tackling bicycle theft. The theft scan shows that the input and attitude of the police varies considerably. It was notable that of the twelve municipalities, only one (Dordrecht) mentioned bicycle theft as a priority and where bicycle theft was also a priority among the police. Municipalities that want to achieve something are often faced with a police force with other priorities.

In most municipalities, typical police tasks such as patrolling, monitoring and controlling only occur 'incidentally when there is a reason'. The police in Gouda, for example, admitted that nothing had been done in recent years. According to the bicycle theft scan, Gruthok inspections (Gruthok was formed from the first letters of the Dutch names for retailers required to keep a record of their suppliers in accordance with the Penal Code: gold or silversmith, bicycle dealer, second-hand dealer, scrap iron merchant, watchmaker, buyer and cashier) – in this case on second-hand bicycle dealers – are rarely carried out anywhere on a structural basis.

Of course, some tasks do not necessarily have to be performed by the police. Civic guards or superintendants can also carry out inspections or monitoring. However they must be well informed and there must be good agreements in place if a bicycle thief or receiver can be arrested, because that is police work. In Amsterdam, where large-scale campaigns are regularly held and where gruthok controls have been restored, these tasks are the job of the cleaning police. They only contact the police when they have made a catch. Checks to trace stolen bicycles can be very successful, as shown from campaigns conducted by agents in Groningen and Eindhoven. It should be possible to implement better checks of the piles of bicycles which end up with the municipality or police because they have been found on the street or during clearing campaigns. At the moment, as revealed by the Bicycle Theft Scan, bicycles found are often checked, but only once: immediately on arrival. Cyclists may not yet have reported the theft and the bicycle may not have been included in the files. Moreover, only the frame number is generally checked in the police records. The superregional HKS system is seldom consulted. Calling about engraved postcodes or trying to ascertain the origin of a bicycle through bicycle shop stickers is not done either. In short, checking should be performed more effectively.

Tracing stolen bicycles is a good way of tackling receiving. Also bicycles can be returned to their original owners, whereby people see the use of reporting thefts.

### **Other priorities**

In the twelve municipalities studied, bicycle theft was regularly mentioned as one of the subjects in the local safety policy. But the step to a truly integrated approach seems to be problematic. This is not only due to other police priorities, for example, but also due to the lack of knowledge about what measures municipalities can take themselves or together with others. Activities sometimes remain limited to a postcode engraving campaign or extra monitoring at stations. However most success can be achieved by taking a range of measures, in collaboration with various partners like the police, justice and the bicycle sector. Amsterdam and Winterswijk are good examples of this. Traffic officials can play an important role, particularly with regard to bicycle parking policy. Politicians and policy makers who promote bicycle use can find enough leads in the current safety policy to put bicycle theft on the agenda.

The Centre for Crime Prevention and Safety, in collaboration with the Dutch Cyclists' Union, has published a book: *Aanpak fietsdiefstal in gemeenten* [Tackling bicycle theft in municipalities]. It includes tips for setting up an integral approach to bicycle theft. It can be

ordered from the centre for crime prevention and safety, e-mail: [info@hetccv.nl](mailto:info@hetccv.nl). The book is included in the database on [www.bicycleberaad.nl](http://www.bicycleberaad.nl).

A database can be found on the website of the Dutch Cyclists' Union with good examples of tackling bicycle theft [www.Dutch Cyclists' Union.nl/aanpakfietsdiefstal](http://www.DutchCyclists'Union.nl/aanpakfietsdiefstal).