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Commentary: BART Bike Theft Victim Speaks Out: By, Justin Lehrer

I am a BART bike theft victim. Both my wife and I bike to the North Berkeley BART station every day. Between us, we have had no fewer than four occasions over the past 18 months where our property was stolen from this BART station. Three of the four incidents involved the entire bike getting stolen, the fourth was a seat and rear tire. We do what we can to avoid these situations; we use thick Kryptonite U-Locks, and lock both the front wheel and the frame to the bike rack. We promptly upgraded to Kryptonite's new locking system after the Bic pen loophole was publicized. We even make an extra effort to lock our bikes within view of the station agent's booth whenever possible. It makes no difference. Three of four times, the bikes were stolen in broad daylight, between 9 a.m. and 5 p.m. Bike thieves have taken to using car jacks to pry open Kryptonite locks. I can tell you as a victim, this method works very well.

It doesn't take a victim to know there is a problem here. Walk by any bike rack at a BART station and you will find a graveyard of stripped frames among the locked up bikes. There is one stripped down TREK road bike frame at North Berkeley BART that has been there for over three months. The car jack is still wedged in the U-Lock, which is bent somewhat out of shape. Leaving these violated frames in the rack for such an extended period reduces the number of available spots for other bikers and suggests that BART doesn't care enough about its bike-riders to maintain this area.

When is BART going to start taking steps to safeguard the property of their riders? BART police have told me point blank that bike theft is not a priority for them. They do not have any security cameras trained on the bike rack area; even a fake camera serves as a visual deterrent. When the most recent theft occurred, after waiting 20 minutes for the BART police to arrive, the station agent asked my wife if she still wanted them to come and file a report. Just because 20 minutes have passed doesn't mean the crime, or its impact, is no longer significant.

BART is sending a clear message to their riders that they do not care about safety and security around the bike racks, or about customer satisfaction.

Here are some basic, inexpensive steps BART can take to address this situation:

- Post signs that the bike racks are under surveillance and

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crimes will be punished to the full extent of the law.

- Install security cameras. Whether they are on or not, they are an important visual deterrent.
- Remove the ransacked frames of bikes that have been vandalized or partially stolen after a reasonable period of time (one to two weeks).

Once these initial steps are taken, BART can step up and take even more action that will have an impact:

- Install bike racks inside the stations, within the turnstiles. Some stations have a surplus of available space for this.
- Raise the priority of these crimes for the BART police force. I'm not suggesting this is more important than human safety, but property theft is a common issue at BART stations. Having an officer focus on bike theft prevention for even a portion of their time is bound to have an impact.

Bikes are a critical component of the commute for many BART riders. When will BART realize this and take action?

Justin Lehrer is a Berkeley resident.>

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