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## Attacks on bicycle commuters spur rider-awareness campaign

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By [Charles E. Brown](#)

Seattle Times staff reporter

It's no wonder cycling activists are still strategizing ways to stay safe.

Only days ago, another bike commuter reported being robbed of his wallet as he rode along Interstate 90's bike route in Seattle's Sam Smith Park in the late afternoon.

It wasn't the first time a cyclist had been accosted in the park, at the west entrance to the Mount Baker bike tunnel. There have been a few other incidents reported to police.

A similar crime happened along the route last May, when a Seattle University professor was attacked by three teenagers who stole his wallet.

But what's worrisome to some riders is that many more such crimes may go unreported.

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Crimes of opportunity, or targeted attacks?

"I think what it is, is somebody's got an idea that this might work as a way of stealing stuff. It's a combination of location of opportunity, and they've succeeded with it, so they go back to what has worked in the past," said Seattle police Lt. Deanna Nollette, the East Precinct's watch commander who was with the bicycle club Tuesday to help dispense information.

Nollette said police have discussed such deterrents as park video surveillance and undercover patrols with bicycle groups.

"This is always a high priority for us when people are being victimized," she said.

In the case of the Beacon Hill cyclist, victimized on Feb. 26, he says he was yanked off his bike by "two hoodlums in all black wearing hockey masks." One punched him in the face.

Josh Putnam isn't surprised. Late last summer, he almost fell victim to two males in their late teens or early 20s as he rode his bike through the same area, his regular route between his Mercer Island workplace and downtown Seattle, where he catches a train for the rest of his commute south to his home in Pacific.

By the time it crossed his mind they were up to something, Putnam, a 41-year-old life-insurance marketer, says one of them was jumping toward him.

"I saw him coming, so I leaned into him and didn't get yanked over," he said.

He got away from the two, both of whom were wearing bandannas covering most of their faces. "But it was a reminder to always be aware what's going on around you," he said.

Awareness is one of the key tips Seattle police and local groups like the Cascade Bicycle Club say are a defense against such attacks.

"We're not trying to make people paranoid about their safety, but we are trying to stress awareness," said David Hiller, the Cascade Bicycle Club's advocacy director.

Besides wallets, Hiller suspects assailants may be targeting laptops, cellphones and other valuables bike commuters may be carrying.

In his 15 years commuting daily along the trail between his Mount Baker home and downtown Seattle, 62-year-old Bret Sutton says he's never had a problem. "But I definitely realize how possible it is," he said. He passed through the park less than 10 minutes after the Feb. 26 robbery, in time to see all the follow-up police activity and talk with the victim.

"This is just the visible tip of the iceberg that cyclists who ride this route have known about for some time," said Ben Feigert, 40, a Central Area resident and Sammamish high-school teacher who bikes daily between home and Mercer Island to join a van pool to work.

The bicycle club says upward of 1,000 riders use that I-90 trail route daily between Seattle and the Eastside.

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