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Online mapping tool promotes bike safety

Seattle-based Cascade Bicycle Club has launched an online mapping tool, www.bikewise.org, that gives the public a place to report bicycle collisions, hazards and thefts, and look at trends. People have posted where road hazards exist for cyclists in cities in Washington and six other states.

By [Sanjay Bhatt](#)

Joe Easterday, of Seattle, and daughter Helen, 5, pedal along Lake Washington on a car-free Bicycle Sunday.

Sue Mings was riding her bicycle home from work in 2004 when a bus clipped her, knocking her over.

Her helmet cracked in half when her head hit the pavement. Though the Bellevue resident wasn't seriously injured, it was two years before she had the confidence to commute by bike again. When she hears a bus now, she pulls over to wait for it to pass.



KEN LAMBERT / THE SEATTLE TIMES

Mings said she's excited that the Cascade Bicycle Club has launched an online mapping tool that gives the public a place to report bicycle collisions, hazards and thefts, and look at trends.

"People will have better information," she said.

In the week since the 11,000-member Seattle group quietly launched www.bikewise.org, club officials say more than 125 people have registered and reported 30 collisions in Seattle alone. People have posted where road hazards exist for cyclists in cities in Washington and six other states. Those planning to buy a used bike can see which models were reported stolen in their neighborhood.

The timing is apt: With summer here, thousands of enthusiasts are riding their bikes. So far this year, at least two cyclists — a University of Washington lecturer and a UW scientist — have been killed in collisions with vehicles in Seattle. Cyclists in King County were hospitalized 226 times for collisions in 2007, the latest year available, with 44 of those involving cars, according to state records.

Tessa Greigor, the project manager for Bikewise, says she and software developer Phil Mitchell hope other bicycle clubs will use the tool, which is believed to be the first online self-reporting

system of its kind in the nation. A mobile application is in the works. The tool isn't a substitute for filing a police report, she said, but it gives the community easy access to this type of data.

The goal is to identify "hot spots" and share the data with cities so that problems can be addressed sooner, Gregor said.

For example, if someone reports a pothole, that data could be sent automatically to a street-maintenance department for review. Now, people usually call a city hotline (684-ROAD) to report potholes or other road hazards.

Sean Cryan, chair of Seattle's Bicycle Advisory Board, said he thinks people are more likely to report problems using an online form than calling the city. Cryan, who cycles to work, said he almost fell off his bike once due to gravel on the roadway.

Jonathan Maus, editor of BikePortland.org, which covers cycling news in the Portland region, said the Bikewise Web site is more robust and better designed than previous attempts in other cities to raise awareness about the challenges facing cyclists on the road.

"It's kind of an early-warning system," he said. "There's a record of it, so there's some accountability."

Last year his news Web site launched the Bike Safety Monitoring and Reporting Tool (B-SMaRT), which didn't gain as much traction as he had hoped.

By contrast, Cascade Bicycle Club has a large built-in membership willing to report collisions and hazards and can use the self-reported data in its advocacy work, Maus said.

While Bikewise deserves credit for capturing data on collisions that typically go unreported, it's hard to compare the raw number of collisions in two areas without knowing how many cyclists are in those areas, said Dr. Fred Rivara, director of the Harborview Injury Prevention & Research Center in Seattle.

Still, a cluster of injuries reported at an intersection could get the transportation department to investigate further, he said.

And Rick Sheridan, a spokesman for the city's Department of Transportation, is talking with the club about using data from the Bikewise site.

"It provides us with additional sets of eyes out on the roadway," Sheridan said. "We'd like to receive that information quickly and move on it quickly."

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