



**BICYCLE
NETWORK®**

**BIKE THEFTS IN
VICTORIA
2011-2020**

A BICYCLE NETWORK REPORT

JULY 2021



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Bicycle Network acknowledges the traditional owners of the land on which we work and live and pay our respects to the first peoples of this country, their culture and elders, past, present and emerging.

Executive summary

In response to increasing concerns about stolen bikes across Victoria, Bicycle Network undertook a detailed investigation into the common characteristics of bike theft cases.

We found that:

- The number of bicycle thefts reported in Victoria has increased by 81.2 per cent in the past 10 years
- Only 9 per cent of bike theft cases are solved
- Bike thefts at car parks and multi-dwellings are growing by 40.7 per cent each year
- Only three Victorian local government areas have experienced no year-on-year growth in bike thefts

The results highlight that bike theft remains a poorly resolved issue across metropolitan and regional Victoria, and may worsen into the future without proper action being taken.

While there are a number of preventative measures people can take in safely securing their bike, the burden should not be placed entirely upon them. By preparing stronger policy options for the provision of secure public and private storage facilities, we can reduce theft risks and further eliminate barriers to a healthy bike-riding lifestyle.

Recommendations summary

1. Lockable on-street and off-street bike parking facilities where people park bikes for long periods of time (workplaces, schools and shopping centers)
2. Provide incentives for multi-dwelling building developers and facility managers to install secure, purpose-built bike parking facilities with restricted access
3. Amend the Building Code of Australia to include provision and specifications for end-of-trip facilities
4. Set national guidelines for workplaces regarding the provision of fit-for-purpose bike facilities

Putting the spotlight on bike thefts

One of the greatest joys in life is getting a new bicycle. We all remember that Christmas or birthday when we got our first set of wheels. The tag #NewBikeDay has hundreds of thousands of Instagram posts of people beaming from ear to ear with their shiny new machines.

However, one of the saddest moments in life is when you discover your bike has been stolen. It can hit you when you step out the front door on to a porch that shouldn't be empty or when you're left stranded at the supermarket with your helmet in one hand and groceries in the other.

This report was prompted by increasing concerns about the number of bikes stolen across Victoria. Using recorded offence data from the Crime Statistics Agency Victoria (CSAV; year ending December 2020), we investigated how many bikes are stolen each year, when they get stolen and where they get stolen from.

In general, the risk of your bike being stolen is low. Only one in every 1000 bikes is stolen across the state. However, thieves are opportunistic, and the risk of theft rises substantially when riders do not take appropriate steps when parking a bike and locking it securely.

The problem runs deeper. Bike thefts introduce a barrier to bike-friendly towns and cities. No one is going to want to purchase and ride a bike if they know it is just going to end up in the hands of thieves.

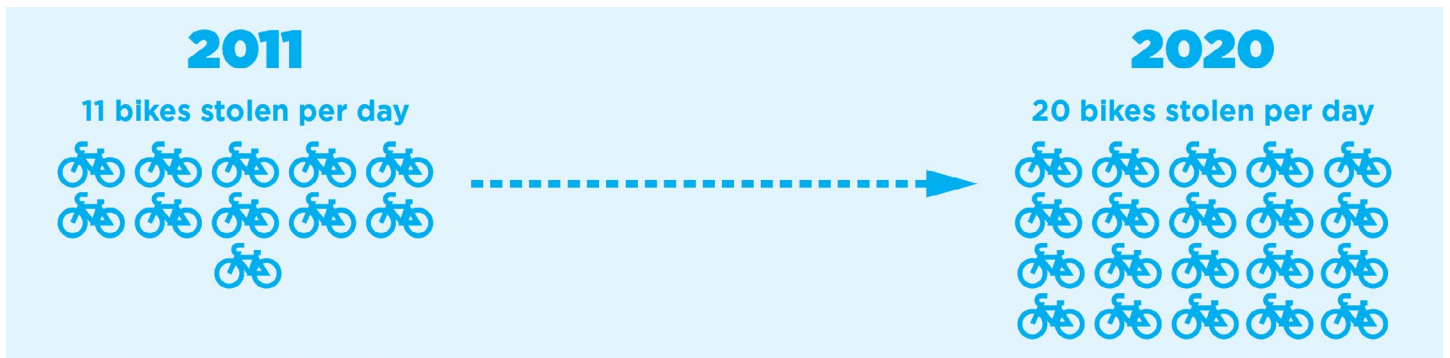
The purpose of this report is to help people understand where thefts happen and what they can do to reduce the likelihood of losing their beloved bicycles. We also explore policy options that may help in mitigating bike thefts.



How many bikes get stolen?

Bike thefts per year ►

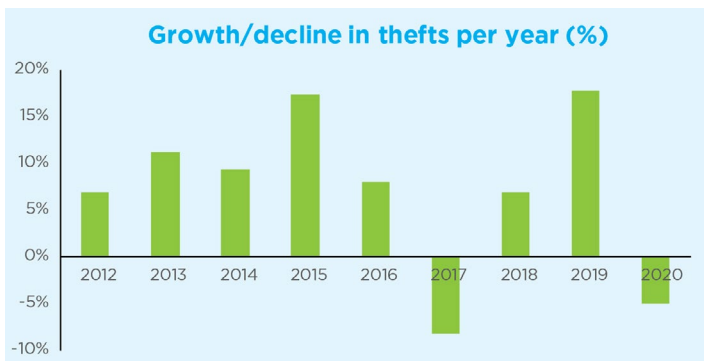
The number of bicycle thefts reported in Victoria has increased by **81.2 per cent** in the past 10 years. In 2011, 4,076 bikes were stolen, which is equivalent to 11 bicycles per day. A total of 7,385 bikes were stolen in 2020, an average of **20 per day** (below).



▼ Variation in thefts per year

Unfortunately, bike thefts in Victoria have almost always been on the rise.

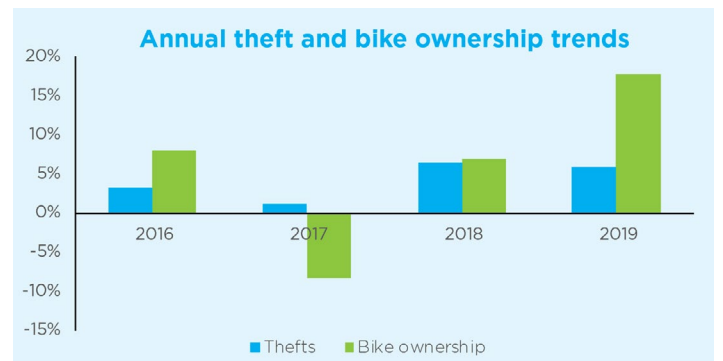
Since 2012, there have only been two years where there was a drop in annual bike thefts. One of these was 2020, when lockdown restrictions were enforced for several months, reducing theft opportunities.



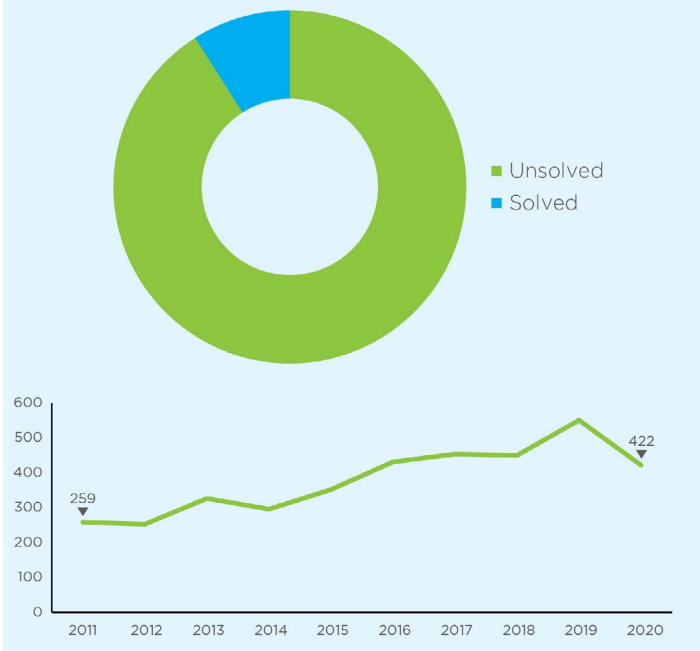
▼ Comparison with bike ownership

Interestingly, the number of thefts tends to wax and wane with annual bike ownership in Victoria.

In years where bike ownership is lower, the number of thefts per capita also decline (and vice versa during times of growth).



Unsolved bike thefts in Victoria (10 year average)



Common outcomes of bike thefts

Bicycles can be an attractive acquisition for people with sticky fingers as they are hard to track, can be easily dismantled into parts and sold quickly. This makes recovering bikes and catching the crooks difficult.

Only **9 per cent of bike theft cases in Victoria are solved by police**. However, as the number of reported bike thefts has increased each year, the number of arrests and summons issued for bicycle thefts has increased. In 2011, 259 arrests/summons were issued for bike thefts. This climbed to a peak of 551 in 2019, and subsequently dropped to 422 arrests/summons in 2020.

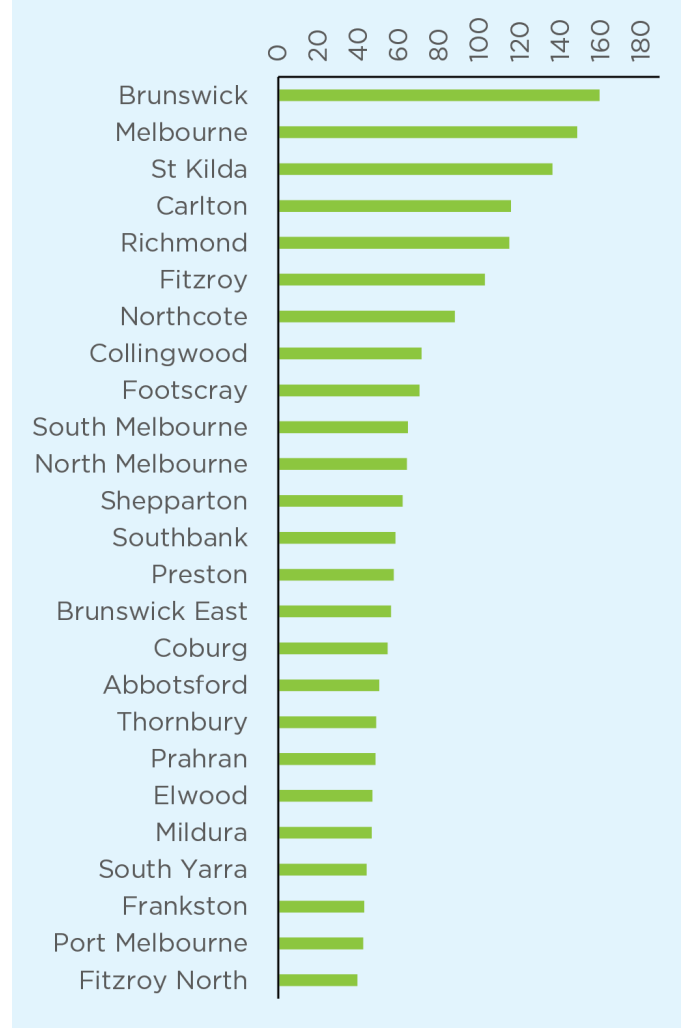
Where do bike thefts occur?

Key suburbs of concern

Inner city suburbs in Melbourne pose a high bike theft risk. The five suburbs with the highest bike thefts (per 100,000 people) include Brunswick, Melbourne, St Kilda, Carlton, and Richmond. In regional Victoria, towns with high bike thefts include Shepparton, Mildura, and Wangaratta.

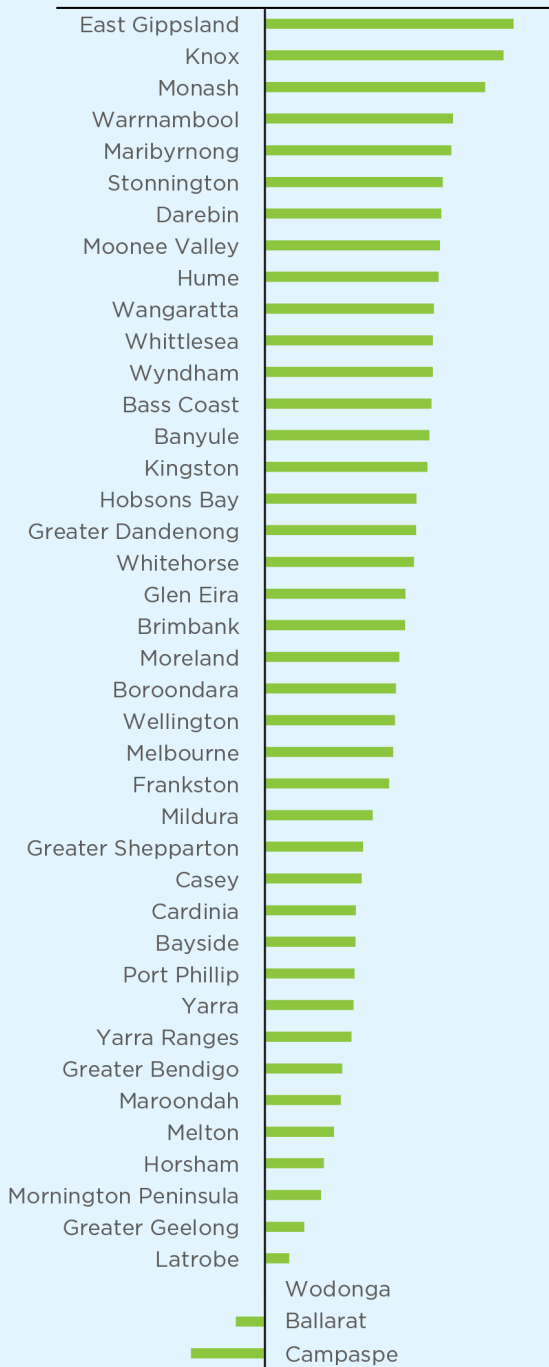
The Victorian local government area (LGA) with the most reported bike thefts in 2020 was Melbourne, with 1,298 reported bike thefts. The Yarra LGA was the second most common place for bike thefts, with 558 reported in 2020. This was closely followed by Port Phillip with 517 reported thefts.

Bike thefts per suburb



Annual growth in bike thefts

-15% -10% -5% 0% 5% 10% 15% 20%



Where are theft cases growing?

It is also important to consider where bike thefts are on the rise each year. Similarly, there may be lessons to be learnt by studying areas where thefts are falling.

Unfortunately, most LGAs across Victoria are experiencing continuous growth in bike thefts*. The LGAs with the highest annual growth rates are East Gippsland, Knox, Monash, Warrnambool and Maribyrnong.

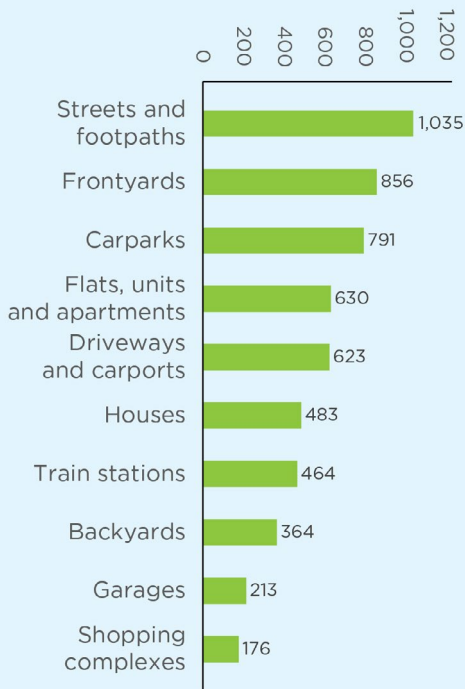
We identified only three LGAs that have experienced no year-on-year growth in bike thefts: Wodonga, Ballarat and Campaspe.

Overall, the data suggests that in the majority of LGAs, there are insufficient measures in place to prevent thefts from occurring.

* Data only includes LGAs with an average annual theft greater than 25 cases.

What are common theft locations?

Most common theft locations in 2020



High theft risk locations in Victoria

The most common place for a bike to get stolen is out on the street. A total of 1,035 bicycles were reported stolen in Victoria in 2020 from a street, laneway or footpath.

However, a large number of bicycles were also reported stolen from dwellings and private property. Front yards comprise the second most reported location of thefts, followed by the carpark of a multi-dwelling and a flat, unit or apartment.

Restrictions placed on activities and movements of people in 2020 appears to have had an effect on places where bikes were stolen.

Thefts reported at public locations such as railway stations, shopping complexes and schools and school grounds all dropped in 2020, despite trending up during the previous nine years. There was also a notable drop in thefts reported at homes, likely because many people were housebound for large parts of 2020.

Locations where thefts are on the rise

There are certain locations where the number of bike thefts are becoming more frequent. For example, bike thefts at car parks and multi-dwellings are growing by 40.7 per cent each year. Similarly, thefts at driveways and carports are on the rise, with an average annual growth of 36.1 per cent.

Fortunately, there are some locations where thieves are striking less and less. Bike thefts at single-level car parks and garages have decreased each year by 13.0 and 6.8 per cent, respectively.

LOCATIONS WHERE BIKE THEFTS ARE INCREASING PER YEAR

↑ **40.7%**

Car parks, multi-dwellings

↑ **36.1%**

Driveways, carports

↑ **12.5%**

Shopping complexes

LOCATIONS WHERE BIKE THEFTS ARE DECREASING PER YEAR

↓ **13.0%**

Single level car parks

↓ **6.8%**

Garages

↓ **0.7%**

Streets, lanes, footpaths

What you can do

Parking your bike

While many thefts happen on the street, that doesn't mean it is a silly place to park your bike. It is often the most suitable place to park and the majority of people who do park their bike on the street come back to find it where they left it.

When you do park your bike on the street it is best to find a spot that is highly visible. You should also avoid leaving your bike parked on the street overnight or for extended periods of time.

When parking your bike for longer periods, see if you can use a secure facility such as indoor bike parking at your workplace or a [Parkiteer cage](#) at a railway station.

If using a Parkiteer cage or parking facility at your work or residential building you should be careful to not let any unauthorised people tail you into the facility. Parkiteer, workplace end of trip facilities and residential buildings provide authorised users with access cards or keys to let themselves in and increase security.

Locking up

Whenever and wherever you park your bike, you should use a quality, hardened lock.

You should carry a lock that can't be snipped apart by bolt cutters. Locks that are only susceptible to angle grinders are much less likely to be targeted by thieves as angle grinders can be rather conspicuous on city streets.

You should also make sure you use a key lock, rather than a combination lock which can be unlocked by 'feeling' for the code.

Don't publish personal details

If you use a ride recording app such as Strava you should be careful not to highlight the location of your home. If you're not careful you can giveaway your address, the bike you own and patterns of behaviour, making you a possible target for thieves.

Types of bike locks

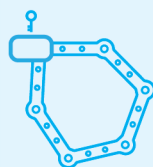


D-locks, as the name implies, are a D-shaped lock made from hardened steel. The best D-locks require two cuts to release, doubling the time needed to make a theft. Most offer greater security than folding locks, and weigh less than chains. However, they are not as flexible.



Chains that use a padlock to connect each end can be some of the best high-security locks available. They are best left in a single location rather than carried on your bike, such as your lock-up area at home.

The best require two cuts to release, doubling the theft time. They are flexible to deal with varied lock-up situations. However, they can be very heavy, and therefore a nuisance to carry.



Folding locks are made from connected pieces of steel that can be shaped to help you lock your bike in different positions. When not in use, the locks fold flat and can be stored on your bike frame.

Most are compact, easy-to-carry, and flexible to deal with varied lock-up situations

However, they can be broken into with just one cut, as opposed to the best D-locks and chains which require two cuts



Wheel locks don't attach your bike to anything, but lock a wheel so it can't spin. They are very convenient to use, and very awkward to cut through.

They don't always prevent your bike from being physically carried away, but some include a cable or chain so you can also lock your bike to a fixture



Cables are simple and easy to use... but simple and easy to steal. They are lighter, cheaper, and flexible to deal with varied lock-up situations. However, they can be cut quickly with bolt cutters and wire cutters.

Record your bicycle's details

In case of theft, you should take photos of your bike and record details of its make, model, year, colour, and serial number.

You should also make your bike identifiable by engraving identification details which can help with recovery. An ID number for people in Victoria can be the letter V followed by your driver license number.

Reporting a theft

If your bike is stolen you should immediately report it to police. When reporting the theft, you can include all the details you have recorded about your bike.

You can also register your stolen bike with [BikeVAULT](#) who work to disrupt bike theft and recover stolen bikes.

Insurance

You can also consider specific insurance for your bicycle. Bike insurance can include specific coverage that isn't part of all home and contents insurance products, including theft away from home. [Bike Insure](#), for example, can provide insurance for any kind of bicycle.



Our policy recommendations

While there are steps people can take to protect their bikes, the burden should not be placed entirely upon them. At a policy level, preventing bike thefts starts with appropriate provision of secure parking options.

Bike parking facilities must be available where people are working, studying, and accessing essential goods and services. Policymakers and planners should consider the location of bike parking infrastructure. Research suggests that facilities installed in built-up and publicly accessible areas with high visibility are less likely to experience theft offences¹. These areas have the added benefit of promoting ‘informal guardianship’, whereby the public indirectly and informally play a supervisory role by simply being in the area. Targetted educational campaigns encouraging riders to lock their bikes has also been demonstrated to improve bike-locking behaviours and reduce theft opportunities².

The variation in bike thefts per local government area (p. 6) means that preventative theft measures require some targetting. The resources required to prevent bike thefts within the City of Melbourne will not be the same as those for the City of Wodonga, for example.

‘End-of-trip’ facilities with designated parking spaces will not only provide safe storage options for riders, they can increase uptake of bike-based commutes³. Bicycle Network has [previously recommended](#) that the Victorian Government introduce a business grants scheme allowing employers to provide appropriate parking and end-of-trip facilities for those riding a bike to work.

High-level policy changes may be appropriate, such as amending the Building Codes to include provision and specifications for end-of-trip facilities. Nationally consistent guidelines for workplaces regarding the provision of fit-for-purpose bike facilities will also be helpful in educating employers.

If the Victorian Government aims to [increase walking and bike riding trips by 25 per cent by 2025](#), riding a bike needs to be framed as an attractive transport option. The rising number of bike thefts across Victoria introduces yet another barrier to a bike-riding lifestyle, and appropriate preventative action must be taken in our policy and practice.

Recommendation 1

Lockable on-street and off-street bike parking facilities where people park bikes for long periods of time (workplaces, schools and shopping centers)

Recommendation 2

Incentives and regulations for multi-dwelling building developers and facility managers to install secure, purpose-built bike parking facilities with restricted access

Recommendation 3

Amend the Building Code of Australia to include provision and specifications for end-of-trip facilities

Recommendation 4

Set national guidelines for workplaces regarding the provision of fit-for-purpose bike facilities

¹ Levy, J. M., Irvin-Erickson, Y. & La Vigne, N. A case study of bicycle theft on the Washington DC Metrorail system using a Routine Activities and Crime Pattern theory framework. *Security Journal* 31, 226-246, doi:10.1057/s41284-017-0096-z (2018).

² Sidebottom, A., Thorpe, A. & Johnson, S. D. Using targeted publicity to reduce opportunities for bicycle theft: A demonstration and replication. *European Journal of Criminology* 6, 267-286 (2009).

³ Wardman, M., Tight, M. & Page, M. Factors influencing the propensity to cycle to work. *Transportation Research Part A: Policy and Practice* 41, 339-350, doi:https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tra.2006.09.011 (2007).



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