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Parking a bike gets tougher in Seattle

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It hasn't gotten as bad as trying to park a car in Seattle. There's no need to ride around in circles for blocks finding someplace to lock up a bicycle.

But as gas prices skyrocket and more people get from here to there on bikes, Chris Cameron is among the bicyclists who say it's gotten harder to find an open bike rack.

You've seen the result – bicycles locked onto racks four deep.

"You have to get a little creative," said Cameron, bike commuting program director for the Cascade Bicycle Club.

Good thing, then, that he's a regular at the Hopvine Pub on Capitol Hill, where bartenders let him leave his bike just inside the back door.

Who wants to come out after a few pints and untangle their bike from the bottom of a pile of bicycles locked to the same rack?

A shortage of bicycle racks in Seattle? "ABSOLUTELY," said one response to a P-I reporter's question on the Cascade Bicycle Club's Web bulletin board.

He blamed the replacement of parking meters for fewer bike-parking kiosks.

"Anyone know how many thousands of parking meters have been removed from city streets? They have NOT been replaced with lockable bike racks all over town, sending bicyclists the not-so-clear message that car parking is more important (read revenue stream) than posts bicyclists can lock to," he wrote. Seattle resident Steve Sox said via e-mail that he runs all his errands on his bike.

"There's a greater number of bikes at bike racks. I've seen a real ramp-up in that in the last six months. I've seen this at the public library downtown, and at Uwajimaya, and the PCC in West Seattle."

At times, he has to set his groceries or books down, and dig out his bike from under others parked there. "It's a good, bad feeling, I guess, because more people are using their bikes."

This week, he wrote, he was shopping at the PCC where there are two straight pipe bike racks on the street. "When I came out of the store there were EIGHT bikes stacked and wedged around

those two racks. I had to work to get my bike back out. I'd never seen more than three bikes at PCC at one time."

Indeed, Cameron said three years ago 12,500 people in Seattle participated in Cascade's bike-to-work day. This year, nearly twice as many – 24,000 – rode to work.

Recognizing the trend, the Seattle Department of Transportation set a goal of doubling the city's 3,000 bike racks by 2017 and has begun installing 300 racks a year, upon the request of property owners.

"With cycling becoming more and more popular, we are finding places where the demand for bike parking is greater than the available racks can accommodate," said Douglas Cox, who runs the city's pedestrian and bicycle programs.

At East Pine Street and Boylston Avenue on Capitol Hill, for instance, he said the city put a bike rack in front of Linda's Tavern. But there's also the Stumptown coffee shop and a Hot Mama's Pizzanearby, so they installed a second rack across the street from the tavern. "But a lot of nights, you look out from Linda's and there are bikes everywhere," Cox said.

Outside the Voxx Coffee shop on Eastlake Avenue East Monday, Michael Robson walked up to a bike rack in paint-splattered clothes, sounding like a car driver. He had to park two blocks from his job renovating a home because there were no racks nearby, he said. "The hard part is finding a safe place to park your bike in some neighborhoods" like Capitol Hill, he said.

Thieves unbolt one side of the rack, slide out the bicycle chain and carry the bike off, he said. "I've lost two bikes that way."

The lack of bike lanes isn't much better, he said. "You try to live without leaving a footprint, and it's hard," he said.