

# Are Portland bicyclists showing signs of an unfortunate new trend?

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[The Oregonian: Are Portland bicyclists showing signs of an unfortunate new trend?](#)



*This bicyclist pretty much had the eastbound walkway of the Hawthorne Bridge all to himself one night earlier this year. But a Portland attorney says that when things get crowded, bicyclists are beginning to lose patience with each other and fights sometimes erupt. (John Killen/The Oregonian)*

Dana Tims, The Oregonian By Dana Tims, The Oregonian

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As both a cyclist and an attorney who specializes in cycling-related cases, Portland's Bob Mionske knows a good deal about road rage incidents pitting motorists against bicycle riders.

But for whatever reason -- warmer weather? More people taking to two

wheels to get around? -- Mionske is seeing an ugly new wrinkle this year, played out through what he says are increasing numbers of instances where two angry, fist-clenched bicyclists are facing off in the Rose City.

"I have so many friends who are suddenly regaling me with stories of fights on bikes," Mionske said. "Someone is riding along, someone else flies by them in an unfriendly way, words are exchanged and just like that, people are threatening each other with fisticuffs."

Mionske has certainly ridden his bike long enough to recognize some new trend in the way that cyclists related to one another. He was a member of the U.S. Olympic team, competing in the road race in both the 1988 and 1992 Games. In 1990, he was the United States national road-racing champion.

So far, there doesn't appear to be any official record that such incidents are increasing.

But Lt. Chris Davis of the Portland Police Bureau's Traffic Division, himself a cyclist, said he has begun to hear some unofficial reports about such behavior.

One place of particular concern seems to be the Hawthorne Bridge, a favorite among cyclists. Davis said typically it seems to be a case of one cyclist wanting to go fast, another wanting to go slower and and the two get into some sort of argument or finger-flipping contest.

Davis said he suspects that most incidents are over so fast that no police report gets filed.

Also, fellow Ocyclers Margaret Haberman, John Killen and Joseph Rose all say they've witnessed such behavior. Haberman thought she was going to see a fistfight one day between two cyclists who became angry at each other on the Steel Bridge after one tapped the other on the shoulder because of some breach of cycling etiquette.

Mionske thinks all this could be seeing the beginning of an unfortunate trend.

He said the way cyclists are interacting on Portland's streets and bike paths appears to be a universe away from the comity of the professional peloton.

"It's an interesting subject," Mionske said. "Motorists think we're all buddies. The truth, however, is that a jerk in a car is not that different than a jerk on a bike."

Twice this spring, Mionske has had to hop off his bike to break up near-fights between cyclists he's come across.

"I've also been in a couple of situations where people have attacked me," he said. "No injuries, nothing really serious, but a little scary and definitely unnerving."

One cause for the possible uptick in incidents is the ease that cyclists have in confronting an alleged offender, he said.

If a motorist gets offended by a cyclist, his or her options are limited since

it's difficult to quickly turn a car around in traffic to pursue the person. On a bike, however, a U-turn takes only seconds and, in the snap of a middle finger, the pursuit is on.

Portland is hardly alone when it comes to being a hotbed for bike-on-bike aggression, Mionske said.

As a regular contributor to Bicycling magazine, he recently wrote a column about an incident in Madison, Wis., about a friend and bike-shop owner who passed another rider at night and told him he should get a light for his bike.

"The guy chased him down and beat him up," Mionske said. "It turned out the assailant was the son of my friend's shop's best customer. Just unbelievable."

Beyond efforts to increase awareness of the problem, however, he isn't sure what can be done to remedy it.

"It's hard to accept sometimes," Mionske said, "but there are a lot of angry people out there."

– Dana Tims