# London’s surge in e-bike phone snatches sparks security fears and police crackdown



A striking video has captured the brazen moment a thief on an e-bike dangerously veered across traffic in Westminster to snatch a mobile phone from a pedestrian. The cyclist, dressed entirely in black, overtook vehicles on the road before abruptly swerving onto the pavement to grab the phone from a man in running gear, who was visibly stunned and caught off guard by the theft. After the snatch, the victim appeared to be in disbelief, clutching his head as the thief sped away.

This dramatic incident forms part of a wider, escalating problem in London, where mobile phone thefts have surged to alarming levels. Thefts often involve criminals on electric bikes or scooters who exploit the vulnerability of people distracted by their devices in busy urban environments. Westminster, where the latest theft occurred, is among the hotspots for this crime wave, with a phone reportedly stolen every six minutes across the capital. The Metropolitan Police have responded by deploying plain-clothed officers and using tracking technology to combat the issue, but challenges remain in curbing the £50 million-a-year trade in stolen devices.

Hotel industry leaders have voiced concern that the rise in phone snatching is deterring tourists from visiting London. Greg Hegarty, co-chief executive of a prominent hotel group with numerous venues across Europe, said he witnessed a marked decline in visitors' confidence when moving around key areas such as the South Bank and Oxford Street. In response, his company has increased security spending as part of efforts to reassure guests. The perception of London as a less safe destination due to such petty crimes is causing economic anxiety amid a sector already struggling to recover.

In related cases, there have been notable instances where members of the public intervened to stop phone thieves. One such event involved Spencer Duarte, a phone snatcher on an e-bike tackled by pedestrians in the City of London after stealing a phone. Duarte lost a shoe during his desperate attempt to evade capture, which police later used to identify and arrest him, demonstrating the ongoing efforts and community role in tackling these crimes.

The scale of phone thefts not only affects victims personally but also carries significant financial repercussions. Stolen phones, often unlocked, provide criminals access to sensitive financial information or digital wallets, enabling fraudulent purchases and loan applications. Authorities and experts have urged consumers to adopt better digital security and 'cyber hygiene' to safeguard against these risks, emphasising prompt action to block stolen phones and accounts.

London's police forces have launched multiple initiatives to combat mobile theft, such as painting warning signs in public spaces and intensifying patrols in known hotspots. The City of London Police, for example, unveiled a three-year plan to transform responses to fraud and cyber-related crimes, including phone snatching. Meanwhile, the Metropolitan Police's recent crackdown saw hundreds arrested and over a thousand stolen phones seized within just a week, indicating heightened enforcement efforts against this £50 million criminal market.

Despite these efforts, many critics, including opposition politicians and public safety advocates, describe the situation as reaching epidemic proportions. Statistics reveal that mobile phones constitute the majority of all thefts recorded in London, with nearly 185,000 devices reported stolen in 2024 alone. The prominence of e-bike gangs in orchestrating these thefts—often targeting distracted pedestrians in tourist and upmarket areas—has made the problem highly visible and urgent.

As London grapples with this persistent crime wave, both law enforcement and the public are called upon to remain vigilant. Enhanced security technology, increased policing, community intervention, and greater awareness among residents and visitors are all vital components of the multifaceted response necessary to curb the thefts tarnishing the city’s reputation and compromising public safety.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14844971/Shocking-moment-e-bike-phone-thief-dangerously-veers-traffic-grab-mobile-stunned-pedestrian-victim.html)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14844971/Shocking-moment-e-bike-phone-thief-dangerously-veers-traffic-grab-mobile-stunned-pedestrian-victim.html), [[3]](https://www.londonworld.com/news/london-phone-snatching-epidemic-200-new-westminster-cctv-cameras-not-enough-to-stop-thefts-4999520)
* Paragraph 3 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14844971/Shocking-moment-e-bike-phone-thief-dangerously-veers-traffic-grab-mobile-stunned-pedestrian-victim.html)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14844971/Shocking-moment-e-bike-phone-thief-dangerously-veers-traffic-grab-mobile-stunned-pedestrian-victim.html)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14844971/Shocking-moment-e-bike-phone-thief-dangerously-veers-traffic-grab-mobile-stunned-pedestrian-victim.html)
* Paragraph 6 – [[2]](https://www.ft.com/content/26be349d-4717-4815-a221-a749e29de2b2)
* Paragraph 7 – [[5]](https://www.cityoflondon.police.uk/news/city-of-london/news/2025/april/city-of-london-police-launch-new-initiatives-to-tackle-phone-snatching-as-new-three-year-policing-plan-published/), [[6]](https://www.standard.co.uk/news/crime/met-police-phone-theft-crackdown-london-b1209407.html)
* Paragraph 8 – [[3]](https://www.londonworld.com/news/london-phone-snatching-epidemic-200-new-westminster-cctv-cameras-not-enough-to-stop-thefts-4999520), [[4]](https://www.thenationalnews.com/news/uk/2024/12/27/phone-theft-hotspots-in-london-revealed-as-crime-reaches-epidemic-level/), [[6]](https://www.standard.co.uk/news/crime/met-police-phone-theft-crackdown-london-b1209407.html), [[7]](https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/crime/mobile-phone-theft-london-met-police-b2693476.html)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14844971/Shocking-moment-e-bike-phone-thief-dangerously-veers-traffic-grab-mobile-stunned-pedestrian-victim.html> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.ft.com/content/26be349d-4717-4815-a221-a749e29de2b2> - In May 2024, a Financial Times article recounted the author's experience of having their smartphone stolen by a masked man on an e-bike in central London. The piece highlighted the increasing prevalence of phone thefts, with criminals targeting unlocked phones to access personal financial information. It discussed the importance of promptly securing stolen phones and preventing unauthorized access to financial apps and digital wallets. The rise in phone theft was attributed to organised criminal gangs exploiting the ease of accessing valuable data stored on smartphones. Measures such as increased police patrols in theft hotspots and advancements in phone security features were mentioned. Consumers were urged to be more vigilant and adopt better 'cyber hygiene' practices to protect their devices and data. The financial impact of phone theft was noted to be significant, including unauthorized purchases and loan applications. The article stressed the need for more crime-fighting resources and greater consumer awareness to combat this growing problem.
3. <https://www.londonworld.com/news/london-phone-snatching-epidemic-200-new-westminster-cctv-cameras-not-enough-to-stop-thefts-4999520> - In February 2025, London World reported on the surge in mobile phone thefts in Westminster, London. The article highlighted that a phone was stolen every six minutes in the capital, with Westminster recording a significant number of these incidents. The Metropolitan Police had implemented measures such as deploying plain-clothed officers in hotspot areas, including the West End and Westminster, and using tracking technology to recover phones and apprehend criminals. The report also mentioned the £50 million-a-year trade in stolen phones across the capital and the challenges faced by authorities in tackling this issue.
4. <https://www.thenationalnews.com/news/uk/2024/12/27/phone-theft-hotspots-in-london-revealed-as-crime-reaches-epidemic-level/> - In December 2024, The National reported on the surge in mobile phone thefts in London, particularly in upmarket and tourist areas. The article detailed how criminals, often on electric bikes, targeted unsuspecting victims by snatching phones from their hands while they were distracted. The Mayor of London, Sadiq Khan, pledged a crackdown on this issue, but opposition figures described the number of mobile phone thefts as reaching 'epidemic' proportions. The report also highlighted that 69% of all thefts in the city were related to mobiles, with about 185,000 phones reported stolen that year.
5. <https://www.cityoflondon.police.uk/news/city-of-london/news/2025/april/city-of-london-police-launch-new-initiatives-to-tackle-phone-snatching-as-new-three-year-policing-plan-published/> - In April 2025, the City of London Police announced new initiatives to tackle phone snatching as part of their three-year policing plan. The force introduced blue circular paint designs on pavements across the Square Mile to warn the public about the rising issue of phone snatching. The plan aimed to keep people safe and transform the national policing response to fraud, economic, and cyber crime. The initiative reflected a commitment to addressing the growing problem of phone theft in the area.
6. <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/crime/met-police-phone-theft-crackdown-london-b1209407.html> - In February 2025, The Standard reported on the Metropolitan Police's crackdown on mobile phone thefts in London. The operation resulted in 230 arrests and the seizure of over 1,000 stolen phones in just one week. The police targeted those involved in stealing, handling, and supplying stolen phones, aiming to disrupt the £50 million-a-year trade in stolen phones. Hotspots such as the West End and Westminster were specifically targeted, with increased patrols and plain-clothed operations in these areas.
7. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/crime/mobile-phone-theft-london-met-police-b2693476.html> - In February 2025, The Independent reported on the scale of phone thefts in London, particularly involving e-bike mobile snatchers. The article highlighted that masked phone-snatching gangs using e-bikes were fuelling a surge in mobile thefts, with more than 225 stolen on average every day across the UK. Data obtained through Freedom of Information requests showed at least 83,900 phone theft offences recorded in the 12 months to July the previous year, almost double the 45,800 five years prior. The report detailed how thieves, often on electric bikes, targeted pedestrians in busy areas, snatching phones from their hands while they were distracted. The Metropolitan Police had seized over 1,000 stolen mobiles and arrested 230 people in one week as part of a crackdown on the £50 million-a-year trade in stolen phones.