

To: Transport & Health Policy Makers, & Practitioners
From: Prof Adrian Davis, TRI, Edinburgh Napier University
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Subject: Essential Evidence 4 Scotland No.76: Count what you care about

Top line: For communities that “care” about active transport, it makes intuitive sense to prioritise counting programmes.

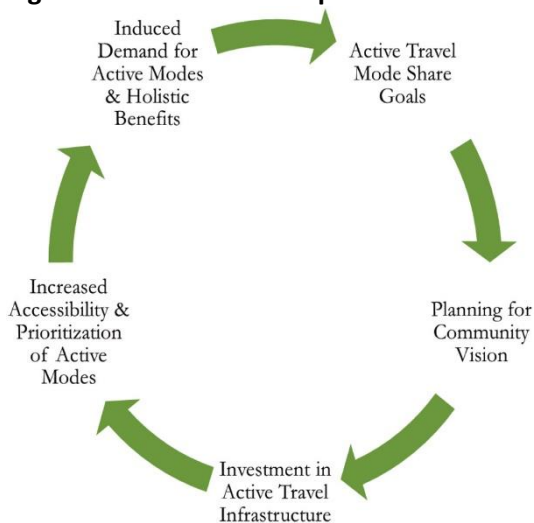
Transport investments are traditionally valued through a “mobility-based” transport planning paradigm focused on user volume. Common metrics include counts, peak hour level of service, peak hour delay, and travel time— and the attention has been almost exclusively on motorised travel. In recent years, more communities are investing in active modes, and with this influx in investments have come pressure to evaluate their impact(s). Active travel count programmes are increasingly called for as they appear to offer a seemingly straightforward metric for valuing investments in active modes. Urban designer Jan Gehl said: “You count what you care about.”¹ When it comes to transport, conventional metrics – such as vehicle counts, peak hour level of service, peak hour delay, and vehicle travel time – have been shown to reflect a focus on motor vehicles.

Researchers identified three additional trends to valuing investment in active modes:²

- i) research evaluating investments in active modes frequently expresses benefits in economic models
- ii) quantified benefits are largely relegated to health, environmental, and economic (or some combination of the three), while potential social equity of investments in active modes and greater viable modal choice sets are examined in separate research strands; and
- iii) studies tend to use population surveys and industry data to quantify economic impacts.

The limitations of count data often, however, precludes its use in quantifying holistic benefits of investments in active modes. Using active traveller counts in the same way as vehicle counts (i.e., for projecting future growth) could result in significant increases in active travel investments when small increases are extrapolated over long time horizons. Practitioners are constrained by institutional forces, wherein investments in active travel must be justified by existing count data, thereby maintaining a motor-oriented status quo. Beginning with the premise that active travel investments be aimed at mode share growth, the feedback loop of first investing in active modes leads to dramatically different outcomes.

Fig 1 .A new feedback loop framework for active mode planning.



While counts are useful in specific instances, they can be all too easily misapplied in the planning process. This is because the conceptual foundation for applying counts to value investments in active modes is either non-existent or flawed, and is therefore unable to fully account for the actual benefits of investing in active modes. Such benefits can include holistic improvements to community health, sustainability, the economy, and contributions towards a more equitable transportation system.

The next step for researchers and practitioners is determining what metric (or metrics) possess the necessary blend of validity and practicality to be incorporated into the transportation planning process to accurately value investments in active modes and help plan for the future.

¹ Dumbaugh, E., Tumlin, J., Marshall, W. 2014 Decisions, Values, and Data: *Understanding Bias in Transportation Performance Measures*, Institute of Transportation Engineers, 84: 8, 20-25.

² Piatkowski, D., Marshall, W. 2018 We count what we care about: Advancing a framework for valuing investment in active travel modes, *Research in Transportation Business & Management*, 29: 63-70