



**To:** Place Directorate

**From:** Adrian Davis

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**Subject:** Essential Evidence on a page No 133: Walking and Cycling: Build it and will they come?

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Top line: In the short term new local walking and cycling routes may largely displace existing trips. However, the routes can generate new trips in the longer term, particularly among those unable to access more distant locations by car.

Walking and cycling are important sources of everyday activity and are independently associated with a wide range of health benefits. The potential magnitude of such benefits may be particularly large in settings such as the UK, where most people are insufficiently active for health (only 5% of adults achieve the recommended 150 minutes of physical activity per week) and where cycling in particular is rare (accounting for 2% of journeys). It is widely recognized that a supportive built environment may be needed to promote walking and cycling and to achieve an enduring increase in activity at the population level.

The evidence has suggested that infrastructural interventions may increase walking or cycling when delivered at high doses, but at lower doses may be used without necessarily increasing total activity. In addition, few studies have examined whether any effects are observed equally across different population groups, and very few have examined equity impacts with respect to any characteristic other than gender. Led by the sustainable transport charity Sustrans, the Connect2 initiative was established with the intention of building or improving walking and cycling routes at 79 sites across the UK. A research study evaluated the effects of the Connect2 intervention on overall walking, cycling, and physical activity levels.<sup>1</sup> The primary hypothesis was that the greater exposure to the intervention among adults living progressively nearer to the infrastructure would result in increased overall activity levels relative to adults living farther away. Three sites were studied in detail: a motor-traffic free bridge over Cardiff Bay; a motor-traffic free bridge over a duel carriageway in Kenilworth and an upgraded riverside route in Southampton.

Researchers assessed past-week walking and cycling for transport covering 5 journey purposes (commuting to work, travel for education, travel in the course of business, shopping or personal business, and social or leisure activities). For each journey purpose, participants reported the total travel time including for walking and cycling as well as for leisure. For both they were asked about the intensity of their physical activity. In terms of the results, newly constructed walking and cycling routes were well used at both 1- and 2-year follow-up, particularly among those living nearby.

The researchers found that infrastructure proximity did not predict increased activity at 1-year follow-up, but it did predict net increases in walking, cycling, and total physical activity at 2 years. On average, at 2-year follow-up residents living 1 kilometer from the new infrastructure reported a 45-minute increase in walking and cycling per week relative to those living 4 kilometers away. Moreover, individuals living near the infrastructure did not compensate for their increased walking and cycling by reducing their participation in other types of physical activity. The effect of proximity on activity levels was stronger among individuals with no car in their household.

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<sup>1</sup> Goodman, R., Sahlqvist, S., Ogilvie, D. on behalf of iConnect Consortium, 2014 New walking and cycling routes and increased physical activity: One & 2 year findings from the UK iConnect Study, *American Journal of Public Health*, 104:9.