



STUDENT RESEARCHERS ILLUMINATE TRANSIT SECRETS

Which one is faster, your bike or UberPool?

Do area cyclists use the Chicago stop or the Idaho stop?

Can you really tour downtown Chicago on a Divvy bike?

Civic leaders from California to Chicago are digging into the data and recommendations from several recent transit studies conducted by students through the Chaddick Institute for Metropolitan Development. Improving cycling infrastructure is a fast and inexpensive way to reduce automotive congestion and air pollution, and commuters love it, says Joe Schwieterman, institute director and professor in the School of Public Service.

"Surprisingly, saving time is a major motivation," he says. "Getting from point A to point B is often faster on a bike than

anything else."

Avid cyclist Riley O'Neill, who is earning a master's degree in sustainable urban development, designed a study to compare bikes, public transit and the ride-sourcing service UberPool. Teams of volunteers made simultaneous trips along 45 routes, recording their time via the three modalities. While UberPool had a slight edge over bikes on trips originating in the heart of or at the outer edge of downtown, bikes were significantly faster between neighborhoods.

"We knew biking would be faster [between neighborhoods], but we didn't think the time saving would be as great as it is. You're saving 25 minutes or a similar gigantic amount of time," Schwieterman says. He was even more impressed by bikers' ability to predict travel time to within a five-minute window. "You can't do that on the CTA."

O'Neill points out that the CTA and bicycles are complementary, not competitors. "If I ride into downtown one day, and it starts snowing or raining, I need to throw my bike up on the bus or the train. That's an important relationship."

Jenna Caldwell (MS Public Service Management '16), who swapped her car for a bike nine years ago, investigated a common Chicago practice with an out-of-state name: the Idaho stop. When approaching stop signs, nearly all cyclists she observed slowed and prepared to yield, but preserved their momentum by not stopping completely. That's legal in Idaho, which enacted regulations allowing it in 1982, but not in Chicago.

"Cyclists are really practicing behaviors that are in the best interest of their safety while maintaining their momentum and getting from point A to point B as fast as possible," she says.

Although a London study showed that the Idaho stop was actually safer for cyclists, Chaddick usually doesn't make that sort of recommendation, Schwieterman says. Instead, the institute provides the data that allow civic leaders and cycling enthusiasts to "have an honest discussion about what's best for the city."

However, Schwieterman does heartily recommend one piece of research done by O'Neill and C. Scott Smith, assistant director of the institute: the seven-mile bike tour that shows the evolution of cycling in downtown Chicago. You'll find the route at blogs.depaul.edu/chaddick-institute.