

Information sheet for participants:

BostonWalks Study

Contact address for questions: bostonwalkingstudy@gmail.com

Project leader: Prof. Andres Sevtsuk

Data Protection responsibility: MIT

Please read the text below carefully and contact us if there is anything you do not understand or would like to know.

Information on the study

What is examined and how?

The study uses a smartphone app that records your location and recognizes which modes of transport you are using. This travel data can be confirmed or adjusted by you and is regularly summarized within the smartphone app. The study also includes basic questionnaires on your mobility and socio-economic characteristics. Your data will help us better understand the mobility behavior of Boston-area residents and explore where and how existing transportation infrastructure can be improved.

Why is this study necessary?

Transportation research and practice have inordinately focused on planning for automobiles and historically privileged demographic groups. Only in recent years has non-auto mobility, particularly active and public transport, started gaining traction in mainstream mobility research in the U.S. as a key pathway to reducing urban energy demand and CO2 emissions. The City of Boston, for instance, has committed to reducing drive alone to work rates by 50% and increasing transit use by 33% by 2030, prompting a need for new timely research for meeting such goals. As in many US cities, race, income, and non-auto mobility are spatially related in Metro Boston.

The current lack of specific data is a critical barrier to more research and practice centered explicitly on marginalized communities, who have different challenges, needs, and preferences than a hypothetical 'average' user. The BostonWalks study addresses this gap by collecting data which is currently not available. We are particularly interested in understanding how needs and preferences for sustainable travel may differ between Black, Hispanic, and white residents, and how these preferences could be mitigated by income and neighborhood location.

The collected data can be used for numerous transport and city planning applications. It will update existing data sources, specifically capturing post-pandemic behavior and the recent uptake of active mobility. The derived insights will help tailor plans and policies specifically to community preferences (e.g., improving street safety rather than adding a bike lane), so as to decarbonize urban transportation in an equitable manner.

Who can participate?

To participate in the study, you must:

- Be at least 21 years old
- Live in the Boston Metropolitan Area
- Own a smartphone
- Be able to walk ¼ mile without pain
- Not be employed as professional driver/courier

What are my tasks during the study?

To participate in the study, you need to install the app, read emails, and fill in questionnaires. The main part is to validate your trip data in the app. In doing so, you can both confirm the recognized modes of transport and indicate your activities. Please validate your data regularly and promptly in order to record it as correctly as possible. You will need a maximum of 5 minutes per day to validate your data.

What benefits and risks can I expect?

You will receive financial compensation for participating in and completing the study.

There are no risks for you resulting from this study, as we rely mostly on passive data collection.

What are my rights during participation?

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You can cancel your participation at any time without giving any reason and without any disadvantage.

Data protection

With the help of the smartphone app, we will collect your daily trip data. We will carry out various analyses based on the collected data. This serves to derive mobility-related indicators (e.g. choice of modes of transport, distances travelled). In addition, we will collect data on your socio-demographic status and other mobility-related information through surveys.

All data collected during the study will be treated as strictly confidential and used exclusively for research purposes. We will anonymize the data during the analysis and publish the results in aggregated form, so that no conclusions can be drawn from the publications about individual persons.

If you agree at the end of the study, you can voluntarily continue to use the app for up to three months (90 days) after the end of the study and thus collect additional valuable data. After this period, we will block your access to the app and will not collect any further data points.

In the course of conducting the study, your data will be accessible only to the research staff directly involved in the project. The members of the MIT Ethics Committee may view the data for review and control purposes, but in strict compliance with confidentiality. Please read the data protection notice for more detailed information on data protection.

What are my rights to the data?

You can request information about data collected from you at any time. You can also request that your data collected as part of the study be corrected, handed over to you, blocked for processing or deleted. You can withdraw your consent to the processing of your personal data at any time without giving reasons. To do so, please contact bostonwalkingstudy@gmail.com.

Who is funding the study?

This study is financed by research funds from MIT

Who approved the study?

This study was approved by the MIT Ethics Committee under application number 2211000806.