

The iConnect (Impact of Constructing Non-motorised Networks and Evaluating Changes in Travel) consortium

This project measures and evaluates changes in travel, physical activity and carbon emissions related to the Sustrans Connect2 programme. This is an infrastructure project to transform local active travel in 79 communities through new crossings and bridges to overcome barriers such as roads, rivers and railways.

The project aims to:

- Develop an evaluation framework and measurement tools for assessing the impacts of infrastructural interventions on travel behaviour, physical activity, carbon emissions and energy use.
- Apply the framework and tools to quantify changes in travel behaviour, physical activity and carbon emissions associated with Connect2 sites and to explore why these interventions work, in what ways, for whom and in what circumstances.
- Determine the feasibility of additional tailored self-help interventions which can enhance the effects of infrastructural interventions.
- Evaluate the Connect2 programme in terms of economic performance at a broad strategic level.

The iConnect consortium consists of eight academic groups based at the Universities of Bristol, East Anglia, Loughborough, Oxford, Southampton, Strathclyde, West of England (UWE) and at the MRC Epidemiology Unit in Cambridge.

The five-year iConnect study involves a broad evaluation of the whole Connect2 project, coupled with detailed investigations at five specific sites: the People's Bridge (Cardiff), the Bridge to Nowhere (Glasgow), the A10 Crossing (Cheshunt, Hertfordshire), the Kenilworth – Berkswell Greenway (Warwickshire) and the Itchen Walkway (Southampton).

There are methodological issues concerning measurement and evaluation. The difficulties in obtaining accurate measurements of walking and cycling levels are outlined and various survey and observational methodologies will be assessed. This research is informed by the critical realist approach to evaluation with an emphasis on the inter-relationships between context, mechanisms and outcomes. An evaluation framework has been developed based on a general, socio-ecological model which relates walking and cycling behaviour to, amongst other factors, socio-demographic factors, social environmental factors and



neighbourhood characteristics (Ogilvie et al. 2011). This will be supplemented by middle range theories to determine the mechanisms that make some schemes more successful than others. These theoretical approaches will be related to an economic framework that draws on instruments such as the Health Economic Assessment Tool for Cycling and New Approach To Appraisal that have been used to assess health and travel benefits respectively (Powell et al. 2010). The iConnect website is at <http://www.iconnect.ac.uk>

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