The Future of Cycling In Seattle (From Complete Outsiders)

To get a sense of cycling volumes throughout the city, all counts were aggregated into a single sum, and used to form a time series model via the Facebook Prophet algorithm. As with the other models, precipitation and the daily temperature high were used as linear regressors.

Our model suggests that for the last year, there has been an approximately 4.4% annualized growth rate in cycling in the city. For the most recent period available, July 2015 to July 2016, the population growth rate was 3.1% annually. With a cycling growth rate above the population growth rate, a greater share of Seattlites are taking to two wheels.

In accordance with our findings, local advocacy group Cascade Bicycle Club reports that cycling’s 3% share of trips “has stayed consistent over the last several years.” [2] Given the population and cycling growth rates mentioned above, it would take over a dozen years before cycling increased even 1 percentage point (i.e. from 3% to 4%).

However, the advent of dockless bikeshare (and soon, electric bikeshare) shows signs of changing this. [3] Early results show they are racking up some 15-20 thousand rides daily, while our counts averaged approximately 7,600 per day in October. Of course, counter data may not capture city-wide changes; additionally, the Burke Gilman Trail is reportedly a very popular place to use these bikes, yet the counter there had spurts of missing data, complicating historical comparisons.

There are various plans to add high quality protected cycleways to the city, which will invariably draw cyclists away from other nearby paths. If the counters are not along these improved corridors, the counters will fail to record these increases. However, thanks to GPS units on their bicycles, bikeshare firms are sharing anonymized trip data with the city, giving city planners more granular transportation data than ever before.

[1] http://www.king5.com/news/local/seattle/seattles-population-growth-leads-nation-report/442879395

[2] https://www.cascade.org/blog/2017/02/biking-walking-and-transit-are-preferred-modes-seattle-center-city-workers

[3] https://www.seattlebikeblog.com/2017/09/20/bike-share-ridership-is-booming-spin-launches-better-bike-forbes-says-limebike-valued-at-200m/