The Economic and Business Impacts of Street Improvements for Bicycle and Pedestrian Mobility

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Introduction

In the face of growing concerns over climate change, rising social inequality and what can loosely be described as an emerging urban ethic, active transportation policy is currently experiencing significant growth. In cities across the country, advocates are arguing for robust bicycle infrastructure and expanded public transit. The call for better infrastructure is even more urgent given the rise of bike-, and now scooter-, share companies that offer people the opportunity to ride and to seriously consider non-auto forms of transport without the commitment of ownership. While these are largely positive trends, placing new, robust bicycle infrastructure on major travel thoroughfares still garners intense political backlash in some cities. In particular, local business owners are often opposed to the installation of new active transportation infrastructure if it requires narrowing travel lanes, or worse, removing parking.

In response, active transportation advocates often claim that new multimodal infrastructure will actually economically benefit business owners. The underlying logic is that improved corridors will increase the number of customers that can arrive from a variety of modes beyond automobiles, and, ultimately, result in greater revenue and employment growth. While there is some suggestive evidence of this (*1*, *2*) to comparing sales trends over time on affected blocks (*3*, *4*). While suggestive, these papers are largely descriptive, or exploratory, in nature as opposed to experimental. This paper will fill the current technical gap in bicycle infrastructure evaluation studies by describing an ongoing six city project to estimat the business and economic impacts of new cycling infrastructure.

References

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