

Cost-benefit study confirms benefits of walking and cycling investment

May 24 2018

The study shows the benefits of walking and cycling—primarily health gains and carbon emissions reduction—outweighed the costs of better facilities and associated educational campaigns by ten to one.

Few international studies have put an economic value on [health](#) and emissions outcomes, and Victoria University's Associate Professor Ralph Chapman says there has not been a robust economic analysis of the benefits of New Zealand's Model Communities Programme (MCP) to date. Model Communities are urban environments where walking and [cycling](#) are offered to the community as the easiest [transport](#) choices. The intention is to deliver safer environments for novice users.

The MCP funded investment in New Plymouth and Hastings in cycle paths, other walking and cycling facilities, cycle parking, 'shared spaces', media campaigns and events, such as Share the Road, and cycle-skills training.

Professor Chapman's study estimated the benefits of health and other outcomes by comparing the two MCP cities—New Plymouth and Hastings—with two similar cities not participating in the MCP.

The research found that the most important economic benefits were health gains from use of active transport. The study estimated that the annual benefits for health were two lives saved plus significant reductions in cardiac disease, diabetes, cancer, and respiratory disease.

"An estimate of the reductions in transport-related [carbon emissions](#) showed that the carbon savings are modest compared with the health gains, but are nevertheless valuable as we transition to a low-carbon economy," says Professor Chapman.

"The study demonstrates that the 'benefit to cost' ratio of the investment made by two city councils together with the New Zealand Transport Agency is around ten to one," he says. "The study provides hard evidence of the benefits of investing in walking and cycling infrastructure and educational programmes, which comfortably exceed the costs. This is particularly useful at a time when the government is finalising its policy statement on land transport."

More information: Ralph Chapman et al. A Cost Benefit Analysis of an Active Travel Intervention with Health and Carbon Emission Reduction Benefits, *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* (2018). [DOI: 10.3390/ijerph15050962](https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph15050962)

Provided by Victoria University

Citation: Cost-benefit study confirms benefits of walking and cycling investment (2018, May 24) retrieved 16 August 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2018-05-cost-benefit-benefits-investment.html>

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