

T-MAP Frequently Asked Questions

1. How will this project impact my community?

The traffic monitoring data we are collecting through T-MAP is analogous to the monitoring already conducted by state and local transportation agencies all over the country in cooperation with the Federal Highway Administration for [vehicles on roads](#), and by [transit agencies](#) in cooperation with the Federal Transit Administration. We want to demonstrate the feasibility of conducting this monitoring for trail users at the national scale.

However, the real local impacts of T-MAP are our primary motivation. The tools we create through this project will enable us to evaluate the impact of the infrastructure assets that we invest in for trail users. Real cost-benefit analysis requires real data, and in a world of finite resources we need both data and tools to make sure every dollar goes as far as it can. In addition, a better understanding trail use supports maintenance and operations, for example for budgeting snow removal during winter, or regulating user conflicts that raise safety questions on trails. And beyond wise planning, data about trail use can help trail managers obtain grants and most importantly celebrate trails in a concrete way!

2. How accurate are the traffic counters used in T-MAP?

The accuracy of these devices can vary up to 10% in practice depending on slight differences in the installation. In addition, when multiple trail users pass the monitoring location at the same time, the device can have trouble distinguishing them, a problem known as “occlusion.” For this project, we have conducted short-term manual counts at every one of our automatic traffic monitoring stations to validate the accuracy of the equipment and generate adjustment factors to account for occlusion.

3. Can I access the T-MAP data?

Data collected for T-MAP are the joint property of our partner communities and the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy. The timing and availability of data varies from place to place. Please contact project manager Tracy Hadden Loh at tracy@railstotrails.org for inquiries about data availability.

4. My community already has a bicycle and pedestrian counting program. Why do we need this one?

T-MAP is unprecedented in that we are bringing together new and existing traffic monitoring programs from across the continental United States to participate in a single research project with a uniform methodology. In many communities, we are enriching the existing count programs by providing equipment that will allow trail managers to distinguish between pedestrians and cyclists for the first time, or obtain continuous data for the first time. Believe it or not, people do use trails at night, in the winter, during business hours, and at any other time you can think of! Our state-of-the-art equipment brings best-practice data to our study areas, and models based on best-practice data to other urban communities.

5. How can I join T-MAP?

Our sample locations are already finalized. However, we are actively recruiting communities in which to test the first generation of our tools as they become available, in partnership with our field staff. Please get in touch with project manager Tracy Hadden Loh at tracy@railstotrails.org if you are interested!

You can also start your own counting program. The [National Bicycle and Pedestrian Documentation Project](#) is a place where many communities start with a low-cost, volunteer-driven short-term manual counting program. The main strength of these counts is that they can be conducted at low cost at many locations at the same time, providing a snapshot of walking and cycling behavior. However, the snapshot is not necessarily representative of overall active transportation and recreation in your community. These counts are most effective when combined with data from longer-term (between two weeks and two months) or permanent traffic monitoring installations. There are many vendors that provide equipment to do this type of monitoring. The T-MAP project uses the [Eco-MULTI from Eco-Counter](#). Some questions to ask when shopping for equipment:

- Do you need to count pedestrians and bicyclists separately?
- Do you need to know which direction the pedestrian or cyclist is going?
- Can you install the equipment securely?
- Do you want to visit the site regularly to harvest stored data, or access the device remotely?