



Mobility Data Methodology and Analysis

Overview

In July of 2018, the City launched a motorized foot scooter pilot program that ran through November 30, with 400 e-scooters available for shared use throughout Minneapolis. The City required participating providers to sign a license agreement which established standard data sharing and privacy requirements. The intention in requiring and using this data is outlined in the following goals:

- Maintain individuals' privacy by collecting data responsibly and thoughtfully, and anonymizing and aggregating data
- Provide transparency by publishing aggregated and anonymized data and visualizations to the City's Open Data portal for public interaction
- Determine compliance with applicable regulations as stated in license agreement
- Analyze and report on aggregated trip information; e.g. number of rides, total miles/minutes ridden, average miles/minutes per ride, breakdown by day/week/month/total pilot duration, available motorized foot scooters by day/week/month
- Analyze and report on usage through aggregated origin, destination, and route heat maps
- Inform future policy decisions such as fleet size, distribution requirements, and/or infrastructure planning by looking for trends and patterns from the pilot

Informing our work through data allows us to take an informed and proactive approach to shared mobility, and ensures that we are able to shape those services to fit our desired outcomes in providing safe, equitable, and sustainable mobility options that work for all Minneapolitans.

Looking to the future, Minneapolis hopes to build a suite of dashboards spanning all shared modes operating in the City. This will allow for efficient oversight of existing pilots and programs, better management and pricing of curbside use, as well as better planning for future modes. We also aim to be involved in defining the applicable national data standards and specifications expected from providers to ensure we have enough data to define the vision and successful metrics for shared mobility within the City, but are requiring it in a way that protects individual privacy.

Data Privacy/Sharing in License Agreements

Minneapolis has taken steps to establish clear expectations and regulations for data privacy in license agreements that are required to operate shared mobility systems in City right-of-way. This includes transparency from providers regarding their terms of use, privacy, and data sharing policies, and ensuring users' ability to opt-in to these policies as well as any potential third-party data sharing or access to location-based data. We also include provisions which ensure that personally identifiable information (PII) is not collected by or shared with the City, and that data security practices safeguard any PII collected by providers.

Regarding data sharing, we have ensured that expectations and regulations are clearly established in the license agreement, and that the City is being transparent about its intentions for use of data. The license agreements state what data the City requires from providers, how data is intended to be collected (via MDS or similar API), and a statement of purpose for how data is intended to be used. Also included is language which establishes what data may become publicly available, as well as a requirement of providers to make a publicly accessible API available.

Methodology, Assumptions, and Limitations

At the time the pilot began, a data specification called the General Bikeshare Feed Specification (GBFS) API¹ existed for sharing bikeshare information and providers used this initially for the City's data requirements for compliance. Midway through the pilot, our providers proposed giving the City access to an API endpoint based on the Mobility Data Specification (MDS) API² to share additional data with us as required by the license agreement. We leveraged both the GBFS API and the Provider API³ specification to create a method for pulling data in from multiple vendors using our existing enterprise methods and tenets for data collection, storage, usage, and analysis.

We used the specifications for data provided through the MDS API, which defines both provider and agency endpoints for trips. For our analysis, we used the Provider endpoint and did not make use of the Agency endpoint. MDS also specified the existing GBFS API endpoints should be implemented for real-time availability information, so we consumed data from the GBFS *free_bike_status.json*⁴ endpoint. **Appendices A** and **B** list an excerpt of fields provided by both MDS and GBFS, along with if and how the City is using these fields.

Although MDS specifies that no PII is to be sent to any agency, GPS data can be identifiable even when there is no PII provided. As a result, before consuming any trip data, we looked the stated goals of the pilot program and at previous efforts in Minneapolis to anonymize data, researched best practices and methods other agencies had employed both in and out of the state, and consulted with our City Clerk's Office to determine how to consume and store data to meet our goals and provide transparency. The Minnesota Data Practices Act informed our approach to protecting individuals' privacy while enabling us to gain the data needed to support the City's goals and provide transparency. Our intention was to store as little data as possible to be able to meet the goals above, so we analyzed the fields available in both the MDS and GBFS APIs and determined those that would be relevant.

Our immediate need was for compliance and monitoring of motorized foot scooters within the City, so we began by consuming data from the GBFS feed to create a solution for showing availability of motorized foot scooters in the City on a 15 minute polling basis. We later pulled historical MDS trip data to enable aggregate route reporting. We anonymized all data as it was consumed so that no raw data was stored.

Platform

We used a Python frontend and Microsoft SQL Server backend for consuming and storing data. We secured the servers so that only authorized users had access to the data and could not make use of it where there was no business need. We also restricted who had access to the API tokens used for each API. We used several spatial and analytical libraries in Python while consuming data to process and anonymize data in memory so that only processed data was stored. For analysis and visualization, we used R, Python, and Tableau.

We employed methods throughout the lifecycle of this project to ensure it was architected so it can be re-used for both future permitted motorized foot scooters and future expansions of the shared mobility program at the City. The image following shows the general principles we followed, which correlate to our data strategy for enabling consistent, reliable, trustworthy data in the City.

¹ See <https://github.com/NABSA/gbfs/blob/master/gbfs.md>

² Developed by LADOT. See <https://github.com/CityOfLosAngeles/mobility-data-specification>

³ See <https://github.com/CityOfLosAngeles/mobility-data-specification/tree/0.2.x/provider>

⁴ See https://github.com/NABSA/gbfs/blob/master/gbfs.md#free_bike_statusjson for specifications.

data to one of the three centerline points above rather than only to the centroid as has been done in other applications.

We also performed spatial comparisons on all route points to find the closest street segment centerline or off-street bike path.

- Any points not located in the Minneapolis bounding box were removed.
- Trip points were pruned to a single point for the trip per street segment center point or bike path and time bin, for both storage and privacy considerations.

Assumptions and Limitations

While MDS and GBFS specified implementation and required fields, the permitted mobility providers interpreted the requirements differently in some cases. For example, pagination was implemented differently between providers, which meant we needed to write our code differently to accommodate. Another example was availability data; GBFS is defined as a real-time specification, so it was implemented in real-time only and did not provide historic querying. This meant we were unable to find historic availability numbers before we began polling. We did not poll route data in real time as it was used only for historic analysis and future planning.

Providers also varied in what they defined as the City's bounds, which meant we needed to remove trips that were outside of Minneapolis. Route data provided also appeared to be suspect in that the distances and durations given in some instances were well outside of expected values (e.g. some trips had a duration of over 7 hours, negative distance, or a distance of over 1 million miles). We removed these examples for our analysis. Route data appeared to have inconsistent distributions of route points to distance and duration over time and strange clustering around the 6-7 hour duration range. In addition, providers were not consistent in providing every point per route and when truncating used very different methods, even though the API specified all route points should be sent. We therefore ran into challenges with normalizing and pruning the data.

Because the MDS and GBFS APIs are quickly developing standards, this caused some challenges as we consumed data from the APIs. When providers implemented new functionality, it sometimes broke a portion of our code. Fortunately, this limitation is also a strength of MDS, as it means that as new bugs or features are implemented, providers are quick to deploy code changes. This means that future scooter or mobility programs using the APIs will provide more functionality, and will solve some of the challenges we encountered during our analysis.

Planned Changes to the Methodology

In mid-March 2019, another pilot program was approved through March of 2020 for motorized foot scooters. It is the City's intention to continue to collect only anonymized data required to support the goals listed above, and to continue to refine our methodology based on best practices. This could include using other open source tools as they are developed and validated. Moving forward, we plan to collect all trip data retroactively, except for availability information, which is required for compliance and monitoring.

Appendix A: MDS Provider Trip & Route Specification

MDS defines that trip information must be sent as part of the API. The definition of a trip is as follows⁵. The table below has been annotated to include data being used by Minneapolis, and any processing being done on the field to ensure privacy. Fields not used are denoted in the Used by Minneapolis column.

Trips

A trip represents a journey taken by a *mobility as a service* customer with a geo-tagged start and stop point. The trip object has the following structure.

Field	Type	Required /Optional	Comments	Used by Minneapolis	Processing Completed Before Storing
provider_id	UUID	Required	A UUID for the Provider, unique within MDS	No	
provider_name	String	Required	The public-facing name of the Provider	Yes	
device_id	UUID	Required	A unique device ID in UUID format	Yes	
vehicle_id	String	Required	The Vehicle Identification Number visible on the vehicle itself	No	
vehicle_type	Enum	Required	See vehicle types table	Yes	
propulsion_type	Enum[]	Required	Array of propulsion types; allows multiple values	No	
trip_id	UUID	Required	A unique ID for each trip	Yes	Original trip id is discarded and a unique one is created.
trip_duration	Integer	Required	Time, in Seconds	Yes	
trip_distance	Integer	Required	Trip Distance, in Meters	Yes	We store this distance, and recalculate it after removing points not in Minneapolis, pruning trip points, and assigning to a centerline bin. This is due to data quality issues in the API.
route	GeoJSON FeatureCollection	Required	See Routes detail below	Yes	Multiple steps: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. If the route went nowhere, discard it. 2. Find the closest street centerline or bike path to the point. 3. Anonymize the points of the trip to the closest centerline bin. 4. Prune route points to a single point per centerline or bike path bin. 5. Anonymize the route timestamp by rounding to the nearest half hour at the quarter hour. 6. Remove points not in Minneapolis.

⁵ See <https://github.com/CityOfLosAngeles/mobility-data-specification/tree/0.2.x/provider#trips> for full specification details.

accuracy	Integer	Required	The approximate level of accuracy, in meters, of Points within route	No	
start_time	timestamp	Required		Yes	Start time is rounded to the nearest half hour at the quarter hour.
end_time	timestamp	Required		Yes	End time is rounded to the nearest half hour at the quarter hour.
parking_verification_url	String	Optional	A URL to a photo (or other evidence) of proper vehicle parking	No	
standard_cost	Integer	Optional	The cost, in cents, that it would cost to perform that trip in the standard operation of the System	No	
actual_cost	Integer	Optional	The actual cost, in cents, paid by the customer of the <i>mobility as a service</i> provider	No	

Routes

To represent a route, MDS provider APIs must create a GeoJSON FeatureCollection, which includes every observed point in the route. Routes must include at least 2 points: the start point and end point. Additionally, routes must include all possible GPS samples collected by a provider.

A sample route object is displayed in *Figure 2* to the right.

```

"route": {
  "type": "FeatureCollection",
  "features": [{
    "type": "Feature",
    "properties": {
      "timestamp": 1529968782.421409
    },
    "geometry": {
      "type": "Point",
      "coordinates": [
        -118.46710503101347,
        33.9909333514159
      ]
    }
  },
  {
    "type": "Feature",
    "properties": {
      "timestamp": 1531007628.3774529
    },
    "geometry": {
      "type": "Point",
      "coordinates": [
        -118.464851975441,
        33.990366257735
      ]
    }
  }
]
}

```

Figure 2: Sample Route Object

Appendix B: GBFS Free Bike Status Specification

The definition of the GBFS endpoint for free bike status is as follows⁶. Fields not used are denoted in the Used by Minneapolis column.

free_bike_status.json

Describes bikes that are not at a station and are not currently in the middle of an active ride.

<i>Field Name</i>	<i>Defines</i>	<i>Used by Minneapolis</i>
bikes	Array that contains one object per bike that is currently docked/stopped outside of the system as defined below	Yes
- bike_id	Unique identifier of a bike	Yes
- lat	Latitude of the bike. The field value must be a valid WGS 84 latitude in decimal degrees format.	Yes
- lon	Longitude of the bike. The field value must be a valid WGS 84 latitude in decimal degrees format.	Yes
- is_reserved	1/0 value - is the bike currently reserved for someone else	No
- is_disabled	1/0 value - is the bike currently disabled (broken)	No

⁶ See https://github.com/NABSA/gbfs/blob/master/gbfs.md#free_bike_statusjson for full specification details.