

Establishing a footfall baseline



The purpose of this resource is to show you how to do a manual baseline count. It is for local authorities who have been allocated monies under the £50m. 'Opening up Safely' Fund and who will be using footfall as an indicator in their reporting to MHCLG.

A manual baseline count will enable you to record what your footfall levels are before lockdown measures are fully eased and, *ideally*, before funded interventions are put in place. Nevertheless, because of the speed at which high streets and town centres are having to be adapted, in order to welcome people back safely, we appreciate many projects will have already started/completed. You should still undertake a manual footfall count as soon as possible – as footfall is expected to be reduced for some time.

This resource offers a series of guidelines and recommendations to make this manual footfall data collection as easy as possible. Although some of these might seem quite obvious, these are things that, in our experience, can cause confusion or be easily overlooked.

In these documents you will find information on:

- The importance of footfall data
- Manually collecting footfall data
- Preparing for fieldwork
- Upgrading to a full manual counting programme and standard dashboard

1. The importance of footfall data

Footfall is a key indicator for a town centre's vitality and viability, and is significant for evaluating the performance of high streets. Counting footfall can help in understanding new trends in consumer behaviour and the changing function of towns. Footfall data can be used to analyse activity patterns and as an indicator of the dominant functions of a place. This can, in turn, support decision and policy making as well as engage a variety of stakeholders in sustaining their high streets.

Counting footfall becomes even more important in times of COVID-19, as it will show if and how footfall is returning to town centres and high streets, as we exit lockdown. This, in turn, will guide the implementation of necessary interventions and measure the impact these have.

Manually counting footfall is an alternative for town centres that do not have automatic footfall counting technology.

2. Manually collecting footfall data

The purpose of this section is to show how to conduct a manual baseline count for local authorities who have been granted the 'Opening up Safely' Fund. It guides the selection of a counting location, it suggests a manual counting technique and schedule, and it offers a series of tips of how to best approach data collection while in the field.

2.1 Where should we count?

Choosing a counting location is an important part of the footfall data collection process. This can be guided by particular interventions, for example, the opening of a market, the pedestrianization of a street, the removal of a parking area, etc. Often, a combination of multiple counting locations can provide data about hotspots or footfall flow. As the aim of this document is to help town centres provide data for the monitoring and evaluation of the £50m MHCLG 'Opening Up Safely' fund, you should choose one location (a particular shopping street, town square, etc.) within one town centre within your Local Authority area. It is up to you what location you choose, but it should be one that is being supported in some way with monies from the 'Opening up safely fund. This might be through a temporary public realm intervention, communication or marketing campaign, an action plan or some other support for businesses.

Once you have identified the general area, you should talk to the Business Improvement District (if there is one), local businesses, or your town centre partnership to identify the exact spot for counting.

Find a way of identifying and keeping record of the selected location(s). Sometimes a simple description will do (e.g. outside Costa), but others more precision might be needed (e.g. finding coordinates with Google Maps or using the website 'What3words' that assigns a 3-word address to 3m x 3m squares). We also recommend taking a photo of the location for identification and illustration purposes (i.e. you can include it in presentations, reports, etc.).

2.2 When should we count?

Cardiff and Manchester Metropolitan Universities have conducted extensive research on footfall patterns and town centre signatures (Mumford et al. 2020). This research shows that there are given days of the week and hours of the day that are key in understanding the profile of a high street/town centre. They have selected TUESDAY as the baseline counting day. Manual counts should be collected between 7-9am, 12-14pm, 17-19pm. We recommend that you choose a Tuesday when data is going to be collected as soon as possible.

Counting on one Tuesday will satisfy the footfall data requirements of MHCLG – but you can choose to count more to get a much more accurate picture of your high street as it is recovering. Going forward, we recommend that you also count on a Saturday and a Sunday during August and December (as these appear to be key dates) and join the High Streets Task Force full manual counting programme and gain access to a Standard Dashboard. We explain more about the benefits of the Manual Counting Programme and the Standard Dashboard in Section 5.

2.3 Counting technique

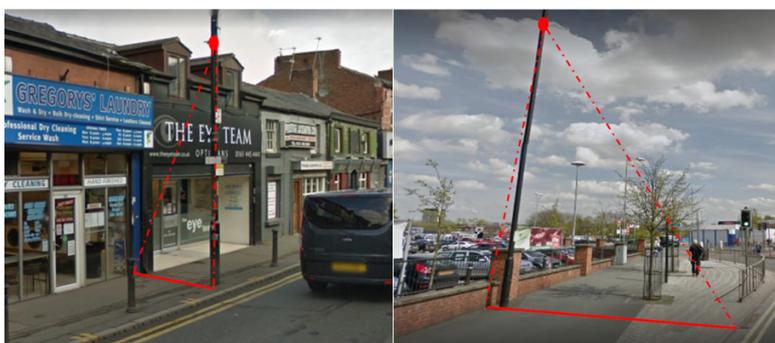
After conducting research on best counting techniques and having tried these out in the field, we recommend: counting in 15 minute intervals, that is, count for 15 minutes and rest for another 15 minutes and so forth. Start counting when the clock strikes the starting time (e.g. 12pm). You can set a timer for 15 minutes or keep an eye on the watch (e.g. until clock strikes 12.15pm). Write down footfall numbers after each 15 minutes counting period. Feel free to move around during the 15 minute breaks. Make notes if there are any important observations that can impact on footfall.

Footfall for 1h is therefore calculated by adding up each time slot and multiplying it by two. For example:

	Tuesday 12:00-13:00				
Location	12:00-12:15	12:15-12:30	12:30-12:45	12:45-13:00	TOTAL
Oxford Road	365		270		$(365+270)*2= 1270$

2.4 Counting instructions

1. Keep written and visual record of the location. Take a photo!
2. Identify an imaginary straight line from side to side of the pavement where you are standing. Do not count people walking on the bike lanes, the road or the pavement across the road. Examples:



3. Count people walking past in *both* directions.
4. Count every person walking past, even if that person has been counted before.
5. Two (or more) people walking together count for two (or more).
6. Prams do not count – but people pushing them do.
7. If a cyclist crosses over the count line, they count. Skaters count as well.
8. Dogs do not count.

2.5 Using your count

After data collection, keep your count in a safe place and include it any monitoring or evaluation reporting that is requested by MHCLG. You may want to continue counting – footfall is an important indicator and very useful to track the recovery of your town

centres/high street. You can find out more about how the High Streets Task Force can help you at the end of this document (Section 5).

3. Footfall Counting Exercise!

We encourage you to practice counting footfall before going out in the field.

This is an activity designed to practice manually counting footfall. The link below will take you to a video with two footfall counting sessions. The first one takes place in a quieter location and lasts about 2mins. The second one is a little harder as footfall volume increases, this one lasts about 3mins.

Video: <https://youtu.be/-3accJDNf8w>

We have decided not to disclose how many counts there are, as you will not have this information when you are in the field. The purpose of the exercise is not to count over and over until you get the exact number, but rather to get a feel for counting under different footfall volumes, and to start thinking about what counts and what does not.

4. Preparing for fieldwork

Getting ready to go out into the field takes a little bit of preparation. Here are the steps that we recommend you follow:

1. Decide on the date. It has to be a Tuesday. It should be as soon as possible so the count can be taken as a baseline.
2. Decide on which location(s) the manual footfall counting is going to take place. Find a way of identifying and keeping record of the selected location(s) (e.g. description, coordinates, What3words).
3. A basic risk assessment would be required, assuring that the person conducting the manual counting is safe whilst conducting fieldwork. In order to do this, we encourage you to read the risk assessment we have created for you and that you modify anything you deem necessary. You can find the risk assessment at the end of this document. Furthermore, we advise that you let a colleague or a friend know your location and finishing time, and that you check in with them as soon as the fieldwork is over and you have safely returned to your home or workplace.
4. Check the weather forecast! Make sure you dress accordingly as you will have to be outdoors for 2h in each counting session.
5. Make sure that you do not take unnecessary valuables with you to the field, not only to reduce the chance of them being stolen, but also to avoid carrying unnecessary weight.
6. Make sure you have some form of ID and a brief information sheet about the project in case you are inquired about it. You can find the information sheet at the end of this document.
7. Find a traditional clicker or download a clicker app.
8. Find a watch or a phone to time counting interventions.

9. Have a printed copy of the counting sheet as you will have to write down footfall numbers on-the-go. You can find the counting sheet at the end of this document. In this document you can input manual counts, and keep track of any important comments or observations. Make sure you have a pen and a clipboard.

4.1 Checklist – before you go out in the field

- Counting sheet
- Information sheet & ID
- Clicker
- Pen
- Clipboard
- Watch

5. Full manual counting programme and Standard dashboard

As you do not have automatic footfall counts, this programme will offer you a regime for manual counting and a Standard Dashboard that will include a footfall estimator, developed by Cardiff and Manchester Metropolitan Universities.

5.1 Footfall estimator

The estimator uses software to predict levels of footfall along with on-site calibration, through short periods of manual counting. It will provide centres with estimated levels of footfall volume, along with additional suggestions about the daily, weekly and monthly usage patterns of the town.

The manual counting programme will require you to count on given months, days of the week, and times of the day that are key for calibrating the estimator and predicting footfall levels and patterns. Key dates are:

Days: Tuesday, Saturday, and Sunday.

Times: 7-9am, 12-14pm, and 17-19pm.

Months: March, August, December.

As a result of manual counting, we will be able to calibrate the footfall estimator and suggest usage patterns of the town (daily, weekly and monthly) and what this means in terms of how the town functions. Data will be available to you through a Standard Dashboard (see below).

5.2 The Standard Dashboard

The standard version of the Task Force Dashboard is offered to locations that do not have automatic footfall data, but that engage in manual counting to calibrate the footfall estimator. This standard dashboard has been developed by My Knowledge Map, The content of the dashboard has been designed by Manchester Metropolitan University and Cardiff University based on actual footfall data, provided by Springboard, a leading provider of data. The Standard Dashboards are based on extensive research experience on what aspects of footfall are necessary to improve town centre performance, how data is best understood and engaged with, as well as what aspects of estimated footfall that are most representative of reality and helpful for place leaders without actual footfall data.

The Standard Dashboard allows users to:

- Interrogate their calibrated annual, weekly, and daily footfall volume and patterns
- Learn to interpret the results of footfall data and actively manage High Street/town centre activity
- Log place interventions and reflect on the impact of these
- Create and export graphs that can be easily shared with a wider group of stakeholders, and build capacity for place management
- Provide a rationale for how automated footfall data can help in town transformation for inclusion in future development budget plans.
- Monitor footfall and town centre recovery after COVID-19 lockdown.

5.3 Endorsements

This product has been designed by Cardiff and Manchester Metropolitan Universities to guide local authorities in their efforts to engage in footfall data collection. It has been piloted with a number of Local Authorities who are now engaged in the full manual counting programme and will soon have access to a standard dashboard. These LAs are: Hartlepool, Accrington, Starchley, Erdington, Ellesmere Port, and Aldershot.

In the views of these LAs, this product has helped them:

Experience how to manually count footfall 4/5

Become more confident about manual footfall counting 4/5

This group of LAs believe this product to be:

Informative 4/5

Enjoyable 4/5

Local Authorities who have engaged with this product 'Agree' to keep undertaking manual footfall counts in their town centres (Agree = 4/5)

In relation to this product, this group of LAs also say:

'Good practical exercise to increase awareness of potential issues'

'Very helpful to be guided through a count'
'Practical and lively!'

If you are interested in upgrading to a full manual counting programme and gaining access to a standard dashboard, then please fill in this form:

<https://forms.monday.com/forms/30f1ffbe3dff72a74071b01aa920788f>

6. References

Mumford, C., Parker, C., Ntounis, N., & Dargan, E. (2020). Footfall signatures and volumes: Towards a classification of UK centres. *Environment and Planning B: Urban Analytics and City Science*, 2399808320911412.

Risk Assessment

Assessed by: High Streets Task Force

Date of Assessment: 10/06/2020

Activity: Manual footfall counting

Overall Assessment of the Risk after Control Measures have been Implemented:

Low X	Medium	High
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What are the hazards?	What are you already doing to control the risk?	Risk
Weather	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Check the daily weather forecast before setting out. • Wear clothing suitable for expected weather conditions. • Be aware of places to seek shelter when necessary and inform participants about these places. 	Low
Working beside major roads and traffic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avoid having your back towards the traffic flow. • Use traffic lights to cross over the road. 	Low
Crime	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do not carry unnecessary valuables. 	Low
Lack of physical fitness or feeling unwell	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do not be afraid to tell someone if you feel unwell or cannot carry on with a task. 	Low
General fieldwork considerations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where possible, carry a phone. • Let a colleague or a friend know your location and start/finish times. 	Low
Dealing with the public	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do not stand in places where you will be causing an obstruction. • Always carry your ID card and be prepared to identify yourself. • Have an information sheet with you and be ready to explain what the fieldwork involves. • If faced with aggression, try to get away as quickly as possible. Move towards a place where you know there will be other people. 	Low
COVID-19	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keep with social distancing guidance 	Low

Information sheet

Data collection for the High Streets Task Force

This is part of the data collection process for the **High Streets Task Force (HSTF)**, led by the Institute of Place Management (IPM) at Manchester Metropolitan University.

The Task Force has been commissioned by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) as part of the Government's Plan to support local leaders to revitalise high streets and town centres.

The data collection process is being conducted by, and has full approval from, the **local authority**.

It involves the manual collection of footfall data. The data collection is fully anonymous and no personal data is being collected at any stage of this fieldwork.

For more information about the project visit the HSTF website:

<https://www.highstreetstaskforce.org.uk>

Thank you for your interest in this project.
The HSTF.

