THEORY: Crime is a social phenomenon which evokes fear as a consequence, and this fear of crime affects people not only at their place of residence or work, but also while travelling. Higher fear of crime is associated with less cycling and walking, increased use of private transport, and can act as a barrier to travel. To encourage use of public transport, perception of safety during the entire door-to-door journey needs to be better understood in order to be improved.

Traditional methods for measuring fear of crime apply household survey questionnaires, where respondents are typically asked whether they are ‘very’, ‘fairly’, ‘not very’ or ‘not at all’ worried about becoming a victim of crime. Such research omits many of the complexities involved with experiencing fear of crime in everyday life. Instead, these measures often reflect generalised attitudes towards risk and future-oriented anxieties, rather than actual experiences. Recall-based surveys that ask participants about their experiences in the past 3 -12 months are also affected by issues with recollection. Memories of emotional experience from longer than about two-weeks draw on general knowledge from people’s beliefs rather than the specifics of the event itself.

Data collected by retrospective questionnaires is further restricted in terms of level of detail provided about when and where fear of crime is experienced. Geographically it is usually restricted to views of the residents of an area, and excludes perceptions of people who travel to or through that area (e.g. people who work there, or who walk through that neighbourhood to catch the train). Temporally (i.e. by time) we normally get a "during the day" and “after night” division, which leaves no way of telling if there are peak times for fear of crime within all hours of darkness. Inaccurate measurement – in space or time - can lead to misguided interventions and wasted public agency resources. Even experts struggle to consistently identify areas of high crime (e.g. mapping crime hotspots helped show that police perceptions of crime patterns do not always correlate with where the most crimes are recorded). The same may be true for fear of crime. In order to gain insight into the nature of fear of crime, a new method of measurement is needed that captures these dynamics.

PURPOSE: The purpose of this technique is to collect data that will provide insight into when and where fear of crime is experienced, and by whom. This allows for a holistic understanding of perceptions of security covering people’s entire activity space (i.e. all places people interact with day-to-day). Data collected by this method is not restricted by traditional limitations. Instead, collecting data on people’s perceptions and experiences as they occur in space and time allows us to identify, at the micro-level, what areas are perceived as safe and unsafe, and know precisely how that changes with different demographic groups, times of the day, days of the week, or other variables. This knowledge can be used to design targeted, efficient and effective situational interventions to enhance perceptions of safety in the built environment.