Letter submitted by Mariela Alfonzo, October 26, 2016, via email.

About the study:

-This study was based on 115 neighborhoods - the three instances I described in the blog post are just examples that illustrate the findings. The overall study included more than 1,500 blocks. The study shows how well Walk Score correlated with micro-scale features of the built environment that are tied to walking. State of Place simply served as the metric that measured these micro-scale features. *Painting the study as based on only three blocks is an erroneous representation of the study and serves to falsely discredit it. I also clearly point out that this wasn't meant to be a tit for tat analysis or commentary, which is why I refrained from speaking about State of Place and promoting what we do in this blog post.*

> Her critique of Walk Score is based on an analysis of three instances in Washington DC suburbs =Error of Fact
>
> We used data from 115 neighborhoods in the Washington, DC Metro region to compare Walk Score to the State of Place Index. Now, this wasn't meant to be self-serving. It so happens that my colleagues had Walk Score data for the DC Metro region they had obtained for a related HUD-funded study. And I had State of Place data for the same region based on previous work. Also, State of Place is indeed based on "microscale aspects of walkability" - in other words, the nitty-gritty aspects of the built environment, like trees, benches, crosswalks, windows, lighting, etc. (we collected 162 of these features at the time, and there are now over 290, so I'll spare you and won't list them all, but you can see them here) that have been empirically tied to whether or not people walk. So by comparing Walk Score to a measure like State of Place, you are essentially looking at whether or not the former is an effective proxy of the urban design features that the latter measures.
>
> We ran this comparison in a variety of contexts to better understand under what circumstances it would and would not be appropriate to use Walk Score as a proxy for walkability.

You can see that we are evaluating how well Walk Score, which is a measure of access to (and quality of) destinations, correlates with micro-scale measures of walkability (which it does not measure). So effectively, we are asking when is it OK to use Walk Score as a shortcut proxy for walkability.

- We find that Walk Score overestimates the walkability of low-income areas - this is a matter of fact based on sound statistical analyses. This finding is indeed problematic, especially when Walk Score is used as a metric by which to evaluate publicly subsidized projects. Additionally, the fact that Walk Score fails to serve as a good proxy for the micro-scale built environment features known to impact actual walking decisions in these contexts is also at issue. *Practitioners and researchers who use this metric should be aware of this important finding.*

She argues that its "irresponsible and potentially discriminating" to use Walk Score "to make planning, private investment or public funding or policy decisions." *This is an important misrepresentation of fact. This is only the case if you are using it in the context of low income or low accessibility places.*

- The purpose of this blogpost was to bring attention to these findings, given most people don't have access to this study, not to baselessly critique Walk Score. *In fact, in the blogpost, we acknowledge Walk Score's contribution not just for being upfront, but also for putting walkability on the map - our words overwhelmingly echo yours in that regard. Again, as I mentioned, I intentionally refrained from talking about State of Place and what we offer (putting up solely a link to another page in our website) so as to not come across as us vs. them with respect to the outcomes of this study.*

Your post:
To their credit, Matt Lerner and the team at Walk Score have always been utterly open and transparent about the limits of their data and algorithms, and have made changes to address those concerns (substituting street-smart distance measures for straight line calculations, for example). As a result of these steady improvements and despite its limitations, Walk Score has done more to advance

interest in and awareness of walkability than any–and perhaps all–of the academic research on the subject.

vs.

our Post

(nearly identical)

I admit, I was a bit starstruck. Here was this guy who had managed to put walkability on the map (literally!) after countless academic papers showing the health, environmental and even economic benefits of walkable neighborhoods had failed to really move the needle

Of course, we also discussed Walk Score's limitations - something that to their credit, they've always been very upfront about. I mean, to hear Matt tell it, this was originally about using tech to do something cool with maps. They certainly fulfilled and surpassed that goal - walkability is now a major shoe company's tagline! But while Matt and the Walk Score guys have clearly laid out their methodology and its limits are clear

-We take issue with various misrepresentations of myself, our study, and the blog post, given the errors of fact cited herein. *My commitment to making places better harkens back over 20 years, to when I was a car-less teenager in the suburbs of Miami, intimately getting to know the power of place, or lack thereof. My work has focused heavily on metrics and quantifying the value of urban design and place as it relates to health, social outcomes, and economics, all with the aim of providing evidence-based practice and policy recommendations. As an academic entrepreneur, I have taken the path less traveled, and made serious economic and career sacrifices, to do so. It is not only unfair and unwarranted to paint me and my company in the disparaging light (noted in the attached document), it is also deeply offensive and saddening to me. (Detailed examples illustrating this are outlined in the attached document).*

They're real models of how to move markets and do good. *Low (unjustified) blow to me and my company.*

Rather than a tendentious critique of Walk Score: *Given the erroneous error made about the basis of this study, this is an inappropriate way to describe our study and blog post.*

Walk Score is a terrific resource than provides a foundation for understanding and promoting walkability as a public policy objective: *We say this.*

If you're really a passionate supporter of walkability, you ought to celebrate that accomplishment and build on it, *We are and do.*

than taking needless and poorly grounded swipes at its limitations *Again, given that the erroneous assumption that the study was based on three blocks, this criticism of our study and blog post is unwarranted.*

Its poor form in any business to get ahead by bad-mouthing your competitors *We do no such thing, especially given the examples in which I praise Walk Score as I have outlined herein*

Its even worse in this situation, when over-the-top claims about Walk Score being "irresponsible" actually undercut a shared common interest in promoting greater awareness of and knowledge about walkability. *We did not paint Walk Score as irresponsible; we merely said that using Walk Score in certain contexts without taking into account these newly revealed findings would be irresponsible. And that is a matter of fact given our findings. Again, given the erroneous assumption made at the beginning of the article – that our study was based on three blocks – this conclusion of "over the top" is out of bounds.*

needlessly tearing down *We simply just do not do this, considering the seriousness of the findings and the sound methodology and research design on which they were based.*

About my company:

-**State of Place is not a consulting company; we are a predictive urban data analytics software that ties a robust measure of walkability and quality of place to economic value. In fact, we were**

funded by NSF's Small Business Innovation and Research grant program early this year, a highly competitive grant program that places a heavy emphasis on funding companies with a high social impact, which we are very much committed to.

launched a consulting firm – "State of Place — **Error of fact**

-**Walk Score and State of Place serve different purposes. We are not in the business of providing walkability metrics. Our software provides data and analytics to help cities (and developers) make the (economic) case for better places. Specifically, our software provides the following features/benefits:**

- **State of Place Index and Profile: An overall quality of place/walkability score that is then broken down into ten urban design dimensions empirically linked to whether or not people make the decision to walk, identifying a place's built environment assets and needs;** *This helps our users understand why they scored the way they did, something Walk Score does not do. Even if Walk Score did help users understand how to get from 40 to 60, those recommendations would be limited to access to (and to some extent, quality of) destinations, which is, of course, part of the equation, but limited in its utility.*
- **Prioritization Analysis: Produces evidence-based urban design recommendations based on users' economic development and livability goals, their existing conditions (State of Place Index and Profile), and the feasibility of making changes to the built environment.** *This helps users set planning and funding priorities and make the most of their limited budgets.*
- **Scenario Analysis: Users can run scenario analysis to see how making certain changes – or how specific design/development proposals – would impact the State of Place Index and Profile.** *This helps users objectively judge and justify internal and external planning and development proposals, including evaluating RFPs.*
- **Forecast Analysis: Users can create forecasts of the economic upside linked to those urban design changes or proposals.** *This helps users economically justify their plans and proposals, which makes it easier to speak the language of traffic engineers, developers, residents and other internal stakeholders - essentially what you point out in your article here:*

As we've noted at City Observatory, for too long our transportation discussions have been subtly but powerfully slanted by the dominance of car-oriented system metrics—average daily traffic, level of service, hours of delay. What's long been missing from urban planning and transportation investment decisions is clear metrics that characterize the role of walkability in contributing to livability and other public policy goals. Walk Score helps level the quantitative playing field. *We at State of Place are aiming to do the same thing - advance a data-driven, evidence-based approach over an expert-driven, ideologically based one.*

- We don't 'sell walkability metrics.' We sell our software analytics program, which, as I just explained, goes way beyond just providing the State of Place Index

that sells walkability measures. **Misrepresentation of fact**

- The study you cite that we did for the City of Tigard is much more detailed and broader than just providing the State of Place Index. In fact, the study you linked to was a study produced by Masters students at PSU; it is NOT the official, complete study produced for the City of Tigard.

But if you're being asked to pay for "State of Place" you might want to ask what it is providing that Walk Score doesn't, and whether it's worth it. **Misrepresentation of fact based on unfair representation of our City of Tigard study** - *should have included commentary from our client, which would have pointed out the clear value we provided, and the fact that it is linked to the students' study (and cites data from the students' study) is misleading.*

- Also, as it relates to providing walkability metrics specifically, we do actually offer (and have provided) State of Place pro-bono in this context, for example, in our work with universities and researchers. Accordingly, we are not in the business of having our customers pay us *JUST* for the State of Place Index.

- We have over 6000+ blocks of data and counting, including in the Washington DC Metro area, Boston, New York, Miami, West Palm Beach, Santa Monica, Houston, San Francisco, San Jose, Birmingham (in the UK), and Shanghai and Hangzhou (in China). Accordingly, your statement below is incorrect.

And they simply haven't been gathered in enough places to have the kind of track record that would let an objective third party assess their utility. **Erroneous assumption**

- You have made assumptions about our business and revenue model without having any information regarding this sensitive information, both respect to our costs (data collection) and pricing:

These metrics, however, are highly complex, extremely labor intensive to gather, and consequently very expensive. **Erroneous assumption**

At her firm, Mariela Alfonso is pitching its proprietary methodology for assessing walkability. For a fee, they'll come to your community and gather data on-site, **Misrepresentation of fact**

and frankly much more expensive kinds of tools that State of Place wants communities to buy **Erroneous assumption – you have no basis to make this claim. And it's based on a false assumption that all we do is provide a different version of a walkability metric.**

- My name and title are incorrect: My last name should be: Alfonzo not Alfonso, and my title is Dr. not Ms.

It took us to a blog entry from Mariela Alfonso **Incorrect** asking "Does walk score walk the walk?"

Ms. **Incorrect** Alfonso **Incorrect** has been doing walkability research for a number of years

At her firm, Mariela Alfonso **Incorrect**