

How to Enjoy the City with Your Feet

By Yazmin Viramontes and Jorge Cañez

Walking in Mexico City can be an extreme sport. Breaks in sidewalks, unsafe intersections, construction with no path planned for pedestrians, and distracted drivers in speeding cars make it difficult to navigate, much less enjoy, walking in the city. One of the greatest ways to transform a city is to put pedestrians first. Cities known for best practices in terms of urban development, equity, and high quality of life prioritize pedestrians when designing the infrastructure of the city. This is being done in Mexico City.



Improvements are in progress. The city has been making a huge effort to improve the pedestrian environment, with projects such as the pedestrianized Madero street, Regina street, 16th de Septiembre street, and the recovery of many other public spaces. These projects are very symbolic and help generate confidence that certain regulations are being followed to the pedestrian's benefit, and ITDP México is working with the city to ensure that this progress continues. There is more work to be done—and a great opportunity available with the historic downtown. If the city does this right, Mexico City could become a national and international example of pedestrian best practices.

Pedestrians in cities such as Mexico City often do not think about all the obstacles they face every day. The government still prioritizes road construction for cars, and for many people this seems normal. ITDP



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México's pedestrian program, *Camina* (Walk), seeks to improve Mexico City's walking environment by evaluating pedestrian environments on three scales: crosswalks, corridors, and zones. For crosswalks—the most dangerous part of the street for pedestrians—safety is evaluated. For corridors, the team evaluates the interface of buildings with the street, connectivity, and the quality of sidewalks. For zones, we look for urban design and proximity to desirable walking destinations, and the network of walking and cycling.

Using tactical urbanism, the *Camina* program takes to the streets to demonstrate how intersections can be improved. Using orange cones, cameras, and signs, the team employs an interactive approach to building awareness of the problem, and to provide a map for improvement. The idea is to create tools for city decision makers that can help them identify which intersections most urgently need intervention, and to provide specific advice as to what should be done.

The new street design offers direction for cars, and reduces the distance that pedestrians have to cover. As this project shows, creating safer spaces for pedestrians can happen easily within the existing road space by narrowing car lanes and directing drivers through specific points in the

intersection that help them to clearly see when pedestrians are crossing.

The goal of *Camina* is to create streets that allow the most vulnerable pedestrian groups—children and the elderly—to walk visibly, securely, and calmly, applying the principles of accessibility, visibility, and order for all users of the street. The best way to attain these measures is through techniques such as decreasing the exposure time of pedestrians in the vehicle line and reducing the turning radius for cars, which results in lower speeds, so that drivers can best see and yield to pedestrians.

Everyone, no matter where you live, has the right to go outside and walk around comfortably, safely, and calmly. Mexico City and all Latin American cities have a great opportunity to build the kinds of cities that we want: walkable, enjoyable, and on a human scale. Keep enjoying cities with your feet, and we'll see you on the street!

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