

# Putting Pedestrians First in Healthy, Equitable, Environmental Cities

By Clayton Lane, CEO



Walking offers a remarkable solution for our planet – especially in cities, which generate 70% of global greenhouse gas emissions. Zero-carbon, affordable, space-efficient, and vital for commercial activity, walking can be a powerful tool to help cities tackle the dual challenge of climate change and economic growth. With over a billion daily trips occurring on foot or bicycle, it goes without saying that safe, healthy walking environments should be a fundamental part of any urban policy or plan.

What's more, walking is healthy, fun, and vital for vibrant communities. We aspire to walk from our earliest adventures as a child and cherish the freedom it brings to our very last day. For many of us walking is also an economic lifeline, connecting us to our jobs, our families, and even our hopes and aspirations. It is no hyperbole to say that walking is a basic human right.

Yet, cities are still building for cars, with

people as an afterthought. People are often forced to risk their lives to get around – crossing busy traffic lanes without crosswalks, or walking along highway shoulders without proper walkways. As a result, traffic injuries are now the leading cause of death among young people aged 15 to 29 years old, and are predicted to rise to become the seventh leading cause of death overall by 2030.

The problem is not just a matter of design, but of policy. In African cities such as Kinshasa and Dar es Salaam, 70% of travel is completed either on foot or bicycle; in Asian cities this figure is typically around 50%. Yet African and Asian cities tend to dedicate the large majority of their transport budgets toward auto infrastructure – catalyzing rapid motorization even where relatively few households own cars.



The revitalized historic center of Mexico City.

National governments also have the opportunity to prioritize walking. In the recent international climate agreement at COP21 in Paris, a full 75% of countries' Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) featured sustainable transport, yet only 4% included walking or compact urban form.

Pedestrians are the indicator for a healthy, equitable, environmentally friendly city. Walkable cities are easy to envision – as we humans have built cities for people, for centuries. They feature compact neighborhoods, mixed land uses, and good connectivity. They provide safe, healthy walking environments, with proper sidewalks, safe crosswalks, protection from traffic pollution, and pleasant public space. And they prioritize pedestrian

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## Sustainia Award

2015

ITDP CEO Clayton Lane accepts the Sustainia Award at COP21 in Paris on behalf of the City of Chennai and ITDP India. The award was presented by Richard Branson, founder of Virgin Group.

accessibility and safety over the movement of vehicles.

Very importantly, walkable cities connect their human-scaled neighborhoods to each other, via high-quality bus, bus rapid transit (BRT) or metro. And they provide a comprehensive system of cycling, shared mobility, taxis, and all the ways to get around that keep us physically active without owning a car. Fortunately, many cities are taking bold, progressive steps to improve walkability and put pedestrians first.

Chennai, India shifted 60% of its transport budget to walking and biking, despite the outcry of some motorists, and is aiming to achieve zero road deaths. The city is developing “complete streets” for all users with wide sidewalks, proper cycle paths, and organized parking. It plans to upgrade 80% of its streets by 2018. The city is also convening a coalition of stakeholders – including traffic police, traffic engineers, elected officials, civil society, and advocates for the disabled – to ensure it plans inclusively for the needs of all citizens. And the world is watching. Chennai recently was awarded the prestigious Sustainia Award alongside COP21 in Paris, recognizing the city’s bold, innovative steps to improve walkability as a means to address climate change.

Mexico City revitalized its historic city center in 2012, transforming it

with bus and pedestrian-only streets. The city has increased cycling with new infrastructure and the wildly-successful bike share program, ecobici. In the years since, the city has added several new pedestrian priority streets in the city center, introduced groundbreaking parking reform, and added more Metrobús BRT lines under the complete streets model, which gives equal space to transit, cyclists, pedestrians, and cars.

Guangzhou set a bold example for China with its groundbreaking greenway project, the Donghaochong greenway, which transformed a polluted canal running under a highway into a beautiful winding bike and walking path. This is part of a wider project to build more kilometers of greenways throughout the city, including Lizhiwan Chong in the historical centre of the city, which opened in 2010. Since then, many other cities in China, including Guangdong and Yichang, have created their own greenway projects inspired by Guangzhou.

This year’s issue of Sustainable Transport addresses the topic of walkability in several articles. We discuss non-motorized transport in five African cities, a program to improve walkability in Mexico City, and how the United States is becoming a more walkable nation.

We also celebrate a major achievement – the new BRT corridor in Yichang, China. Notably, Yichang is taking a comprehensive approach to sustainable mobility, featuring not only a new BRT, but a well-integrated bike sharing system, safe and proper pedestrian crossings, and even converting automobile parking into public space for pedestrians.

I cannot express enough thanks to our amazing staff, board, partners, and funders. The projects featured in this issue spotlight just a fraction of their good work in partnership with progressive cities around the world. These inspirational examples show us how we can make a difference, with cities built for people.

Image: ITDP