

As ITDP Turns 35, Climate Change Is Accelerating. Fortunately, So Is Political Will.

Welcome to 2020, a milestone year in so many ways for those of us working to mitigate climate change. This target year underpins the Paris Climate Agreement, marking the next decade as the most crucial period for action. This year, United Nations member states will take stock of actions made to limit climate change, with the aspiration of ratcheting up commitments in coming years. Here at ITDP, as we reflect on 35 years of work in a rapidly changing world, the importance of our mission for sustainable and equitable cities worldwide has never been clearer.



By Heather Thompson,
ITDP CEO

The threat of climate change is nothing new. Scientists, politicians, and activists have been warning of the serious consequences of burning fossil fuels for decades. What is new is that the threat is now impossible to ignore. Catastrophic fires, floods, and ever more unpredictable and destructive storms are making the theoretical very real for hundreds of millions of people around the world. People are now demanding change. We have a seemingly broken system of international cooperation. The most powerful world leaders are renegeing on commitments and even refusing international assistance in the name of protectionism.

Yet, in the absence of national leadership, cities and activists are stepping up. This past September, over six million protesters took to the streets for a week of direct action, a movement increasingly led by young people. As of this writing, over 10,000 cities and local governments have joined the Global Covenant of Mayors for Climate and Energy, under which they committed to continue their support for the Paris Agreement, no matter what their national policy says. In reality, this almost matters more. Cities account for over 70 percent of global CO₂ emissions and consume over 66 percent of the world's energy. Cities are where most of the world's population lives and where the impacts of climate change are experienced locally.

This newfound political will opens opportunities for organizations like ITDP to make a difference. For 35 years, we have been urging cities to recognize the limits of car-oriented planning, and the potential of prioritizing transit, cycling, and walking. Population growth, worsening traffic congestion and air pollution, combined with the reality of climate change, are creating an awareness and urgency that is opening doors that were previously closed.

The best part is, we already know the solutions, and they work. They are fast and affordable. We do not need to wait for new technologies to reduce the impacts of climate emissions from internal combustion engines in our cities. Three solutions rise above all others in terms of the speed of implementation, cost-effectiveness, and impact: **buses, bikes, and parking reform.**

Get on the bus. Buses are the most cost-effective way to move people in vehicles. Globally, over two billion people use the bus every day, yet it continues to be the most maligned and underfunded form of transport. Metro rail systems are great, but they take decades and untold billions to build, and billions

of people need transport now. A fleet of buses can be purchased and deployed within months, and streets can be redesigned to prioritize bus services with measures as simple as paint, barricades, and enforcement. Add to this the bonus of electrification that yields a smooth, noiseless ride free of fossil fuels, and buses become more attractive than ever.

Switch to the bike lane. While not everyone can or wants to travel by bike, a greater share of cyclists benefits everyone on the streets by taking people out of cars, thus lessening their harmful impacts. A majority of people around the world already walk or cycle, yet they are often doing so in unsafe and demeaning conditions. Cars kill more children each year than malaria, yet we continue to accept this state of affairs on the false assumption that everyone can and should travel by car. Like protected bus lanes, separated bike lanes can provide a major boost to cycling at a very minor cost. With the increasing popularity of electric bikes, more riders can cover greater distances, regardless of fitness level. From New York City to Jakarta, Indonesia, city leaders are dedicating more and more street space to cyclists, with positive impacts for people and the environment.

Limit and price parking. The huge amounts of prime space that cities give to empty car storage could be better used as public space, bus lanes, bike lanes, or greenways. While major initiatives such as congestion pricing are commendable, they are politically fraught, time-consuming, and expensive. Pricing street parking also provides a new source of city revenue to fund sustainable transport. Decisions can be made on a street-by-street basis, with the benefits realized quickly by the neighborhood. While this may seem obvious, free street parking is still the norm in much of the world, but this is changing. In 2018 Mexico City became the first major city in North America to eliminate parking minimums citywide. Other cities from Pune, India to San Francisco, California are adopting these policies.

Buses, bikes, and parking management are solutions that all cities can put into place now, which is critical in this next decade of urgent climate action. Beyond mitigating climate change, these solutions would massively improve air quality, a crisis plaguing cities worldwide. Prioritizing these modes and policies would also support greater equity, providing low-cost, safe access to the jobs, education, healthcare, community and culture of the city. If we fail to create solutions that work for everybody, we are not working at the scale required to address climate change. For real change to happen, equitable and environmental solutions must go hand in hand.

With 35 years of experience, ITDP is well poised to help. When we look back at this decade, I believe we will see 2020 as a tipping point to greater momentum behind tried-and-true solutions that we know work. I want to thank our generous donors and supporters who enable us to continue to do the important work that we do, and our phenomenal staff all over the world who make it happen. 2020 is going to be a pivotal year.



Heather Thompson, ITDP Indonesia and Governor Anies joined the Jakarta Transportation Agency to show off new signage as a part of a cycling pilot in Jakarta.