

Mexican Cities Create Safer Streets for Children

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Photos: ITDP Mexico



ITDP's Vision Zero for Youth project focused on creating a safe journey to school for children, either by walking or cycling.

When we consider the effects of transport on children's health, we often think of the sedentary lifestyle enabled by cars, or the consequences of increasingly poor air quality, which contributes to rising rates of asthma. These are important issues but cars create another dangerous and grim reality. They threaten the lives of our children every day that they are on the streets. In 2016, traffic collisions were the most common cause of death for children in Mexico between the ages of five and fourteen¹—44 percent of fatalities were pedestrians.² Nationally, more than half of children and adolescents walk to school and put their lives at risk for an education. The national government in Mexico has attempted to address this problem over the last decade, yet their commitment to cut traffic deaths in half by 2020 is not on track. Fortunately, Mexican cities are taking the lead.

Mexico City's Vision Zero policy has had many successes since joining the movement in 2015, including the creation of road safety regulations and an ambitious target to reduce fatalities by 35 percent with evidenced-based measures. Also, according to data from the city attorney, the policy contributed to a 21 percent decrease in road deaths from 2015 to 2017.³ Unfortunately, some citizen groups representing drivers have contested the actions that the city implemented, such as sidewalk extensions, reduction of speed limits, and automatic ticketing. However, ITDP examined the effect these policies have on children and created a plan to protect them.

ITDP's project, Vision Zero for Youth, focused on creating a safe journey to school for children. ITDP applied the concepts of Vision Zero to the school zone, an environment requiring the government's utmost attention, and directly involved local communities. The project began with a public middle school in the central borough of Cuauhtémoc, Secundaria 4 Moisés Sáenz, in Mexico City. ITDP engaged the school community early on to make sure it could continue the project autonomously. ITDP held informational sessions on road safety with parents and worked with teachers to integrate road safety principles into lessons for the students. With ITDP's guidance and select teachers, the students created a one-day street redesign in the school zone. The redesign focused on dangerous intersections and potential areas for a collision. It used posters with key messages about road safety and created traffic barriers with crates and buckets to simulate a safer street crossing.

¹ Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía. (2017) Estadísticas a propósito del día de muertos. Available from https://www.inegi.org.mx/contenidos/saladeprensa/aproposito/2017/muertos2017_Nal.pdf.

² Secretaría de Salud/Consejo Nacional para la Prevención de Accidentes. (2018) Informe sobre la situación de seguridad vial, México 2017.

³ Institute for Transportation and Development Policy. (2018) Informe Visión Cero CDMX. Available from <http://mexico.itdp.org/noticias/informe-vision-cero-cdmx/>.



Top: ITDP Mexico's Gonzalo Peón guided middle school students from the Secundaria 4 Moisés Sáenz school on their way to school in the Cuauhtémoc borough of Mexico City.

Bottom: Critical crossing points near the middle school were painted with vibrant colors to reduce vehicle speeds and create more space for students.

Critical crossing points near the school's entrance were painted with vibrant colors and traffic barriers were aligned to reduce vehicle speeds and create more space for the students. Students were excited to see the impact of their work: more space to cross streets and get to school. Parents were happy that their children's safety was a serious priority. The activity was so successful that the principal of the school insisted that these temporary measures stay in place until the city committed to permanent ones, which it eventually did. Today, an executive project is in development to improve and enhance pedestrian safety by widening sidewalks, reducing pedestrian crossing lengths, adding traffic barriers, and installing speed bumps in the school zone.

Since 2018, ITDP Mexico has worked to replicate this success in more Mexico City schools. ITDP organized Mexico's first national Walk to School Day in partnership with FIA Foundation, the AXA Foundation, and Mexico City government. ITDP expanded this program to become a day to walk and cycle; focusing on fun, active, and healthy means of transportation. Before the Walk to School Day, ITDP went to five schools scattered in three boroughs to raise awareness of road safety with students and to provide parents with a tool to evaluate street conditions. Students, parents, and teachers contributed by identifying frequently traveled unsafe routes.

Based on the community discussions, ITDP created a pedestrian and cycling route for the Walk and Bike to School Day. Parents were enthusiastic about voicing their safety concerns and readily agreed to accompany children along the new route.

continued on p. 44

Mexico

continued from p. 13

Children were encouraged to express, in their terms, their experiences walking to and from school. For that purpose, they used magnifying glasses in cardboard to observe street elements that they liked (dogs and ice cream vendors) and those they disliked (holes in sidewalks and cars parked on the sidewalks), and got adults or older students to take pictures of them. At the end of the day, all the children shared their experience of walking or biking, and parents took advantage of the presence of local authorities to demand safer street environments for children.

Today, these experiences are being implemented in three mid-sized cities in central and northern Mexico whose governments show a strong commitment to the road safety agenda: Puebla, Hermosillo, and San Pedro Garza García. With these tools and technical visits of the ITDP team to the sites, school communities in these cities have collaborated with authorities to organize their own Walk and Bike to School Day. The act of providing space for children to express their ideas about how to use street space and enlisting parents to advocate for road safety was key to the project's success. Vision Zero for Youth is about saving children's lives and creating a sustainable future for everyone.

Bike-Friendly Quiz Answers

continued from p. 43

residents cannot afford a car, the roads in the city are built for cars, and many are unpaved.

However, community-driven critical mass rides have brought awareness to the growing number of cyclists in the city and their calls for safety and improved conditions. Advocacy groups like the Johannesburg Urban Cyclists Association, which developed a bicycle map for the city that identifies preferred commuting routes and continues to pressure the city government to implement its bicycle strategy, are working to change the perception of cycling in Johannesburg.

China

continued from p. 15

the first city in the world with a fully electric bus fleet. The city has 16,359 electric buses that travel a daily average of 2.85 million kilometers. It has built 510 bus charging stations and approximately 5,000 charging piles, a form of charging station.

Pure electric buses have replaced traditional diesel buses and have made progress in mitigating air pollution. Even with an imperfect grid, e-buses are huge energy savers, consuming roughly one-third of the energy of diesel buses, and helping to lower fuel consumption. Electric buses also reduce harmful carbon emissions and particulate matter by over 400 tons and are less expensive to operate. Electrification still has challenges as battery life can be difficult to maintain and capital costs are high, but China is positioned to take full advantage of new technology.

There are many unanswered questions about China's future, but all signs point to electrified transport that is people-centered and bicycle-forward. If China continues on its current trajectory, it will be a highly competitive economic force and an example of sustainability to other high-polluting nations. This shift will require cities to reorient away from growth and investment patterns and priorities from the past 30 years and focus on sustainable and low polluting practices. If successful, China's cities can become examples for previously high polluting cities all over the world.

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