

Walking and Cycling in COVID Times

No single event in modern times has had a larger global impact than the COVID-19 pandemic. It has disrupted our lives, exposed our inequalities, and altered our use of space within our cities. However, 2020 has been the greatest year for cycling in decades.

In many places, both cycling and walking have increased significantly. Without cars clogging the streets, people have been able to reclaim space. In some parts of Jakarta, cycling ridership went up to 1,000 percent. From Buenos Aires to Guangzhou, people opted to hop on

bicycles rather than into cars. The best news is that cities followed suit. From creating pop-up cycle lanes, to closing down streets to vehicular traffic, to using coveted street parking for outdoor dining, cities responded quickly to make traveling safer. The common backlash or red tape dissipated in the face of an urgent pandemic demanding immediate responses. What we have seen are creative and far-reaching solutions that support sustainable mobility and make cities safer for walking and cycling. As we move into the new year, with some aspects of daily life returning to normal, many of these solutions should become permanent fixtures in cities: a transition into a new, better normal.

We have gathered examples of sustainable transportation solutions from the cities where ITDP works and has offices.



The number of people using the emergency cycling lane in Jakarta rose between 80 and 1,000 percent during peak hours.

Africa

ITDP has active projects in six countries in Africa: Egypt, Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania, and Uganda. Many cities across the region have readily embraced sustainable transportation solutions and have worked to raise awareness through cycling and pedestrian campaigns. COVID-19 has accelerated the demand for improved walking and cycling conditions.



Top: Cycling event organized by Critical Mass Mombasa in Mombasa, Kenya.

Photo: Critical Mass Mombasa

Middle: A newly constructed footpath in Kisumu, Kenya.

Photo: ITDP Africa

Bottom left and right: Critical Mass Mombasa cycling event.

Photo: Critical Mass Mombasa

Bottom middle: Car Free Day in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

Photo: ITDP Africa

Brazil

Traffic plagues many cities in Brazil, but most have not responded by adding cycling networks. One exception is Belo Horizonte, Brazil's third-largest city, which installed emergency cycle lanes throughout the city, connecting existing lanes. Cities in Brazil are not as aggressive about opening cycle lanes as other South American cities, but the pandemic has sparked a conversation about the importance of sustainability and resiliency, and how non-motorized transport, like cycling, is essential for cities to thrive.



Top and Bottom: In Belo Horizonte, emergency cycle lanes were constructed to support more cyclists.

Photos: City of Belo Horizonte

Middle: In Recife, roadways are opened up for cycling and pedestrian usage every Sunday.

Photo: ITDP

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US

Across the United States, in an effort to keep dining available and safe, restaurants took over streets and parking spaces to serve patrons outside. This has led to more awareness of how much better the streets are without cars. While car sales have increased as people have chosen private vehicles as the 'safe' transport, the pandemic has sparked major shifts in street usage. Cities from coast to coast are on the precipice of shifting their priorities away from cars.



Outdoor dining was a welcome return to "normal" for many in the US, where the virus has been spreading quickly and without abatement for months. It also showed people that streets and parking spaces could be used for more than cars.

Top right: A restaurant in Los Angeles that opened up to outdoor dining.

Above left and left: New York City restaurants creatively repurposed outdoor space to serve diners during the summer.

Photos: ITDP US

Above right: Boston restaurants overtook parking spaces to provide diners with outdoor seating.

Photo: Jonathan Berk

China

China, the first country hit with the novel coronavirus, quickly imposed severe restrictions on movement. As cities came out of lockdown, residents embraced the already robust cycling pathways and bikeshare systems. While private car usage has increased during the pandemic, so has cycling. Beijing's bicycle highway opened to the public last spring, and will continue to expand to create more opportunities for people to travel sustainably. With strong municipal governments, cities kept public transportation running during, while moving ahead on pedestrian-centered projects.



Top: Pedestrian plazas, like this one in Guangzhou, give people safe, car-free areas.

Middle: In Guangzhou, a long pathway opened in May of 2020, providing residents with a welcome outdoor recreational area.

Bottom: Guangzhou continues to expand pedestrian and cycling areas.

Photos: ITDP China



Indonesia

Jakarta, a city historically plagued with congestion, saw a massive increase in cycling during the lockdown. In some locations, cycling increased by up to 1,000 percent. To support cyclists, the city built a temporary bicycle lane on one of the main roads for use during rush hours. ITDP has been advocating for increased sustainable transport in Jakarta for years, and the pandemic has provided an impetus to push existing projects further.



Top, middle right, middle left: Grassroots groups supported the emergency cycle lane, which was opened during rush hour traffic in the mornings and evenings.
Bottom and top left: Car Free Days, where streets were closed off to vehicular traffic, continue to be popular especially among families.
Photos: ITDP Indonesia

India

With the onset of the pandemic, the urgent need for cycling awareness and infrastructure improvements has come to the forefront in India. Cycling campaigns have popped up in cities throughout India. While Indian cities have worked on expanding pedestrian spaces and footpaths before COVID-19, they now have even more reasons to continue to push for safe, open spaces for residents.



Top and Bottom left: Open streets programs, like this shown in Kolkata, are part of community awareness campaigns to show how streets can be transformed away from cars and towards people.

Middle: The city of Ahmedabad in Gujarat conducted a cycling rally with diverse groups of people, including women, children, and the disabled.

Bottom right: Aizawl, Mizoram, in northeastern India, conducted a survey among women and children to better identify issues faced by cyclists.

Photos: ITDP India

Mexico

Mexico City already has one of the world’s best bike-share systems. This year, Avenida de los Insurgentes, one of the longest avenues, got an emergency bike lane to support the growing number of cyclists during the pandemic. Cyclists throughout Mexico City have responded to the better cycling conditions with enthusiasm and hope that the cycle lane will become permanent. Cities with large pedestrian populations have recognized the value of open public spaces, especially in the pandemic.



In Mexico City, Avenida de los Insurgentes, shown in photos, got an emergency lane that was eagerly used by the many cyclists and micromobility users seeking safe passage on the busy and long road.
Photos: ITDP Mexico



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Clockwise top to bottom: The cycling boom as experienced in Ethiopia, India, China. Worldwide, cycling has had a great year.