

Santiago, Chile

Improves Equity by Putting Pedestrians First

By Jemilah Magnusson, ITDP Global

Santiago, the Chilean capital with an urban population of five million, and a metro area population of over seven million, is a beautiful old-world city enjoying a modern day renaissance. In 2006, the city opened Transantiago, an efficient service and the backbone of its transport system, but has since lagged behind other cities in the region on cycling and walking.

Over the past year, Santiago made major improvements in pedestrian space, cycling, and public transit. Santiago's Calle Aillavilú, in the central market of the city, has been transformed from a derelict, car-congested and unregulated parking lot to a pedestrian-friendly oasis. The street was repaved, the lighting improved, new trees were planted, and most importantly, cars were removed. Except for the scheduled delivery of goods, no motorized traffic is allowed. Calle Placer, one of the busiest pedestrian streets during a popular weekend market, is now completely closed to cars on the weekends, with a 2.2 million USD investment by the city for improved sidewalks, lighting, and sanitation.

Other public space improvements include an investment in 100 sq meters of new green spaces in historic residential neighborhoods, revitalizing a previ-

ously abandoned area, and the re-design of the Historical Center's main streets, featuring more sidewalk space, improved lighting, beautification, and a "complete streets" redesign for public transport exclusive corridors in the most active pedestrian zone in the country.

Car ownership has soared in Chile over the past decade along with the economy, with more people buying cars each year from 2003 to 2014. Greater Santiago is now home to seven million people, and four million cars. However, the last few years have seen considerable changes. As traffic jams grow longer and parking becomes more scarce, more Santiaguinos are using transit, cycling, and walking to get around their city. The number of cyclists on major routes has grown up to 25 percent a year for the past two years, and cycling mode share has doubled since 2006, for a total of 6 percent.¹

The changes made on the streets of Santiago this year are a reflection of that trend, and will go a long way toward improving social mobility in this city with significant class divides. On Sunday mornings, cars are banned from 40 kilometers of Santiago's roads. Around 30,000 people take to those vehicle-free streets on bikes, skateboards, roller-blades, or simply on foot.

The City has backed up these achievements with new sustainable transport policy changes and education programs. In April 2015, the National Ministry of Housing and Urbanism created a detailed standard of design for high quality cycle lanes, even piloting it in a major street near the presidential palace. The policy redistributes road spaces to create more space for cyclists. This standard was quickly adopted by Santiago, and the city has managed to



A street in the center of Santiago before



and after the redesign, prioritizes pedestrians and beautifies the area.

Images: Claudio Olivares Medina

¹ <https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2016/jul/21/cycling-challenging-santiago-chile-social-barriers>



Left: The number of cyclists on major routes has grown up to 25 percent a year for the past two years, and cycling mode share has doubled since 2006. Above left and right: Former Santiago Mayor Carolina Tohá introduces the cycling games program, intended to familiarize children with cycling culture and safety.

increase cycling trips from a negligible 150 per day to over 5000 per day. This number is expected to increase with the growing popularity of BikeSantiago, the city's bike share program, which is responsible for 50 percent of the increase. Santiago also gave support to B Mov Trici, a free bicycle taxi in the historic city center operated by a private company, supported by advertising, that encourages cycle use and provides a non-motorized alternative to taxis. Santiago has adopted a pilot program of cycling games in kindergarten to

help introduce cycling early in life, and a traffic education program at primary schools is helping to create better cyclist behavior.

The changes in Santiago have not been without political controversy. Santiago is a city made up of 36 counties, or *comunas* each with an elected mayor. Implementing these improvements at the city level required a massive effort in coordination throughout the whole municipality. Former Mayor Carolina Tohá, who represented the downtown county of Santiago Centro, not to be confused with the larger city, which won the award, stressed the collaborative nature of the process.

“This award is a recognition to the whole city. Our county has been actively promoting coordination processes with Santiago’s Board of Public Transporta-

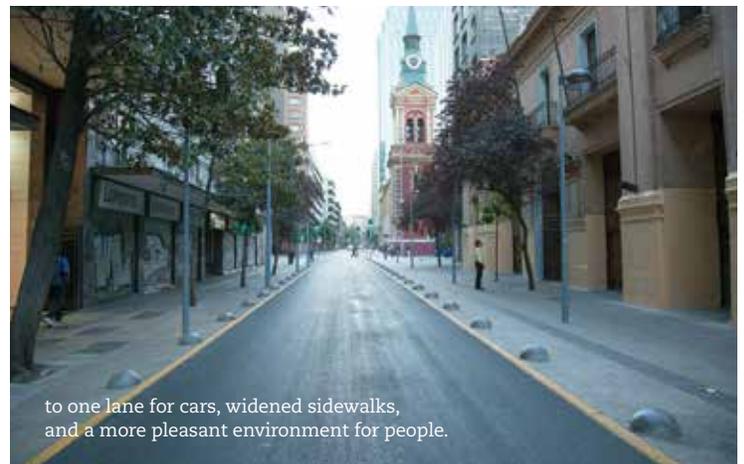
tion, the Ministry of Environment, the Regional Government, civil society organizations and other municipalities”, said Mayor Tohá, “Thanks to this coordination and collaboration we have been able to move forward in local projects with greater metropolitan impact, such as the System of Public Bicycles, the Plan Centro, the Green Zone and to double the bicycle’s path network”.

Santiago will be the site of **Mobilize 2017**, ITDP’s new annual Sustainable Transport Summit, supported by the Volvo Research and Education Foundations. This event will give international transportation researchers and professionals and opportunity to experience this emerging city as a learning lab for best practice in sustainable transport.

For more information, visit mobilizesummit.org.



A street in the city center went from three lanes of car traffic and narrow, often obstructed sidewalks



to one lane for cars, widened sidewalks, and a more pleasant environment for people.

Images: Claudio Olivares Medina