

Climate and Pandemic Resiliency Found on Two Wheels



By Heather Thompson,
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Cycling is good for people and the planet. Regular cycling reduces the risk of cardiovascular disease and alleviates anxiety, diabetes, and obesity. Cycling options significantly expand access to jobs, schools, and other destinations 10 times compared to walking.

One star that has shone through the darkness of the pandemic: the bicycle.

As the pandemic forced all of us into lockdown, the world of mobility changed. Without regular commuting schedules, more people took to the streets on foot and on bicycle. The initial reduction of car traffic, along with open streets and pop-up lanes, helped people feel more comfortable on a bike.

The bicycle became part of the 'new normal' in cities around the world. In fact, sales of bicycles are so high worldwide that there is a shortage of parts, and bikes are back-ordered.

In 2020, over 100 cities built more than 2,000 kilometers of temporary cycle lanes and other cycle-supportive infrastructure. Cities that built cycling infrastructure saw almost 50% more cycling trips than cities that did not. The pandemic has shown that cities can quickly, sometimes overnight, integrate cycling infrastructure into the urban landscape. It just takes making the political decision to move a city from a car-dominated space to a cycling-friendly haven.

Bikes make sense. They are an affordable, resilient means of transportation. For every pop-up lane a city builds, more cyclists take to the streets. Recognizing this pivotal moment, this year, ITDP has launched the global *Cycling Cities* campaign to provide governments, planners, advocates, and others the tools to make cycling a safe and affordable transportation option in cities worldwide.

With such success, cities are now moving to make these solutions permanent. Mexico City, Mexico, created over 40 kilometers of temporary cycle lanes along Insurgentes Avenue, one of the city's main transportation corridors and one of the longest urban streets in the world. The number of cyclists has increased 350% since implementing the temporary protected lane, and with its upcoming permanence, this number will continue to grow. In the spring of 2020, ITDP Mexico launched *Rodando Ayuda*, as part of a larger cycling campaign, *Ideamos*. With *Rodando Ayuda*, food and essential goods were delivered using bicycles to vulnerable groups during the pandemic.

In Jakarta, Indonesia, the municipal government committed to improving cycling to make the city more livable and accessible. Jakarta introduced a plan to build 500 kilometers of cycle lanes and integrate the cycling network with public transit. During the pandemic, Jakarta invested in pop-up bicycle lanes to meet the needs of the people. The results were dramatic, with cycling increasing by 500% and up to 1,000% on some routes.

Photo: ITDP



When given safe conditions, people opt for bikes. The pandemic's empty streets allowed people to feel safer to venture out and test new wheels, exposing them to the benefits of bicycling as a practical option. Bikeshare systems allow people to easily experience the benefits of cycling and encourage new riders. Cairo, Egypt, and Kigali, Rwanda, will soon launch some of the first bikeshare systems on the African continent, which ITDP helped create. In New York City, the Citi Bike bikeshare system, one of the largest outside Asia, has continued to set daily records this year, with 3.17 million monthly rides in June.

Cycling also makes sense for “last-mile” small freight delivery in urban centers. Companies—from small, informal outfits to large corporations—are increasingly using cargo e-bikes instead of cars and trucks, which are cumbersome on busy urban streets.

Most importantly, cycling is good for people and the planet. Regular cycling reduces the risk of cardiovascular disease and alleviates anxiety, diabetes, and obesity. Cycling options significantly expand access to jobs, schools, and other destinations 10 times compared to walking. Cycling is zero-emission travel, which is what our bedraggled planet needs.

The key to becoming a successful cycling city is scaled, safe cycle-lane networks. This infrastructure requires funding, which government funders and financiers, including multilateral banks, should prioritize. Policy support is also critical to make cycling a priority. This includes road safety laws like speed limits and safe school zones. Car-Free Days are another proven public engagement tool to support a bike-friendly culture.

For these reasons, I am thrilled to announce ITDP's global campaign, *Cycling Cities*, to help continue the momentum for better cycling in cities worldwide. This campaign provides governments, planners, advocates, and others the tools to make cycling a safe, affordable, and widespread transportation option. ITDP is influencing 250 cities to design, and implement plans like redesigning streets and adopting key policies so that by 2025, 25 million more people will live near safe cycle lanes.

Join the ride! Sign our campaign pledge at cyclingcities.itdp.org to help grow cycling in your city and build a healthier, safer, and more equitable planet!



Top photo: ITDP
Above: Rodando Ayuda is a program that has used bicycles to deliver food and other aid to people in Mexico City, during COVID.
Photo: ITDP Mexico