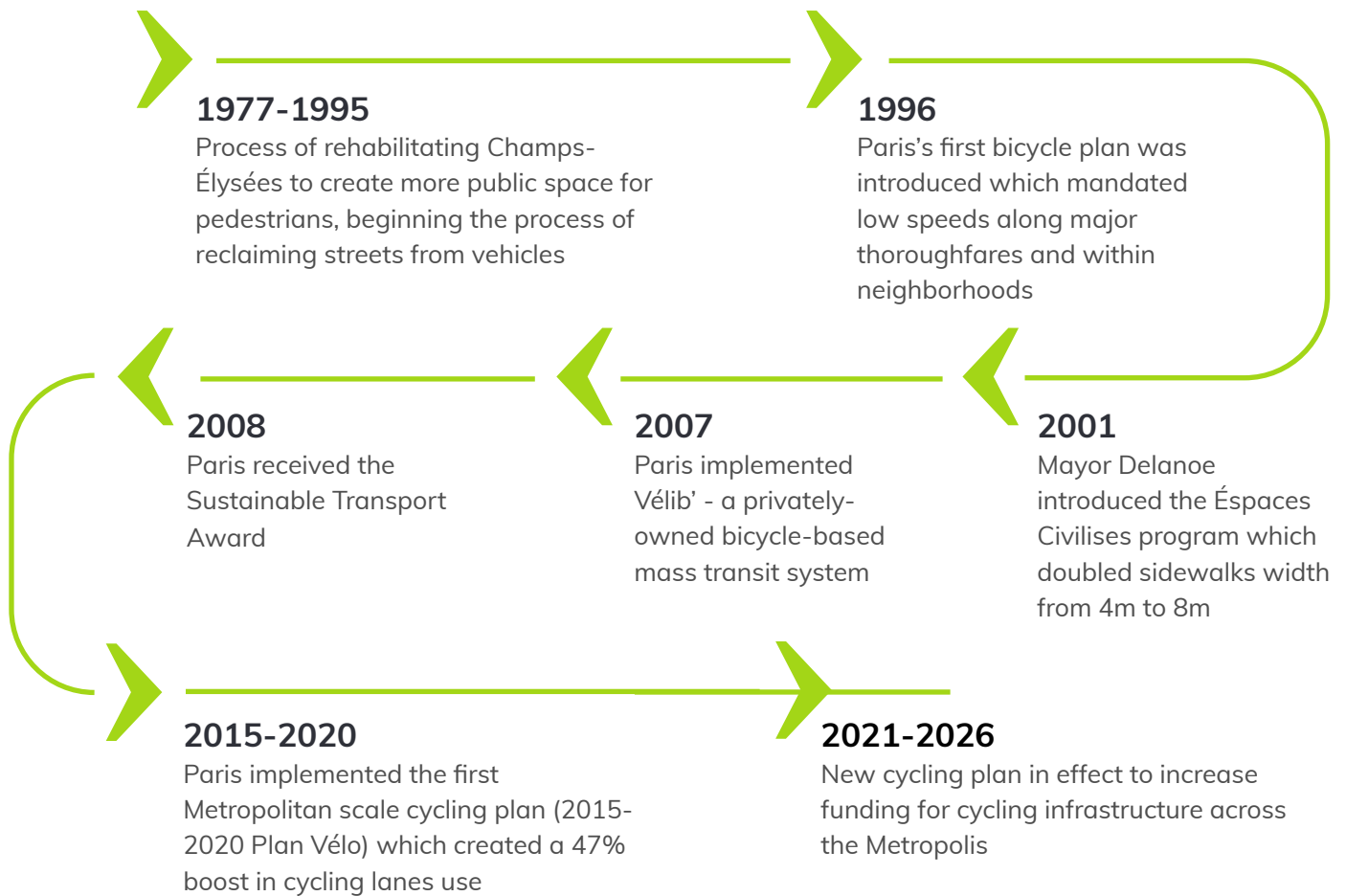


STA 2023 Spotlight: Paris, France

Paris - Transforming Public Space to Serve the Public



Timeline of Key Events and Interventions:



Paris is one of the leading cities worldwide when it comes to prioritizing cyclists and pedestrians. Being a pioneer of the 15-minute city, the French capital aims to become carbon-neutral by 2050. Between 2004 and 2018, it already managed to decrease its carbon footprint by 20% and cut local greenhouse gas emissions by 25%. The city is facing urban development challenges such as traffic congestion, social inequality in the suburbs, and urban sprawl, resulting in a clear focus on equity, public spaces, and climate resilience.

With its cycling emphasis, Paris showcases several strategies that can serve as inspiration to other cities for becoming more sustainable:

- ▶ Creating an Express Bike Network with 1,000 km of cycling lanes between 2015-2020 as well as 180 km of additional lanes by 2026.

- ▶ Widening and expanding existing cycling lanes and incorporating them into existing roads and public spaces to enable safer and more accessible cycling.
- ▶ Becoming 100% cycling-friendly by 2026 through street redesigns, safety measures, and bike parking facilities everywhere in the city. This also includes continuous, safe and accessible transport links between the city center and the suburbs.
- ▶ Implementing School Streets as car-free open spaces to provide extra playgrounds for children, space for pedestrians and cyclists, and passage for emergency and service vehicles.

The city of Paris has long been home to cycling culture. Early in 1867, the city hosted the **world's first cycling race**, with the Arc de Triomphe being the starting point. Throughout the next century, Parisians only grew their fondness for the cycling sport. In 1975, the Champs-Élysées first served as the racecourse for the first cycling race found itself to be a racecourse again in the Tour de France. Another important element of transport in Paris, and of the culture in the city, has been walking, as exemplified in the idea of the *flâneur*, a literary type from the 19th century.

However, like many European cities, Paris has also long been a car-centric city.

Its wide boulevards have attracted carriages and then cars since their construction in the 19th century as part of Haussmann's renovation of Paris. With the steady rise of vehicular traffic in Paris through the 1990s, plans to create a transportation modal shift were given birth. Mayor Jacques Chirac and his successor Jean Tiberi pioneered pedestrianizing streets. Chirac rehabilitated Champs-Élysées **to accommodate more foot traffic**. In 1996, Tiberi introduced **Paris' first bicycle plan** to reduce vehicular speed along major thoroughfares and within neighborhoods.

▼ Vélib', or "Freedom Bikes" became a staple on the streets of Paris since its implementation in 2007. Credit: olrat via Shutterstock.



Since the 21st century, Paris took a step further to embed their fondness for cycling into their daily commute as a means to achieve climate goals, which granted them the first [Sustainable Transport Award in 2008](#). Their implementation of Vélib' ("Freedom Bikes") - a bicycle-based mass transit system- was the largest and most successful bike share service across Europe in 2007. Completely self-service, Vélib' provided a speedy experience for commuters to rent and dock their bicycles quickly. At the launch, the system encompassed around 14,500 bicycles and 1,400 bicycle stations. The comprehensive network of cycling stations resulted from the conversion of parking spaces. Giving way to bicycle stations, Paris converted [6,000 parking spaces](#). The success of the bike-sharing scheme, which was a public-private partnership between the city of Paris and advertising company JCDecaux, hinged on the City's progressive administration and infrastructural policies to redevelop streets for a more pleasant cycling experience.

In 2001, Mayor Delanoë prioritized pedestrian spaces by implementing the Espaces Civilisés program, a 24 million Euros investment to double sidewalks from 4 to 8 meters. The shift from prioritizing vehicular traffic to pedestrian use established the precedent for the city to redesign its streets that prioritize pedestrians, cyclists, and public transport, thus setting up the city for success in reclaiming spaces and implementing ambitious cycling infrastructure and public spaces. Since 2014, Anne Hidalgo has been the mayor of Paris. She has taken these efforts further by not only expanding the cycling network but also pursuing a more compact urban form through a 15-minute city approach.

The City of Paris was once again recognized in 2023 for its bold policies and actions to redesign streets that spurred a modal shift in transportation to encourage cycling and walking. Adjusting to the surge in more active modes of transport such as walking and cycling, a shift triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic, Paris is currently focusing on low-cost, high-impact transportation interventions to achieve climate goals and reduce vehicular traffic while making sure that its policies are equitable, in particular with regards to women and the disabled community. This strategy can apply to many cities with a limited budget for ambitious interventions while demonstrating that significant change can be achieved. Under bold leadership, the City of Paris reclaimed public spaces previously designated for vehicles and repurposed them for pedestrians and cyclists.

This transformation towards "soft traffic", as the Parisians call it, has transformed some of the city's largest public spaces such as the Place de la République. By reducing the size of street parking spaces and vehicle lanes, more public spaces are now designated for schoolyards and children's playgrounds. An astonishing 60% of daily trips in Paris are made on foot. Public transport accounts for 25% of journeys, cars for 5%, and bikes and e-scooters for 10%. Through these changes, Paris is addressing both climate mitigation and adaptation while simultaneously creating a safer, healthier city for everyone.

➤ Towards a 100% Cycling City

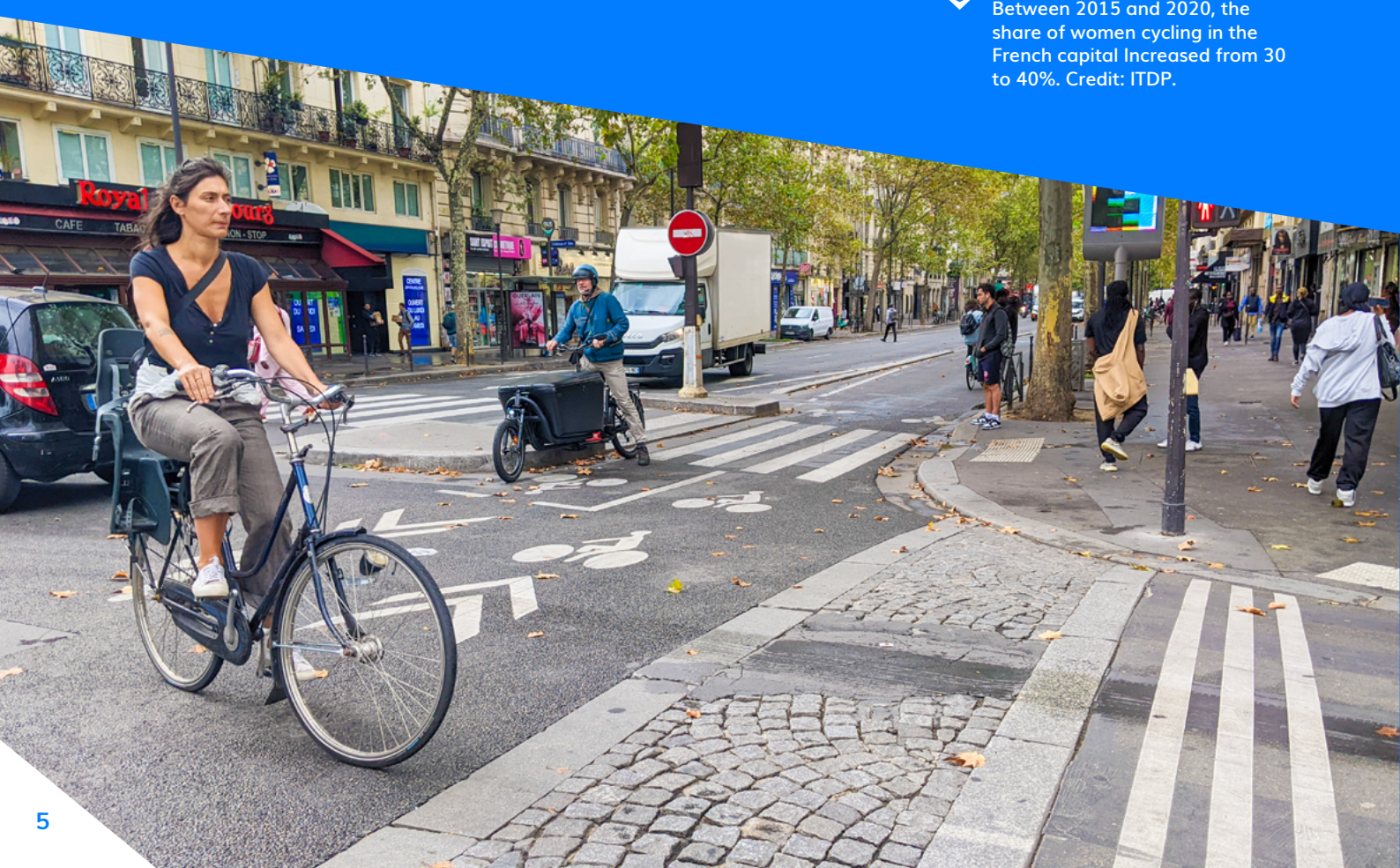
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➤ Widening the cycling lanes and expanding the network

The current success of Paris' cycling infrastructure goes back to the 2015-2020 Cycling Plan. Prior to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the City of Paris was already engaged in a five-year bicycle plan that aimed to create an Express Bike Network (Reseau express vélo - REVe) and develop secondary cycling networks. The successes of the **2015-2020 Cycling Plan–Velo–** led the City of Paris to enhance its cycling infrastructure to the next level: Between 2015 - 2020, **hundreds of kilometers of cycling lanes were installed**, creating a bike network of **around 1,000 kilometers** that connects the north to south and east to west.

Major thoroughfares like Voie Georges Pompidou, Rue de Rivoli, and Rue Saint-Antoine were equipped with designated cycling lanes. Public spaces and roads previously designed for solely vehicular use became safely accessible by bicycles. Of the over 500 kilometers of bike lanes constructed between 2005 and 2020 in Paris, two-thirds were protected bike lanes that encourage women and children to cycle due to their high safety. By widening cycling paths and expanding the cycling network, the adoption of cycling increased by an average of 47%. With the success of the 2015-2020 bicycle plan, the City of Paris implemented the second five-year plan.

▼ Between 2015 and 2020, the share of women cycling in the French capital increased from 30 to 40%. Credit: ITDP.



The 2021-2026 Velo Plan aims to turn Paris into a 100% cycling-friendly city by 2026. With more than 250 million Euros of investments, the city aims to deliver 180 KM of new cycling paths by 2026. Combined with [existing cycle tracks](#) and bike lanes currently under construction, the city is aiming to [eventually have 1,500 kilometers of cycling lanes](#). Coupled with the demand for alternate transportation created as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the city is ambitiously incorporating well-established cycling paths into existing roads and public spaces to encourage the use of bicycles, thereby diverting daily transportation from heavy reliance on motor-vehicles. A focus is on protected bike lanes, since they have proved to be particularly popular with female cyclists and those cycling with children, according to the city's transport department. Between 2015 and 2020, the share of women cycling in the French capital already increased from 30 to 40%.

According to Île-de-France Mobilités, [walking is the most popular mode of transport in inner Paris](#). It increased by about 5% in the first year of the pandemic, while the use of cars shrank by 3%. Somewhat surprisingly, the use of bicycles decreased slightly, which could be linked to the reduction of Vélib' bikes between 2018-2020. But between 2021 and 2022, cycling took off again. In June 2022, bicycle travel in Paris experienced an all-time high of 1.2 million trips by bike. Overall, cycling as a mode

seems to be stabilizing. The city is hoping to be able to offer every visitor to the Olympic Summer Games in 2024 the opportunity to get to and from venues by bike.

To further expand cycling paths, Paris will deliver 180 km of safe and interconnected cycling lanes that expands beyond the ring road while connecting local roads to major thoroughfares where cycling infrastructure is established by 2026. This cycling network comprises 52 km of "coronapists"- pop-up cycling paths implemented during the pandemic- and 130 km of new cycling paths previously planned for implementation.

In Paris, a roadwork workforce promptly responded to the increasing demand for cycling infrastructure during the pandemic by quickly implementing pop-up cycling paths along roads previously designed for motor-vehicles, sometimes overnight. The workforce's promptness highlights the Paris government's bold leadership in making, creating, and expanding spaces for bicycle use.

As a result, there was a 6% increase in bicycle use on other main streets of Paris. 7% of all trips made in Paris were by bicycle compared to less than 5% before the pandemic. Therefore, the city government successfully harnessed the urge for a modal shift during COVID-19 for the improvements of bicycle infrastructure, which ultimately led to an evident increase in bicycle use for daily transport among residents.

The global pandemic created opportunity to expand cycling in Paris, which also helped address the overarching demand for cleaner and healthier modes of travel. Credit: Oliverouge via Shutterstock.



► Spotlight example: Rue de Rivoli

Paris's major east-west thoroughfare, Rue de Rivoli, is now converted into a bicycle highway. Previously, it was a four-lane road for vehicles. Yet, by January 31, 2022, the Paris government reclaimed three of the four traffic lanes for cyclists and left the remaining one for authorized vehicles. Repurposing of roads also applied to north-west thoroughfares like [Boulevard Saint-Michel](#) and [Rue Saint-Jacques](#).

To successfully boost bicycle use and create a safe environment for cyclists, the City of Paris made ambitious street redesigns to make cycling easier and more convenient. By redesigning previously vehicle-dominated streets for cycling purposes, the city government effectively sends the message to road users that cyclists are welcome on the street.

At the same time, it showed that this kind of transformation can be done with simple and affordable tools like paint and bollards.

Reclaiming three lanes from a four-lane road for cyclists requires strong political will. Yet, this bold redesignation of streets effectively helps cyclists feel safe when cycling. With the widened, designated lanes, cyclists can cycle alongside other cyclists instead of being pushed onto the side of the road. The increased space for cyclists, in turn, encourages people who previously did not cycle to adopt cycling as a means of daily transportation. And local authorities see that the implementation of cycling lanes can be very easy and fast.

Rue de Rivoli transformed to a complete street with ample space for cycling.
Credit: Eug Png via Shutterstock.



► Enhancing bicycle facilities

Cycling paths alone can hardly invite a modal shift without adequate bike parking and safety measures implemented to create a convenient cycling experience. Just as vehicles need space to park when unused, bicycles also need parking spaces. In Paris, bicycle parking racks and stations are often converted from previous parking spaces for vehicles. In the early 2000s, when Vélib' implemented its program, bicycle stations were created from the reclamation of on-street parking. Continuing the legacy,

120,000 new bike parking spaces are implemented as part of the 2021-2026 Velo Plan. At the same time as bike parking is increased, car parking is reduced with some former car parking spaces now dedicated to bike parking. The city is already working to [remove over 70% of existing on-street parking spots](#) designated for motorcars. Some of them are being transformed into restaurant terraces or gardens with planting pots. This is an example of how Paris is reclaiming public space for its inhabitants.

➤ From Streets to Open Spaces: School Streets

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Besides expanding the cycling infrastructure, the Paris city government repurposed streets for pedestrians. The primary reasons for this change are to prevent congestion and avoid further pollution caused by vehicular traffic. However, the most pivotal factor to such a shift lies in the opportunity that the COVID-19 pandemic brought, which is the increased demand for public open spaces for pedestrians.

These newly created open spaces not only create safer routes to school but also serve as extra playgrounds for school children. They emphasize the importance Paris places on the safety of children and their ability to walk around the city. While these school streets are designed for pedestrians, they are also open to service or emergency vehicles. However, the passage of other motorized vehicles is strictly prohibited.

The landmark intervention employed by the City of Paris is the construction of **school streets**. To protect schoolchildren and pedestrians' safety, streets previously designed for vehicles are transformed into pedestrian-only streets.

▼ School streets project allows children, their caregivers and anyone else to walk safely to and around school facilities. Credit: City of Paris.



Currently, Paris has constructed at least 169 school streets, among which 114 have been constructed since the beginning of the program in the summer of 2020. By the winter of 2023, there will be 14 new “school streets” constructed and 18 “school streets” with landscaped and green open spaces. Between November 2022 to March 2023, **more than 3,500 m² of spaces will be cleared and vegetated for school streets, and 60 trees will be planted.** To compare: A regulation soccer pitch has around 7,140m². By 2026, there will be a total of 300 school streets constructed. At the current pace, more than half is completed.

A similar intervention was the conversion of on-street parking. The Paris city government aimed to convert 70,000 parking spaces within the city to recover 60 hectares of public space for pedestrian streets, electric vehicle charging stations, bicycle parking, and urban vegetation. As a result, an estimated 85 km of roads previously designed for vehicles will be transformed into pedestrian-friendly spaces.



Before and after
space conversion on
Rue Ferdinand Flocon.
Credit: City of Paris.

► “15-minute city” as a Guiding Principle for an Accessible and Healthy City

The idea of the 15-minute city is central to the urban development of Paris. It guides the expansion of the city’s cycling network, the construction of the schoolyard, and the 2021-2026 bicycle program. Mayor Anne Hidalgo is widely adopting the 15-minute theory into her agenda. This theory was first conceived by the Franco-Colombian professor Carlos Moreno. He states that a city where one can reach all the destinations central to daily life in 15 minutes on foot or 5 minutes by bike offers a much higher quality of living.

Designing a city with this approach means that jobs, houses, daily amenities, and leisure activities are in close proximity to each other, which in turn increases the density of a city. Mayor Hidalgo adopted the **15-minute vision** as a means to enable local access and active transportation for communities.

- ▼ Central to 15-minute cities is the diversity of modes and destinations to encourage shorter trips. Credit: City of Paris.



➤ Schools as neighborhood capitals

In an attempt to localize all activities related to the 15-minute city, the City of Paris created schools as the “capitals” of neighborhoods, thereby opening school facilities after school hours and on weekends for all to use. The city pedestrianized roads near schools and increased vegetation cover to make walking and congregating more pleasant. Beginning on Saturday January 23, 2023, [school and university courtyards are open to the public](#) on Saturdays. The city partnered with non-governmental organizations to offer Saturday morning workshops for toddlers, children, and teenagers at school courtyards.

This means that schoolyards and the spaces in front of schools are no longer only a space for the relaxation and the physical activities of schoolchildren. Instead, they are also open to neighbors outside of school hours in order to offer recreational, sporting, and cultural activities. Called “oasis”, this approach makes use of unused spaces. With 430 kindergartens or crèches, 645 schools, and 114 colleges, Paris offers many potential local capitals. So far, 42 school and college courtyards and 28 crèches are open to the public on Saturdays during the school year. They have become an important pillar of the 15-minute city.

Between 2010 and 2020, car traffic in central Paris was reduced from a 12.8% to 6%, whereas cycling and walking's share increased from 55.4% to 68% due to strategies promoting active transport. Credit: City of Paris.



➤ Cycling and walking infrastructure

Central to the 15-minute city actualization is the construction and enhancement of cycling and walking infrastructure. The City of Paris, therefore, turned the pop-up cycling paths implemented during the pandemic with light-weight bollards that were often installed overnight into permanent cycling infrastructure. The city also transformed the urban highway adjacent to the Seine River into a waterfront park lined with cycling paths.

Such an endeavor to reclaim public roads from private vehicle use for pedestrians and cyclists greatly encourages a modal shift to cycling and walking. [Statistics show the success](#): Between 2010 and 2020, car traffic in central Paris was reduced from a 12.8% share in traffic to 6%, whereas cycling and walking's share increased from 55.4% to 68%.

To further support the “gentle revolution” in modes of transport, Paris has planned a 30 km/h speed limit for cars in 2021, which is in force on most streets of the city apart from some larger ones.

Importantly, Paris is aiming at providing safety, comfort, and health for all street users.

Since elderly pedestrians in particular tend to struggle with fast cyclists, safe pedestrian crossings and “floating bus stops” with barrier-free access are being implemented to make the city attractive and usable for everyone.

➤ Proximity of services

Another element of the 15-minute city strategy in Paris is to ensure the proximity of urban services and important everyday destinations. By strengthening the network of local shops and services and promoting local production and short supply chains, it will be easier to shop sustainably in the neighborhood. The label “Made in Paris” will showcase which shops, food halls, cultural shops, recycling centers, manufacturing spaces, or even urban logistics providers follow the guidelines for local production.

Interestingly, Paris’ efforts to improve the cycling network can also help with the proximity of services. According to the transport department of the city, bike use by professionals such as delivery drivers or even plumbers is part of the plans for the bike lanes. While it is not possible to carry heavy goods on cargo bikes, they allow for the fast delivery of smaller packages and urban services.

➤ Participatory budgeting

To successfully create functional and healthy 15-minute cities, the Paris government employed participatory budgeting and decentralized decision-making. Residents can participate in planning for their neighborhoods on issues regarding street beautification, street redesign, and micro-mobility interventions. Successful participatory budgeting made [\\$75 million euros](#) possible for residents to vote on crowdsourced projects.

To further enhance participatory democracy, Paris wants to deploy “citizen kiosks”. These new local spaces will allow citizens to meet, support each other, ask for advice, and access city officials or institutions. The kiosks could in the future also serve as a meeting point between local residents and the cleanliness manager of the neighborhood, which is another scheme the city is planning to set up.

▶ Lessons Learned and Next Steps

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▶ Resilience is key

Paris wants to ensure that its transportation infrastructure is adaptive to change, including climate change. Here, tactical urbanism with its short-term, low-cost and scalable interventions proved to be a good approach, as demonstrated during the pandemic: With an instant increase in the demand for infrastructure that caters to non-motorized mobility, pop-up cycling paths were quickly introduced. The city government modified the street design with movable and convertible facilities to allow for safe cycling and walking while maintaining the social distancing requirements.

This proved that street transformations could be cost-effective and that public acceptance is more receptive when changes are made, and results are delivered promptly. To create resilient transport systems that can adapt to challenges like a health crisis and climate change, both flexible infrastructures and mobility development should be prioritized.

▼ Paris transformed its streets and created safer and healthier spaces for those walking and cycling. Better use of street space encourages more sustainable modes, and supports less reliance on cars. Credit: City of Paris.



► Equity should be the backbone of street planning

In order for streets to serve the most people, they ought to be designed for people with diverse needs. Women, children, and people with disabilities will be more likely to walk when there is adequate illumination and wider space. Roads that are poorly lit are more likely to make women feel uncomfortable walking at night. For narrow roads with uneven surfaces, people with disabilities find it harder to use compared to wider and smoother pavements. Sidewalks that are located in close proximity to zooming vehicular traffic are unsafe, especially for children. When designing with equity at the forefront, streets can benefit more users and allow more users to perform their daily tasks more efficiently.

With its design guidelines called “Gender and Public Space”, Paris has driven urban planning and design to be more women- and disabled-friendly.

► Guidelines are vital to ensure fair access to public spaces

The implementation of cycling paths, the widening of pedestrian roads, and the narrowing of vehicular roads promote different behaviors among road users that require regulations to ensure safety and order on the roadway are maintained. Paris places great importance on guidelines for the respectful and peaceful use of public space while also ensuring equitable access.

According to the city’s keynote during the [STA 2023 Series](#), there are now many more women cycling on the streets and cycling lanes of Paris. Protected bike lanes are key to this development.

The city is also dedicated to creating better connections for cyclists and walkers between central Paris and the suburbs. There is still a lot of inequality between the city’s poorer suburbs, and transport links tend to show a difference in accessibility and transport quality. By ensuring that there are continuous, high-quality bike lanes, Paris hopes to further encourage active modes of transport and create a more equitable city for everyone.

The construction of physical infrastructure should go hand in hand with the legal framework that enforces the proper use of roads and holds violators accountable. The City of Paris is currently working on a street code that will meet the needs of the current situation.

➤ E-scooters may not be an acceptable micro-mobility alternative

A referendum called by Mayor Hidalgo in April 2023 shows that 90% of votes were in favor of banning e-scooters. Despite popular support for electrified micro-mobility, Parisians found e-scooters particularly dangerous. Speed, the lack of helmet enforcement, and user age regulations are major reasons leading to a favor for the ban.

Unlike cyclists, e-scooter users are often exempted from adherence to traffic rules. Not to mention, the high price to rent e-scooters (5 euros for ten minutes) makes it inaccessible to those who are less financially capable. In late August 2023, the city banned shared e-scooter programs. The private use of these micro-mobility options is still allowed, but not on the sidewalk and only with speed limits.

➤ Successful bicycle programs educate users

France launched a nationwide educational program aimed at teaching all school children how to ride bicycles. Giving children this opportunity is perhaps the most effective way to instill a modal shift.

When people are exposed to commuting with bicycles at a young age, they are more likely to be using bicycles as their primary means of transportation.

➤ Citizen participation makes for a healthy city

The success of participatory budgeting in creating the 15-minute city in Paris shows the importance of citizen participation.

It can create a sense of ownership while also making sure that every neighborhood has the decentralized services it needs.



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