

Redesigning Paris Streets to Promote Cycling and Walking

Background

Paris has long grappled with traffic congestion, air pollution and a car-dominated urban planning. In response, Mayor Anne Hidalgo's administration launched a comprehensive plan to transform the capital into a city centred around people rather than cars. This shift was driven by public demand for safer, greener, and more liveable spaces, and it also aligned with Paris's climate commitments and the vision of a "15-minute city" where residents can access most services within a short walk or bike ride.

The redesign initiative accelerated particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, when options that allowed for social distancing became more urgent. The city used the opportunity to reallocate road space, focusing on promoting cycling and walking.

Key Activities

Paris undertook sweeping urban design reforms, including:

- The city converted over 50 km of car lanes into protected bike lanes (termed 'coronapistes' during the pandemic), expanded pavements, and created pedestrian-only zones. Major thoroughfares like Rue de Rivoli became bike-priority streets.
- New cycling infrastructure was accompanied by a robust bike-sharing system (Vélib'), subsidies for e-bike purchases, and a network of cycle highways ("RER Velo") connecting the suburbs to central Paris. The city also made permanent many temporary cycling lanes and reconfigured intersections for pedestrian safety.
- Complementary policies include reducing on-street parking, enforcing lower speed limits (30 km/h citywide), and restricting car access in central areas. Schools benefited from "rue aux écoles," which turned adjacent streets into car-free zones at drop-off/pick-up times.



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Impact

Significant increase in bicycle usage:

Between 2019 and 2022, cycling trips in Paris nearly tripled. By 2023, over 1 million bike trips per day were recorded in the wider metropolitan region.

Increased awareness: Public opinion surveys show a growing acceptance of the changes, especially among younger residents and families.

Environmental benefits: Pollution levels have dropped, and the streets have become quieter, greener, and safer.

Boosted economic & social activity: Pedestrian traffic increased, boosting local businesses and contributing to a more vibrant street life.

Recognition: Paris has received international acclaim, winning the 2023 Sustainable Transport Award from the Institute for Transportation and Development Policy (ITDP) and being frequently listed amongst the world's most bike-friendly cities

Challenges & Solutions

Resistance from drivers and business owners presented recurring challenges. Concerns about traffic displacement and parking loss were mitigated through public outreach, data transparency, and phased implementation.

Political opposition and media debate were strong, but city officials stood firm, backed by climate goals, pilot project successes, and European funding for sustainable urban mobility. Adjustments were made along the way based on citizen feedback.

Ongoing monitoring and enforcement were required during construction to maintain infrastructure and to ensure bike lanes remained protected (i.e., not encroached upon by cars).



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Tips for Similar Projects

- Strong leadership and political will are essential for ambitious changes.
- Start with pilot projects to build support and evaluate outcomes.
- Use crisis moments, like the COVID-19 pandemic, to introduce bold reforms.
- Integrate mobility with public health and climate strategies.
- Coordinate with local businesses and schools to tailor street design to community needs.
- Communicate impact clearly, using before/after data and human-centred stories.

Video

Watch this video - '[STA Series 2023: Paris – Transforming Public Space to Serve the Public](#)'

Video Description

The ITDP provides short video clips showcasing the city's transformation.

Image Source

Image © Gonzalo Fuentes / Reuters – Vélib' bike-sharing station, Paris

Identified Limitations/Weaknesses

- While central areas saw major improvements, some outer arrondissements (suburbs) lag behind, raising equity concerns.
- Accessibility upgrades for people with mobility impairments require continued integration into future street redesigns.
- The reliance on temporary “pop-up” infrastructure early on led to some inconsistencies in quality, though these were mostly resolved in later phases.
- Ongoing tensions between motorists and cyclists persist, especially where infrastructure remains mixed-use or lacks full separation.

Resources

- Full ITDP report: [Paris Sustainable Transport Spotlight](#)
- City of Paris urban mobility plans (FR): [paris.fr](#)

Partners

