

Sustainable transport is a strategic component in developing competitive cities that seek to protect the environment and health by substantially enhancing their inhabitants' quality of life.

It will ensure the competitiveness of urban areas by enabling their people to be productive, and contribute socially and economically, rather than spending hours stuck in traffic. According to one survey, around 3.3 million person-hours are lost every day to traffic jams in Mexico City, causing millions of people to spend five years of their lives in a car during their working

career. Such traffic congestion is not confined to the capital: the people of Mexico's medium-sized cities have recently also been suffering exponential increases in the time they spend travelling.

It's not just a matter of lost time, serious as that is. Extensive use of motorized transport reduces, or even eliminates, time spent walking every day, contributing significantly to problems associated with obesity and being overweight: The World Health Organization, says the potential for developing such problems increases by six per cent with every extra

hour spent in a vehicle daily. Air pollution causes diseases, especially in children and older people. If the current trend continues, greenhouse gas emissions from transport will rise from 170 million to 440 million tons annually by 2030.

Even more worrying, these conditions are set to worsen. The number of vehicles on Mexican roads rose 160 per cent from 8.5 million to 21.6 million between 1996 and 2006, and — if this trend continues — will reach 70 million vehicles, more than one vehicle for every two inhabitants, by 2030. The results would be



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CITIES the solution

devastating for our health, our quality of life and the environment.

Strenuous efforts must be made to avoid this future. Solutions based on expanding the road network have proved to be ineffective and extremely costly. So, Mexican cities must change their transport patterns as a matter of extreme urgency. Developing a much more holistic approach that looks at urban development, the quality of public spaces, the creation of a system that would facilitate safe walking and cycling and the operation of rapid, efficient, safe and clean forms of public transport.

For competitive urban growth, streets must be built on an essentially human scale, taking various modes of transport into account. Avenues should be designed as to enhance their connectivity and shorten travelling distances, and should accommodate various forms of transport, including walking and cycling. Housing complexes should provide their occupants with all the amenities they need.

Options must be found that would enable an efficient transport system: journey times must be cut and travel made safer and more comfortable and cost-effective. One such system is bus rapid transit (BRT) which, with the use of dedicated bus lanes, can provide all the advantages and benefits of modern rail-based urban transport systems at a fraction of the cost. Most successful systems have: dedicated or priority lanes for public transport; rapid boarding and alighting; pre-payment of fares and on-board validation of tickets; modern, high capacity vehicles using clean technology; and combined transport modes and tariffs.

Mexico has three examples. Optibús in Ciudad de León,



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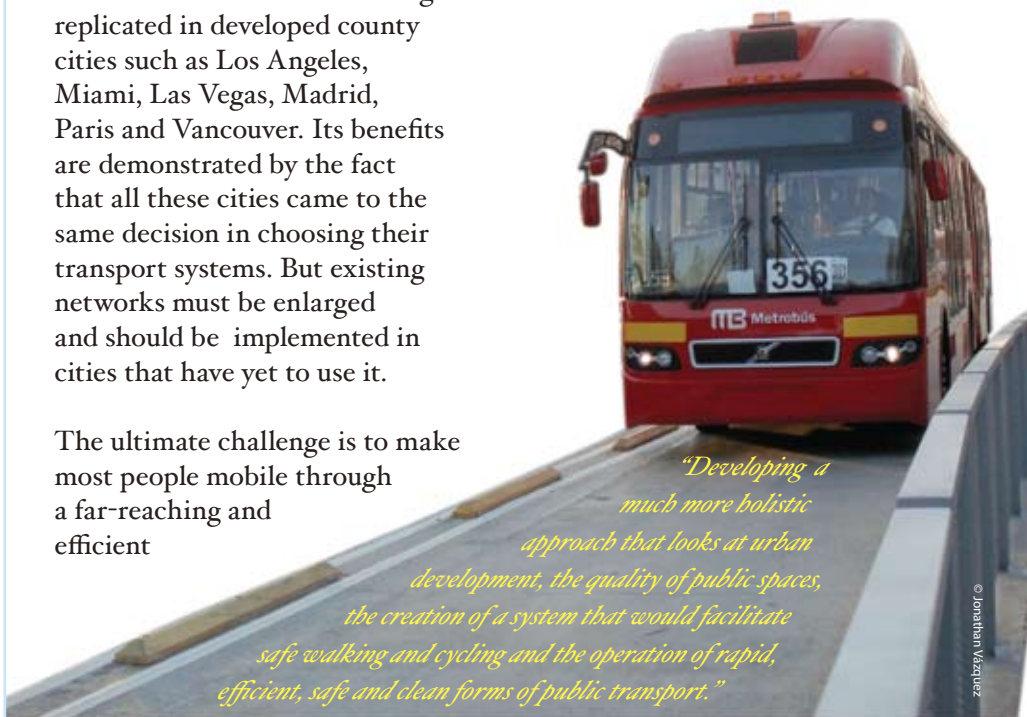
the first BRT line in Mexico, carries between 104,000 and 411,000 people daily on 15 km-long routes. Metrobús in Mexico City, which transports up to 450,000 people daily on 50 km of routes, cuts carbon dioxide emissions by approximately 80,000 tons per year. And Macrobus in Guadalajara, which went into operation in March 2009, saves another 23,000 tons of CO₂ a year by taking 75,000 people a day along 16 km of routes.

Successful examples can also be found in other Latin American cities like Bogota, Quito, Curitiba, Goiania and Belo Horizonte. Indeed BRT had its roots in Latin America and is now being replicated in developed county cities such as Los Angeles, Miami, Las Vegas, Madrid, Paris and Vancouver. Its benefits are demonstrated by the fact that all these cities came to the same decision in choosing their transport systems. But existing networks must be enlarged and should be implemented in cities that have yet to use it.

The ultimate challenge is to make most people mobile through a far-reaching and efficient

transport system encompassing non-motorized alternatives, providing decent and efficient conditions, consuming as little energy as possible and proving competitive in terms of time-saving, comfort, safety and cost.

Jaime Lerner, the Brazilian transport expert, says: “the city is not the problem, it is the solution”. A holistic approach will enable Mexican cities and their inhabitants to remain competitive, while assuring their quality of life and sustainable urban development, plus contributing to the preservation of the planet through strategic sustainable transport.



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