

# WANTED: EcoMobility



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In an age of rapid mobility, people and goods are moving ever faster and further both between and within cities. But the era of the car is unsustainable. With almost 1 billion cars — a number that has doubled in the last decades — and the expansion of economic activity, more roads have fueled more vehicles, at even greater cost.

Road transport alone accounts for 4.7 gigatonnes of carbon dioxide, 17% of world energy-related emissions. Cars also contribute to congestion, air pollution, urban sprawl, road accidents,

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fragmented ecological habitats and health hazards: the list seems endless. Road transport can also lower economic productivity while adding to climate change. South Korea’s economy, due to its traffic congestion, has lost an amount equivalent to around four per cent of the country’s GDP.

Individually, motor vehicles with combustion engines affect us and the health of our families. Its dust and soot are far more damaging to human health than previously believed. The WHO estimates that over



0.8 million people die prematurely each year from outdoor urban fine particulate matter, to which road traffic contributes.

Many cities across the world are reacting, and refusing to follow the misguided footsteps of the developed world. As they grow, these cities re-discovering the merits of public transport, cycling and walking, and investing in them. Governmental and non-governmental organizations are addressing how roads are planned, financed, and built to ensure that road space is available to all users — including bicyclists and pedestrians. The United Nations Environment Programme and the FIA Foundation, along with other partners, have launched a global initiative called ‘Share the Road: Minimum 10% Finance for Safety, Sustainability and Accessibility’.

Together these initiatives are altering the familiar experience of choking traffic, perilous roads and low vehicle speeds, proving that non-individual motorized forms of transport can be a real choice. Cities are creating accessible, safe, comfortable and affordable public transport systems and introducing new policies to reduce inner city traffic. According to the city, some 290,000 people now use Rio de Janeiro’s 140 km of bicycle lanes every day, avoiding the emission of around 66,000 tones of CO<sub>2</sub> a year. Cape Town is considering plans to allow bicycle-commuters greater access to the inner city. Other popular initiatives include the dedicated Transmilenio bus lane in Bogota, London’s Congestion Charge and the community bicycle programmes of Paris, Berlin, Barcelona and Changwon in Korea.

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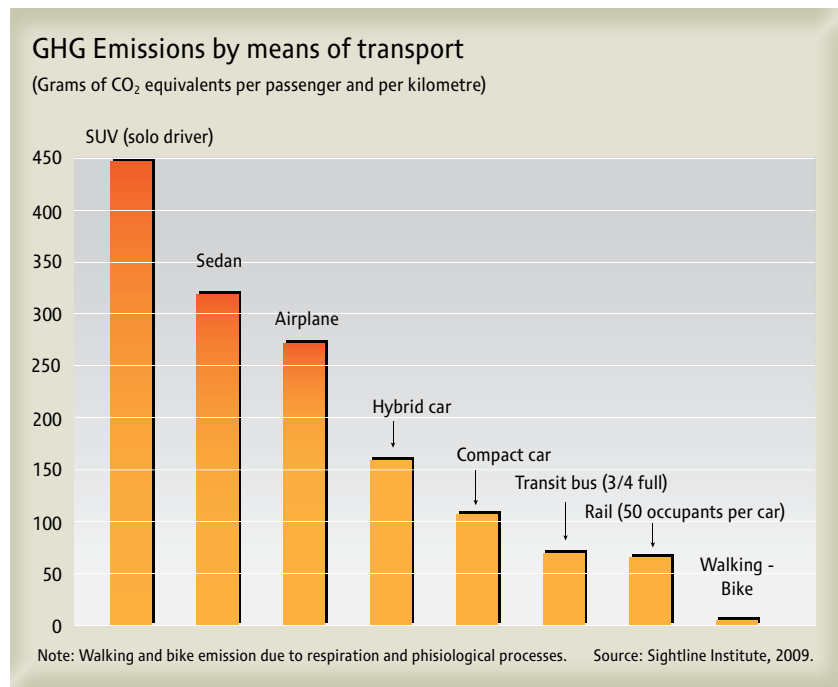


Cities are also harvesting the potential of integrating different transport forms, making riders passengers and passengers riders, providing many more choices to travelers and commuters, and benefiting employers and local governments as well. The Bicycling Empowerment Network, based in South Africa, imports bicycles from Europe, the Americas and Asia and distributes them to schools and teachers, farm and health-care workers, among others — a successful example of promoting cleaner, more affordable and more democratic forms of mobility.

So is the age of EcoMobility dawning? Despite progress, cities and communities have still many challenges. Traditional and polluting modes of transport are enshrined into the physical form of cities. The individual behavior of citizens and the status of the car have to be reappraised and local businesses, investors and community leaders need to become aware of the benefits of other forms of transport.

For the age of EcoMobility the physical infrastructures of cities will have to be re-designed and retro-fitted for safer travel. Community leaders will need to raise awareness of the health benefits and joyful aspects of using bicycles and walking in safe and secure environments.

Koprivnica, a city of some 31,000 people in northern Croatia, is leading the way. It has increased barriers to road traffic, constructed cycling tracks, created green spaces, and introduced community bicycles. Streets are being reclaimed for people by traffic-calming providing school traveling programs and work travel plans. It has held cycling festivals, open-air bicycle museums, and campaigns for cycling and walking. The city won the ICLEI Cities Enjoy Bicycles Award in 2006 and, two years later, received the European Mobility Week Award, supported by the European Commission, for its “comprehensive action plan” which “aims to make the city 100% accessible to all.” It is continuing its work by improving active access and providing scenic cycling routes.



The Global Alliance for EcoMobility brings together a diversity of actors, with businesses, local governments, experts, and user associations playing important roles. Its mission has been embraced by such key actors as the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-HABITAT); Shimano, Giant, Trek, Dahon and Accell Group from the bicycle industry; the European Cyclists Federation and the League of American Bicyclists. Operating internationally, it seeks to raise the profile of EcoMobility across disciplinary and territorial boundaries and advocates it at international policy forums and climate change negotiations.

The age of EcoMobility is under way. Urban planning — preventing endless cities through urban sprawl — is as much part of it as are local awareness, community leadership, employers’ support, and new investment opportunities. It is a new way of traveling in an era challenged by environmental blows, yet — safe, secure, healthy, affordable, equitable, and informed by greater choice — its merits remain personal.