



Imagining a New City  
United Nations Car Free Days 2002

**Bogotá Practicum for Regional Mayors**  
**6-8 February, 2002. Bogotá, Colombia**

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**Aide-Mémoire**

New York, 26 November 2001

**United Nations**  
Department for Economic & Social Affairs  
Energy and Transport Branch  
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# Imagining a New City

## I. Background

Although appropriate transportation infrastructure contributes critically to the economic and social development of countries and regions, the wide spread use of private vehicles in cities over the last half century has resulted in very large externalities. Not only does their excessive use contribute largely to local and global air pollution, but congestion and traffic threaten the economy and lead to significant losses of productive time and a deterioration in the quality of life.

In an effort to change the current trajectory, many cities have begun to imagine – and a growing number to implement -- a new form of urban development where private vehicles are not the primary mode of mobility. Increased use of public transit and alternative modes of transport is essential if cities are to continue to grow without further polluting the air, increasing congestion on the roads, and threatening the historic built environment, public space and quality of life. Yet the greatest obstacles lie not in the planning for public transport, but in changing the behaviour and attitudes people. One method of imagining a new city is holding a broadly supported Car Free Day (CFD) in which the use of private vehicles is temporarily banned and citizens are asked to use buses, trains, taxis, and safe cycling and walking for their daily trips, thus allowing them to see that alternative modes of transportation are indeed possible in their city.

Car Free Days can be used to spark a public dialogue about transport policy and to inspire and empower citizens to take a more active role in their city's transport planning and policy. One example of a good CFD is that which was organized by the city of Bogotá, Columbia held Thursday, 24 February 2000. The entire urban area was closed to private vehicles and people were asked to use public and non-motorized transport to travel throughout the day. Although the Day was initially met with resistance in some quarters, it was ultimately so successful that a public referendum to have a CFD every year was passed, providing a firm long term base for the move to a fully sustainable transportation system.

In light of its accomplishments both during the Car Free Day and as a result of the extensive on-street follow up work that resulted and which is literally changing the face of the city, the City of Bogotá and its seven million citizens was awarded the Stockholm Challenge Award for Environment for the year 2000, in conjunction with EcoPlan (a Paris based NGO that helped plan the event), as an exemplary innovative public project that opens up new paths and empowers people, society and the environment. Car Free Days have since been used in Colombia as a means of promoting a more socially equitable transport system, as an educational tool to promote alternative transport, and as a way of identifying and finding solutions to problems in the transport infrastructure. As a result of these accomplishments and the creation of the long term base for the necessary transition, Bogotá has emerged as an exemplary new model for transport and democracy for cities around the world.

The forthcoming World Summit on Sustainable Development, to be held in Johannesburg, South Africa in September 2002, has sparked an acceleration of activities in the field of sustainable development at the international, regional, national, and local level. Preparation for the Summit has involved the identification of obstacles to sustainable development as well as possible solutions at all levels to be presented and discussed at the global level. Through the sponsorship of the Car Free Day Practicum, the City of Bogotá and the nation of Colombia offer Car Free Days as one possible transport planning and open dialoguing tool to be considered by all nations.

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## II. Goals and Objectives

In support of the World Summit on Sustainable Development, the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, through its Global Initiative on Transport Emissions (GITE) and in conjunction with the City of Bogotá and the Colombian Ministry of Environment, is inviting mayors from leading cities across the Latin American and Caribbean region to come to Bogotá to participate in the city's third Car Free Day and an associated Practicum,<sup>1</sup> aimed at providing a high level hands-on forum to discuss common development concerns and to observe directly the possible use of Car Free Days as a sustainable transport planning tool.

The events will take place over two and a half days, beginning on Wednesday morning, the 6<sup>th</sup> of February at

- ? The first day will consist of a closed session to consider together development dilemmas faced by cities in the region, both large and small, in their transport policies and practices. Mayors will have the opportunity to outline for their colleagues the problems faced by their municipalities in terms of sustainable transport. Obstacles to creating more efficient and equitable transport systems will be discussed as well as possible solutions. The City of Bogotá will present their use of Car Free Days as one method of creating an environment of greater awareness and commitment to transport problems.
- ? The second day will be devoted to direct observation of the Car Free Day, close up. The visiting mayors will have the opportunity to experience the implementation of the Car Free Day in Bogotá via a series of tours, discussion, and interaction with the media. The reaction of the citizens of the city and the media will be observed and discussed. Obstacles and solutions to effective implementation will also be evaluated.
- ? The third day session will provide MAYORS with the opportunity to get together to digest what they have seen and learned, and to discuss the Car Free Day with multiple stake-holders, including local merchants and other members of the private sector and civil society, not all of whom necessarily equally enthusiastic about this approach. They will also discuss possible implementation of Car Free Days in their own cities.

Before it officially closes, the meeting will also provide an opportunity for the visiting mayors to synthesise problems and solutions into a statement that will serve as an input to the World Summit on Sustainable Development. There will also be an opportunity for those in attendance to decide if any of them in turn may wish to organize a Car Free Day in their city or possibly host a similar regional event in 2003.

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<sup>1</sup> The term 'practicum' has been chosen for this innovative cooperative event on the grounds that the intention is to point up the strong practical, non-theoretical, nature of the sustainability approach being demonstrated and of the three day event itself.

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## **II. Targeted Participants**

The Bogotá Practicum will focus on bringing together concerned mayors from a number of Latin American and Caribbean cities of all sizes and development levels.

## **IV. Venue**

The events are being locally hosted by the City of Bogotá and the Colombian Ministry of the Environment, and will be held from 6-8 February 2001.

## **V. Languages**

The official languages of the Workshop will be English and Spanish.

## **VI. Further Information**

The latest information on all aspects of the Bogotá events, including the current agenda, and the UN Car Free Days program itself can be found on the program's web site at <http://www.uncarfreedays.org>.

Full information on the World Summit on Sustainable Development, to be held in Johannesburg, South Africa in September 2002, is available at <http://www.johannesburgsummit.org/>,

## **VII. Communications**

Please address all questions, suggestions and responses to invitation to:

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