

Bogotá's Experience in Sustainable City Development

By Enrique Peñalosa

- **Place people first**
- **TransMilenio is an approved clean development mechanism transport project**
- **An advanced democracy can be measured by the width of its sidewalks**

Bogotá is an old city in Colombia with a population of about 7 million. In 1998, I promoted this city “not for businesses or automobiles, but for children and for the people,” and restricted car use instead of building highways.

I also rejected a Transportation Master Plan that proposed to solve Bogotá's traffic jams with a metro system and elevated highways because it was unaffordable and unworkable, promising mobility for the few, but not for all.

From 1998 to 2000, a Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) system called TransMilenio was made operational, transforming Bogotá's quality of life and renewing civic spirit among the people.

The money that Bogotá would have paid interest in one year for a loan to build the metro was used instead to build 155 miles of bicycle paths that now move 5% of the population, up 10 times from bike ridership in 1998. A key to the success of Bogotá's BRT is the attention paid to improving public spaces, bikeways, and sidewalks which make the system safe and accessible to all.

After five months of operation, TransMilenio reported a 93% reduction in traffic fatalities; a 40% drop in some air pollutants; a 32% decline in travel time; and a passenger acceptance level of 88%.

The TransMilenio with its feeder bus system, bikeways, sidewalks, parks, and improved public spaces has been continuously expanded. The improved city infrastructure has attracted citizens from all income levels. Private car owners have shifted to BRT, contributing more than 20% of total bus customers.

Five things you should know

A quality city puts the public good above private interest.

A good city is one that is built around the needs of its people, not cars. It is a city for the most vulnerable citizens: children, the handicapped, the elderly, and the very poor. It is safe and friendly to pedestrians and to bicycles. Also, it is able to attract highly creative and qualified people, which can boost the economic competitiveness of a country.



TransMilenio moves more passengers at only 5% of the cost of railway systems

Karl Fjellstrom, ITDP

A good transport policy is about providing mobility for all and minimizing motor vehicle usage. Transportation gets worse as a society gets richer. It cannot be solved with money alone, but requires a change in attitude. If use of cars is to be restricted, there must be a good public and non-motorized transport system in place.

New cities should be structured around a street network of pedestrians and bicycles. In a democratic society, road space should be divided into exclusive space for public transport, such as a bus system; large sidewalks; protected bicycle lanes; and cars should get whatever remaining space there is. A formidable pedestrian–bicycle highway would encourage a different, happier, and more sustainable way of life. Aside from sidewalks, people should have access to parks. In Asian cities, it is possible to have long parks, crisscrossing cities for dozens of kilometers.

A good transport system offers quality services at low price. A democratic city should charge a uniform fare for short or long distances. This will benefit the poor since they travel far, often living on the urban fringe.

To transport people, a bus system would be better than a rail system in terms of capacity and speed. To choose a rail system over a bus system is akin to taking resources that might have met the needs of the poor, e.g., schools, libraries, parks, etc.

For further information

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