

## 19. PRACTICUM – UN CAR FREE DAYS 2002

<b>Officer responsible</b> -	<b>Author</b> Councillor Denis O'Rourke
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I attended the above practicum for UN Car Free Days 2002 at Fremantle from 8 to 10 May 2002.

### DAY ONE

Following a welcome by the mayor of Fremantle, which was also attended by the mayors of some nearby cities, the first working session, was a video link-up with the mayor of Bogota (Columbia), Mr Anatas Mockus. Bogota is one of the cities which has run a car free day, as part of the UN programme to encourage sustainable transport systems throughout the world. Bogota is a city of about 6 million people, and has 800,000 cars. In February this year, Bogota took the step of excluding private cars from its city centre. This was one of the principal case studies for the practicum, and represented a rather extreme example of the concept of the car free day. The Fremantle car free day was the other case study. The car free day for Fremantle was held on 9 May 2002, and took the form of the closure of its main street (referred to locally as the "cappuccino strip").

The mayor of Bogota explained that his city had a twenty five-year plan for the development of a sustainable transport system. Its focus is on the reduction of private motor cars in the central city. There are already restrictions on the entry of private motor cars from 7 to 9 am, and 5 to 7 p.m. Already, 650,000 trips per day are taken using public passenger transport services, and it is intended to increase this to 3 million per day using the 'Transmilenio' transport system. A central part of the strategy is the ring road system which has been developed not too far out from the central city to encourage private motor cars not to drive through the central city. While by New Zealand standards, car ownership in Bogota is low (40%), the number of cars in this city has already degraded its quality of life. There is also a wide gap between rich and poor in Bogota, and car ownership is concentrated in 20 percent of homes. Therefore the city is highly dependent on public passenger transport and the use of cycle and pedestrian facilities. Another aspect of the strategy has been the removal of a large number of central city on-street car parks. In the past, the sidewalks in the central city were used as car parks as well as pedestrian thoroughfares. They are now all used as shared pedestrian and cycle ways. Bogota is well on the way to a sustainable transport system. Christchurch can learn from it.

The car free day in Bogota February, was supported by the population, who understand the need for the development of a sustainable transport system for that city. The value of the car free day concept for Bogota is demonstrated by the following benefits, which were described by Mr Mockus:

- One million gallons of gasoline was saved.
- 9 tonnes of tires were saved.
- A large reduction in traffic accidents.
- A large estimated reduction in emissions to air (especially CO<sub>2</sub>).
- Motivation of the population to use walking, cycles, and public passenger transport as a means of getting to and from work/school.
- A means to "create harmony between regulation, culture, and conscience".

Mr Mockus was particularly pleased with the effect the car free day had on motivation. He said that the car free day relied less on obedience to law or sanction, and more on social conscience and community direction (supplied by his leadership). In response to a question from me, Mr Mockus said that the car free day had received a lot of publicity before the event through news media coverage. This concentrated on the consequences if people tried to use their car to go to the central city during the car free day. The results of the car free day were also widely published. There appears to be a good relationship between the city administration and news media and Bogota. Mr Mockus said that the success of the car free day was dependent on the generation of public support ahead of the event. Many people took the opportunity to take the day off and to visit the central city, and used walking, cycling, and public transport to do so. It therefore appears that central city retailers benefited, rather than being disadvantaged. Extra public transport services had to be provided, and shopping malls made special preparations for the influx. Special facilities were also provided for the huge number of cyclists who visited the central city. This included the creation of temporary cycle paths. Physical barriers were placed on arterial roads to prevent private motorcars from entering the central city on the car free day. The aim was: "business as usual, but without your car". This appears to have been achieved.

Following the video interview with Mr Mockus, there was a video interview with Mr Eric Britton of Eco Plan, who provided a background for the concept of car free Days as a starting point for shifting the path of urban development toward greater social justice and sustainability. The advantages, obstacles, and the importance of strong follow-up were discussed. Mr Britton said that following discussion of the idea in Spain in 1994, the first car free day was held in La Rochelle in 1997. This was a demonstration for the European car free day movement, and was entitled 'In town without my car'. He said that the first car free Days in Europe had limited success, but that these are increasing in interest and effectiveness, especially now that they are being encouraged by the UN.

Mr Britton said that engineers and planners have been largely unsuccessful in establishing sustainable transport systems effectively, because culture change is needed as well as engineering and planning. Therefore planners had to be more conscious of the need for culture change, and must seek ways of generating this. Innovative ideas, such as the car free day concept, are necessary. It is essential that public participation is generated, and that continuous effort is required over many years. He recommended a 'bottom-up' approach. Sustainable transport systems are not only an important part of sustainable development, but are also an important aspect in the development of social justice. Consequently the UN has a fundamental interest. The international car free day is being promoted by the UN, which hopes to create international peer support groups/cities. Christchurch could be part of this. In Bogota the mayor had been the major driver of the car free day, and Mr Britton described Mr Mockus as brilliant, committed, and gutsy. But Mr Britton said that he also had respect for cities such as Fremantle, which had adopted a less extreme version of the car free day, suitable to the culture and needs of Fremantle people. Bogota had chosen a legal ban (although Mr Mockus was somewhat doubtful about whether he really had the power to do what he had done), while Fremantle had taken an 'encouragement' type of approach. This was suitable for the smaller cities, which predominate in the world, and is just as valuable in terms of outcomes.

The relevant websites are: [carfree.org](http://carfree.org) (Fremantle), and [untsd.org](http://untsd.org) (UN). Mr Britton encouraged Fremantle to put the results of its car free day on the Web as a means of encouraging others.

Mr Britton also said that there is a need for studies into the social effects of cars, and of the issues relating to the transition to alternatives, if the long-term aim of a sustainable transport system is to be achieved. In answer to a question from Lee Kelly, Mr Britton agreed that transport security was a major issue for schools. He said that there was a need to focus here, and that Christchurch could spread its good ideas in this area, using the www.

There was a great deal of discussion of the problem of business opposition to the implementation of the car free day concept. All agreed that it was essential to develop public understanding well ahead of the chosen day. The Fremantle people described how they had overcome opposition by retailers. This was essentially achieved by promoting the car free day as part of a 'come to town' promotion. In Fremantle, the car free day took the form of the closure of the main street, 'the cappuccino strip', on which a festival was held during the day, ending with a parade and street party in the evening. This could be a good example for Christchurch as it is a good means of central city promotion. The pleasantness and novelty of central city streets without cars for a day, in association with a festival and street parties might work in Christchurch too.

In Fremantle it does appear that the message of using alternatives to motor cars, via the car free day, had worked, with a significant number of people using public transport, cycles, and walking, more than before the car free day promotion had been implemented. People were seen giving the 'thumbs down' to others using cars on this day. There had clearly been an increased demand for more cycle parks and cycle lanes. It was estimated that there had been a 9% change away from the use of private motor cars to go to and from work.

There were a number of exceptions from the car free day, wherever it had been done in the world: people with disabilities, service vehicles, commercial vehicles, and taxis, are commonly exempt.

I explained that in Christchurch, one of the major barriers to culture change, is the belief that Christchurch has no problem. In discussion, it was agreed that in places such as Fremantle and Christchurch, as distinct from Bogota, legal bans were controversial (except on a small scale) and probably un-necessary. It was felt that it was better to start at a lesser level, to be patient, and to repeat and improve the concept over time. It was suggested that women's influence was important, and that schools and children might also be targeted. Mr Britton felt that where no problem is perceived, people would need to see what they could get out of it, and what the community interest is. He felt that the emphasis should initially be on short trips which can easily be done without cars.

Following the discussion with Mr Britton, there was detailed discussion on the Fremantle car free day. This was called 'Shed Your Car Day'. The goal for Fremantle is no increase in private motor car use. The objective is to encourage the use of public passenger transport, cycling, and walking. For the city of Fremantle, parking revenue is very important, and there was a conflict between this and the need to encourage sustainable transport. Fremantle is naturally walk-friendly. The city is built on a human scale. Cycling is easy. But there is very high motorcar use compared to other Australian cities, with the lowest public passenger transport use. Therefore although the state government had provided excellent public passenger transport facilities, such as the light rail system between Fremantle and Perth, there was a great need for culture change, so that the alternatives to cars are used more. Fremantle has also succeeded in aiding pedestrian amenity in its city centre. Fremantle is a dormitory or commuter city for Perth. It is also a day trip destination for people who live in central Perth. The connections are by light rail, the bus, and an excellent system of cycleways. Cars are still the dominant transport method. The new planning strategy for Fremantle, and WA, stresses the creation of local employment retention, broader live/work options, parking policy changes, 'cash in lieu of parking spaces' for new developments (the money used for public passenger transport amenities), the implementation of 'end of journey' facilities for cyclists, and the upgrade of commercial centres in satellite towns to avoid the need for travel to Perth (includes street design, street furniture, and better access and amenities). Major elements include separated bus lanes to Perth, the development of major pedestrian routes, and a policy of cycleways having priority over parking.

Short presentations were given by the strategic planning team of the city of Fremantle regarding various aspects of planning and implementation of the car free day. The day finished with a multi-stakeholder panel discussion. The panel comprised local community groups, business representatives, and media representatives.

## **DAY TWO**

Following the formal launch of the 'Shed Your Car Day' by the mayor in the town hall, delegates visited the "cappuccino strip" to see the car free day and action there. The street had been closed using physical barriers, including attractively planted (temporary) barriers, and there were banners and other decorations to show that something special was happening on this street. There were stalls, entertainers, and many children were in evidence, occupied in a number of different fun activities. There were a lot of people in the street, and the cafes and restaurants all seemed to be very well patronised.

The Fremantle 'Shed Your Car Day' has now been going for three years. In the first year there was no temporary street closure. In the second year, the cappuccino strip was closed to cars, but not to cycles skateboards or pedestrians. This year the street party has been improved, including a parade in the evening. This incremental approach seems to have worked. Good marketing, and the inclusion of stakeholder groups in the organising committee, had been the main strengths. The weaknesses of the Fremantle model are that it is limited spatially. Also perhaps once per year is too infrequent? Culture change still appears to be slow and better monitoring of the effectiveness of the event is required. It is felt that the real value of the event in Fremantle is the promotion and understanding of the concept of sustainable transport through public participation in an event. The event itself is clearly successful: people liked the reduction in noise, fumes, the crossability of the street, and generally the pleasantness of it. In fact, there is a risk that the message (sustainable transport) may have been overshadowed somewhat by the party-event itself. The message must be clear. A good lesson to learn from Fremantle is that the message must not be anti-car. It must be: choice and variety in transport modes for all.

## **DAY THREE**

The practicum concluded at midday. The morning comprised a multi-stakeholder panel discussion comprising a panel from the 'Shed Your Car' advisory group, which discussed ways of incorporating disparate actors into the planning of the car free day. This was followed by a puppet show to which children from local schools were invited. It demonstrated how the message can be got across to schoolchildren and their parents.

The practicum closed with a discussion about how car free days might work in the cities of attending delegates. For Christchurch, it might be possible to have a car free day on the same day as Fremantle, and other Australian cities which might participate in future. A thought is that all councillors, community board members, and other community and business leaders, could avoid using their cars on our car free day, and could log their transport modes for publication, as an example to the wider community. The initial car free day for Christchurch could promote the idea that each resident able to do so, could use an alternative to the car for at least one trip during our first car free day, or to car-pool with at least one other person.

Note: it is considered by the practicum that it is essential that the car free day be a midweek day, and not a weekend day. It would be desirable for at least one street (or part thereof) to be closed to cars and for that street to be used for a street party and festival, like Fremantle. A possible street might be a part of High Street, or a part of Victoria Street, or both. Widespread publicity would be essential, focusing on the sustainable transport message, hopefully with the support of local news media. Another possibility might be free buses for the day (budget provision essential - Ecan to be a partner). Small prizes could be given at random to cyclists. City Council cars (except essential vehicles) would not be used. Some businesses, and government departments and agencies, could be encouraged to do the same. Obviously, councillors and the council staff would not use their cars on this day. An important aspect would be to target schools, to persuade parents not to drive the children to school on this day, and to use alternatives. Cycle shops should be heavily involved by promoting their products - space on the street (especially Cathedral Square) should be made available for this. The benefits of sustainable transport, not just for the city as a whole, but also for the individual should be stressed in promotional material and articles in the media: health benefits, cost savings, reduction in accidents, better use of resources and time. Another idea is to use the lower floor of parking buildings as free cycle parks (supervised).

## **CONCLUSION**

A discussion needs to be held by the STU Committee as to whether it would support and promote the car free day concept as part of the UN programme, and if so, recommendations to the Council need to be developed, including budget provision for the 2003/04 year.

### **Chairman's**

**Recommendation:** That a car free day for Christchurch be held in late 2003, and that staff report to the Land Transport Subcommittee of the matter, with a view to the subcommittee developing a proposal for consideration by the STU Committee later this year.