

Lockdown the cars

Let's get our city back!

#RecuperemLaCiutat campaign

We are asking for an end of lockdown plan in which people and environmental friendly mobility are prioritized over private vehicles. The pollution of the atmosphere has disastrous effects on our health and worsens the symptoms of Covid-19. We want our cities back. Cities that are healthy and that take care of the environment.

The alarm state has been going on for weeks now. This situation was unimaginable a few months back. These are hard times for everyone due to the consequences of the sanitary, social and economic crises that coronavirus has triggered. Our number one priority, as a society, must be to ensure the lowest infection rate, the highest health coverage and the best assistance to people that are vulnerable.

This lockdown lets us witness extraordinary urban scenes: silent cities, smells that we could not enjoy before, birds singing, conversations between balconies... For the first time in decades, a lot of cities meet the OMS's air quality recommendation. For the first time in the last fifty years, to breathe in Barcelona is not harmful to our health. It is terrible to have reached this goal due to the crisis we are currently living, but it allows us to imagine the possibility of living in a smoke-free city. This is not a secondary issue. Some international studies show that the areas with more pollution are having higher coronavirus mortality and morbidity rates. A population that has spent years and years breathing polluted air develops more respiratory and cardiovascular illnesses; which can lead to more serious Covid-19 symptoms.

Part of the energy needed to get through these difficult days comes from imagining how tomorrow will be. A day in which seeing our friends and family will be allowed, a day in which we will safely walk the streets of our city again. The end of lockdown will be a step-by-step plan and our city will never be the same. What can we do so this new reality still takes some positive features? We have come up with one very clear idea: we should try to maintain the levels of pollution at their lowest. And to do so, the number of cars and motorcycles that circulate in our city has to be drastically reduced.

We need to turn a high percentage of our streets into spaces where we can walk or ride bikes in a safe way; and to reinforce the capacity of public transportation, epicentre of mobility in our cities, which has to ensure social distancing security rules. Bikes have to become the end of lockdown priority vehicle. They are the cleanest and most efficient vehicle, allowing long trips and respecting social distancing. We are not talking about small secondary paths or small "superilles". We are talking about the necessity of having a network of motor free paths, that help active mobility among neighbourhoods and cities. There will be multiple health benefits of restricting traffic: we will generate enough space to ensure social distancing. Traffic-calmed streets will be the right way to promote active mobility after multiple sedentary days caused by the lockdown. And we cannot forget that breathing clean air also is a preventive measure against Covid-19. The environmental benefits will be extraordinary too: less emissions in a world that is still in a huge climate crisis.

Other cities are already going through with these measures and are saving a lot of kilometres of roadways to walk or ride bikes; and are also improving their public transportation system. Here in Catalonia, some city councils like Barcelona's, Girona's or Vic's have also presented actions towards the same goal. But in other cities like Lleida or Tarragona, no actions have been taken yet. To walk towards pollution free cities, we need to drastically restrict traffic. We need to urgently extend these measures and make them permanent.

This is why we ask the administration an urgent crash program to turn roadways into paths for pedestrians and bikes, in all streets and accesses to the city. Concerning the urgent need for public transportation, we ask to turn the left lane of all the big access streets into bus lanes and to ensure the founding of this system in the current situation.

Lockdown the cars, let's get our city back!