



WORLD STREETS

TAIPEI CITY CAR FREE DAY :
2011

Eric Britton reports to the 2011 Taipei City
Green Transportation Forum



Figure 1. An innovative cross-walk for pedestrians

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* The photographs you find here are taken from the streets of Taipei City. I have included this sample of typical street scenes to give our international readers a first feel for what they will find when they come to Taipei.

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Figure 2. A typical rainy day in city traffic in Taipei

Introduction: Rethinking Car Free Days in Taipei City

I was kindly invited by Mayor Hau Lung-pin to come to Taipei City this year to discuss preparations for the celebration of the city's tenth successive Car Free Day -- and as part of this collaborative brainstorming process to draw on my experience of some seventeen years working with this, one hopes, transformative transportation approach in different cities around the world.

This year's Green Transportation Forum gave me an opportunity to meet once again with many old friends and distinguished colleagues working in the sector, to hear about the progress the city has made in working with this approach in this first decade. In all I ended up spending a full week in the city and the surrounding region, in order to have a better appreciation of the overall transportation situation, which of course is what the Car Free Days are supposed to be all about.

The goal of the Green Transportation Forum was to lay the way for the CFD X celebrations on Thursday, the 22nd of September. And if you turn to the closing annex here you will find a summary of the principal events organized by the Taipei city team for this year's celebration.

But after ten years might it not be a good time to think about making some major structural changes in the CFD formula and procedures, perhaps with a goal to being more ambitious about what we would like them to achieve for the city in the decade ahead? The Forum gave us an opportunity to compare notes on this. We had a lively time brainstorming on this topic, and I believe came up with some interesting ideas for next steps, as you will see in the following summary.

In closing I would like to thank Mayor Hau and his team for a warm welcome and highly efficient series of events. Every time I come to Taiwan I end up learning a great deal and this visit was no exception. Thank you all.



- Eric Britton, World Streets and the New Mobility Agenda, Paris. 7 October 2011



Figure 3. Busy street on Car Free Day

Every day is a great day to take a few cars off the street and think about it

More than a decade and a half has raced by since the first public Car Free Day challenge was issued to an international audience of more than four hundred in the transport/environment conference held under the Ciudades Accesibles program and the European Commission in October 1994 in Toledo, Spain. (For details see [Thursday: – A Breakthrough Strategy for Reducing Car Dependence in Cities](#)).

The Car Free Day planning and implementation approach we set out back in 1994 proposed two things. It offered both (a) a sketch plan for discussing and then organizing a Car Free Day -- and (b) the rudiments of an exploratory toolkit which is intended to help people and policy makers in a place improve their understanding of and readiness for a strategy of prudent, effective traffic reductions.

This approach is intended to help those who are concerned with these issues in moving that critical step from the abstract and perhaps desirable, to the concrete and practical. You can see all the detail on this in the original [Thursday](#) report.

The keys to the approach set out in the original documents are careful preparation, broad local participation, discussion and negotiation, test implementation, performance monitoring, reflection, and negotiated follow-up and extension.

A *Thursday* car free demonstration has to be planned and undertaken with strong local support at the specific city or neighborhood level. It directly addresses the complex challenge of how to make our cities more accessible (which is vital for the local economy), while at the same time improving the quality of life for all who live, work and play there.

That at least was the plan.



Figure 4. Metro station

Looking Back on Car Free Days: Worldwide Perspectives

Over the first seventeen years of this movement, the world has seen hundreds of cities giving the CFD approach a whack in very different circumstances, some good, some undeniably bad, and most of them a bit of both.

While real progress has been made in terms of getting concrete on-street programs and improvements as a result of a CFD in a certain number of places, as a result of strong programs and continuing attention over a period of years, this is still not the situation in most towns or cities. I am sorry to say that the verdict has to be that most of these Car Free Days have been spinning their wheels for most of the last seventeen years.

As I look back at the very large number of CFD projects I have seen over these years in different towns and cities around the world, what strikes me upon reflection is that in all too few cases have they actually served as an instrument to achieve significant changes in policy and practice in the transport sector in their city. This is a tough message for me, since back in 1994 when we were first getting started in this, that was precisely the fundamental objective behind the whole Car Free Day idea.

As time passes we are seeing abundantly that while it is easy enough to excite a certain number of people to talk for a day or so about how great it would be to have cities with less traffic, and to organize some festive public events around this fine idea -- it turns out to be a great deal harder to build on this base, on this event, to make any real progress in that direction. Even the occasional car free day or demonstrations, exciting though they may be for the moment, invariably accomplish little to advance these concepts into practical, daily reality. We need more than celebrations.

This suggests that a new approach must be found in order to break the policy and bottlenecks in the many places that need to advance the sustainable transport agenda and make major changes in these areas, but which for one reason or another have failed until now to do so. We need to find better ways to plug our Car Free Days into the process of the move to sustainable transport in our cities.



Figure 5. Station for Taipei's public bike system

Sustainable transportation agenda: Changing course in Taipei

Based on what I have been able to observe over the last three years of visits here, there is clear evidence showing that Taipei City is really trying to move ahead on the sustainable agenda -- to the extent to which you have been targeting and bringing online significant, step-by-step sustainability improvements in transportation policy in the city in recent years.

Over the past decade Taipei City has worked to achieve a pattern break, innovating in favor of people and not for vehicles. And in the process they have gained increasing public support with innovative measures and projects for streamlined traffic infrastructure, introduction of low-pollution buses, a public bike project, extension of a downtown network of bike lanes, a 30 km/hr speed limit in residential areas, improvements in both the barrier-free environment and pedestrian space, the 5284 e-Bus information system, the Easy Traffic in Taipei Smart Phone app, and measures and improvements for safe school commuting. Clearly the city is on the move and in the right direction.

Those are some of the details, but what is more to the point is the extent to which these kinds of projects are not just one-off innovations, but are part of an emerging broader pattern of moving the basic system toward sustainability and efficiency from a broader systemic perspective.

Another step in the right direction, over the last decade of so we are starting to see the emergence of different kinds of "mobility week" strategies which are promising advances on the original preferences for a single day. I am pleased that we are also seeing variations of this mobility week approach in different cities around Taiwan, and in particular with all you are doing here in Taipei City.

But is that the end of it? I am not sure. But I do have some ideas on this which I should now like to share with you that may make a difference in the future. And in the process perhaps we can put the Car Free Day concept to work in Taipei in new ways that could be very powerful and perhaps even unique.

So where do we start?

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Figure 6. Taipei does have taxis

After ten years even the greatest poet in China . . .

Taipei City is celebrating this year its tenth consecutive Car Free Day. All concerned seem to be generally satisfied with this approach.

But what do you do after ten years of success? Should you keep going, holding to your established pattern?

Or is this an occasion to re-reflect, regroup and perhaps even make some fundamental changes in order to make a major leap ahead?

Two and a half millennia ago the great philosopher Lao Tzu gave us a clue when he said that after ten years even the greatest poet in China should change his name and change his village.

Might it be that after ten years, it is also time for the Car Free Day approach in your city to change its name and change the basic approach in some significant ways?

Or do we keep doing what we have always done to now?

It is a choice.



Figure 7. New cycle path (oops)

Car Free Day⁺

To move ahead with the challenge of how we might give this old formula a new and more useful life, let us start with a name change -- and for this take a page out of the book of Google who have recently created a new set of tools which they call Google+. Suppose we rethink and then reinvent our concept and think in terms of Car Free Day+.

What might it look like? What might be the basic strategic changes you can make that could make a difference for your city?

What is the difference between the old and the proposed CFD⁺ approach? Three things basically.

1. Set explicit performance targets for the year ahead
2. Evaluate progress during past year
3. Open up the process to all concerned

Let us have a look.

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Figure 8. Train station

Plus 1: Let's set explicit performance targets for the year ahead

In this new and expanded configuration the objective is transformed from a program focusing on day-specific events, to one which a certain number of specific performance targets, tasks and projects are set out in the full view of the public, which the organizers propose to plan, develop and realize in the year ahead. These targets will of course vary from city to city and year to year, but what is important is that the organizers provide a **public commitment for specific improvements in the sector**.

As best I understand it, in recent years your city has targeted, planned and executed a significant number of initiatives to achieve certain specific target objectives: increasing the percentage of people who come into the center of the city using public transport, increasing the modal share of bicycles, improving the density of coverage of the public transport network for more convenient access, widening neighborhood sidewalks in parallel with new metro extensions, reducing traffic speeds, improving safety of the trip to school, and others. This is excellent.

But I would like to propose here that you now take this one step further and build on this specifically to incorporate these and similar targets into your future Car Free Days year after year.

By doing this and on this occasion I believe it provides a strong public commitment to making the kinds of 365 days a year day-to-day improvements which are the soul of sustainable transportation. One day a year is not enough. Unless it is a step in the direction of a broader and more important goal.

And what is no less important, by making these as public statements you commit to having the program and the results examined and evaluated by citizens and others concerned on a year by year basis.

I cannot strongly enough recommend that this new "plus" be added to your Car Free Days in the future.



Figure 9. Scooter parking – work in progress

Plus 2: Evaluate progress made during previous year

It is an important advance to discuss and set specific targets for the year ahead, but in this new CFD⁺ organization one of the critical goals of the program in any given year will be to explicitly evaluate the targets and the performance in meeting them of the previous year. And it is only appropriate if this be an open public event and discussion, and not one that is controlled by the political organizers of the process.

The process of evaluation and public reporting on progress over the last year will hopefully take the form of an open and creative vision which rewards accomplishment and boldness, and takes creative, generous approach to judging performance in specific areas in the preceding year. It would seem appropriate that targets that set should be ambitious ones.

Moreover it should also be understood that if in any given year not all of the objectives are fully met, this is not to be taken as a sign of failure, but rather as a sign of work in progress.

This is going to be real work the first few times around. But after this cycle has been initiated in any given place after a year or two, it will become easier to organize and surely more realistic to set goals which are at once ambitious and which at the same time the city has a chance of meeting. The objective after all is to progress.

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Figure 10. Off to the races: Waiting for that light to change

Plus 3: Opening up the process to all comers

And if in the first year of Car Free Day +++ the target setting may be carried out primarily by those who are most directly involved organizing the various events, it will be desirable to steadily expand the range of all of the organizations and interests involved.

Here is one possible idea you may wish to consider. It would seem important that there be the broadest possible public participation in both the target setting and the process of realization, and the best way to ensure this would be for the organizers to open up the process to bring on board the full range of groups, institutions, people and interests involved.

It would thus be good if proposals can come in from cycling and pedestrian groups, public transport users and operators, schools and schoolchildren, commerce and business groups, taxis and paratransit operators, groups responsible for representing the interest of the elderly and handicapped, the old and new media, university groups and students, consultants and environmental organizations, NGOs and more.

And let us not forget to ask the police and the traffic authorities for their ideas and suggestions as well (after all who knows more about the daily realities of traffic in your city than the police who are out on the road 24/7. Likewise let us not forget to bring in all those who lobby for cars and parking. You need to have a big and open house, otherwise you risk to miss some important possibilities.

High profile public awards: One idea might be to invite not only proposals for targets and improvements for the coming year, but also to do this in terms of friendly competition with some form of public recognition, and possibly even a cash prize. It would be good if these involved significant amounts (say at least US\$ 1000 each), and there should be financial, industrial and other business groups and charities willing to lend a hand for such a good cause. Another possibility would be to try to get broad coverage offering prizes in each of, say, ten of the above or other categories.

The Award Ceremony could be a significant high profile event crowning future Car Free Days in your city.

Eight lucky wishes for Taipei in the year ahead

As I leave you this year, here is a shortlist of a proposed CFD⁺ targets you may wish to consider for the year ahead. For now I present this in the compact telegraphic form, but if you wish more, just ask.

1. **Slow Down**

Your 30 kph slow zones are great. We are well aware in cities around the world that not only does speed kill, but also that speeding cars have many deleterious effects on city life for all. Keep extending your target zones, then start to link them for a slow speed network that will serve all.

2. **Protect and improve scooter traffic**

Many transport planners in many parts of the world are either without any good ideas for this popular and affordable form of transport – or worse they try to eliminate them. This is an enormous opportunity for Taipei to emerge as a world leader in safe and efficient motorized two wheelers.

3. **Work with taxi owner/drivers to create new services and improved earnings**

This is, or at least could be, a beautiful flower in your sustainable mobility bouquet. But it needs more thought and work. There is great promise in using your best technologies to provide higher quality, lower cost and group transport services. Work directly with the drivers, even when it's hard..

4. **Walk/Bike to school**

You already have a fine start here. What about setting a target, say to do what is needed to enable 90% of all young students and children to walk/bike to school.?Great technical progress has been made in these projects in recent years. Join the world leaders.

5. **More and better sidewalks**

This is still a weak point despite progress made in recent years. There is still a lot of work to do here. What about setting a target? Say, " 100 new pedestrian sidewalks in the city by CFD+ in 2012".

6. **Elderly and Handicapped transport**

Lifestyles are changing, and your population is aging and still needs fair access. There are excellent new models of wise transport policy you can study and benefit from. Give yourself some targets.

7. **Improved area access to transit stations**

This is rich terrain for study and innovation. Extend the immediate area coverage so that passengers can get to the station more safely, more comfortably and more quickly. Integrating cycle and ped planning, as well as encouraging more businesses and services in area of each station

8. **Explore and test carsharing as a key mobility option**

Join the leading cities of the world is bringing carsharing to Taipei and Taiwan more generally. This proven concept is working in more than one thousand cities worldwide today. And not one in Taiwan. There is a great potential fit there. Please exploit it.

* * *

And if you do this or something like it, I hope you will consider inviting me again in 2012 so that I can review the progress that you are making, and in turn share your news with the readers of World Streets and the other associated international journals and media. We badly need more great examples and inspiration, and Taipei is starting to get there.

Annex A: High officials met during Taipei City stay

Though I was invited to Taiwan in a first instance to report on experience with and views on Car Free Days, and more generally on matters relating to the New Mobility Agenda as a strategic planning approach, I was also there to listen and learn. During the course of my week, I met with a broad range of people and groups, people working directly with these matters in both local and national government students and professors, consultants activists and media representatives.. The list of people and projects visited is too long to be reported here in full, but to give the reader a feel for the quality and variety of these exchanges, I list here a certain number of the high officials with whom I met while there.

Wei-Zen Chen. Deputy Mayor of Taipei City

Jason Tse-Ying Lin. Commissioner of Transportation, Taipei City

Eugene Chen, PhD. President and Chairman, Taiwan Institute for Sustainable Energy

Simon Shiao-Lien Chao. Director General, Transportation Department, Taipei City

Li-Yu Lin, Ph.D. Deputy Commissioner of Transportation, Taipei City

Lawrence W. Lan, Ph.D. Chair Professor, Ta-Hwa Institute of Technology

Prof. Luo Xiao-xian. Tamkang University

Prof. Feng Cheng-Min. Institute of Traffic and Transportation, National Chiao Tung University

Huang Jin-Nan, Chairman of artists' committee to serve the handicapped.

Yang Cheng-Chih, Vice General Manager of Capital Bus

Dr. Shyue Koong (Jason) Chang. Professor, Department of Civil Engineering, National Taiwan University

Karen YY Chen, Ph.D., Research. Advanced Public Transport Research Center, National Taiwan University

And let me add to this impressive list that I was especially glad to have the chance to meet with a number of junior staff members and university students, graduate and undergraduate, several of whom are hard on work on innovative projects that I very much hope will be widely discussed, carefully planned and implemented with success. To me they are the key to the future of sustainable Taiwan.

Annex B: Taipei City CFD 2011 events in brief¹

Over the years, the duration of the event in [Taipei](#) has been extended from a single [Car Free Day](#), to a whole “Car Free Month”. The range of activities has also been diversified: from the initial closing traffic of a road for cyclists to enjoy, to celebrating a Carnival, Academic Seminars, Green Transportation Parade, and many other activities via internet encouraging the use of public transportation.

Amongst these activities, “Walk to School Week” has been particularly successful: The activity not only decreases the time parents need to take their children to school by car, but also improves parent-child relationships. Due to its success, the event was soon extended from a one day event to a whole week, and later developed into an ongoing “Walk School Advanced Planning” Programme. Thanks to this, the use of public transportation has raised 47%, the usage of bicycle over 5%, and the total coverage of public transportation in the city centre area has risen to 87.5% within the range of 500 meters from the initiative. Encouraged by this success, Taipei city government has established a public bike rental system, starting off a new cycling fashion in Taiwan.

Some of the activities offered at this year’s Car Free Day in Taipei included:

- [Save the polar bears!](#) An Internet activity which calculates the carbon footprint of people’s daily life using the Polar Bear as an emblem will help the citizens realize the effect of their lifestyle over the environment: By uploading the daily amount of food, clothing, living, and transportation consumed by person, citizens can calculate the total decrease of carbon during the period of the activity. The more carbon in the simulation decreases, the bigger the ice plane for the polar bears becomes.
- [5284 Love story](#) In Chinese the number “5284” has the same pronunciation as “I love Bus”. This is the title of the bus real-time information system which -combining GPS and wireless communication technology-, offers arrival times and real-time location of buses of Taipei’s public transport network. This precise service encourages citizens to give up cars and turn to public transport.
- **10 Years or Car Free Day:** My car free time Car Free-related photographs from the past ten years will be collected via internet and will be exposed to celebrate the 10th birthday for CAR FREE DAY, together with activity records of participation in the CAR FREE DAY during the past years.
- **Rethinking Car Free Day — Green Transportation Seminar** The overall aim of Green Transportation Seminar is to promote a low carbon lifestyle by foreseeing the future of Taiwan (Taipei). For this, the Taipei city government invited the founder of the [WORLD CAR FREE DAY](#), Eric Britton, to give a speech and share his experience regarding Car Free Days. In addition, business and academic representatives have been invited to share their own accomplishments and experiences promoting sustainable transportation.
- **Car-Free Living — In order to raise citizen awareness regarding public and green modes of transportation** and to encourage them to participate in "Car-Free Living" activities, the city organized a creative market (environmental showcase and creative works) in addition to the 10 year exhibition. During these activities, 26 public parking lots provided bicycle parking areas.

¹ Source: Mr Tzu Li Chang Sub division Chief, Transport Department. Phone:+886

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Figure 11. Bikes parked near university

Annex C: The Transportation Majority in every city in the world

- Extracts from [article](#) taken from [World Streets](#), 5 October 2011,

Policy continue to plan and spend hard earned taxpayer money for a distinct minority of all citizens and voters. It is amazing that they still manage to get elected. Here is a generic short-list of the people who make up this till-now all too silent majority:

1. Everyone in your city, country or electorate who does not own or have handy access to a car
2. Everyone who cannot drive
3. Everyone who cannot afford to own and operate a car of their own
4. Everyone who should not drive (for reasons of a variety of impediments such as limitations associated with age, psychological state , , ,)
5. Everyone who lives in a large city and for reasons of density, public health and quality of city life needs to have access to a decent non-car mobility system
6. Everyone who suffers from some form of handicap that makes driving or even access to traditional public transit difficult or impossible
7. Everyone who cannot responsibly take the wheel at any given time (fatigue, distraction, nervousness, some form of intoxication. . .)
8. Everyone who do not care to drive and would in fact prefer to get around by walking, cycling or some form of shared transport but who cannot safely or readily do so today, because all the money is being spent on the car-based system which is fundamentally, and financially, incompatible with these “softer” and more healthy ways of getting around
9. All those who are today isolated and unable to participate in the life of our communities fully because they simply do not have a decent way to get around.
10. And — don’t lose sight of this! – in a few years . . . you!

The bottom line for politicians all over the world is that this is the majority -- and these people vote. So what could be more logical than to so the arithmetic and go to work for them. Democracy in action!

World Streets 2011

- Doing more, for less, for more.



Annex D: Some handy World Car Free Day references

Car Free Days on World Streets - <http://worldstreets.wordpress.com/category/activitiesevents/car-free-days/>

European Mobility Week at <http://www.mobilityweek.eu/> is a hotbed of useful information and links.

WCFD on Facebook: http://www.facebook.com/home.php?sk=group_132914840099269

WCFD Video Library – at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R3tLUZO8_8&feature=Playlist&p=2120657BD0B30397&index=0&playnext=1

World Car Free Café: Since 1998 at <http://tech.groups.yahoo.com/group/CarFreeCafe/>

World Car Free Days Consortium Homepage: at www.worldcarfreedays.com

World Carfree Network at <http://www.worldcarfree.net/wcf/>

World Streets on Car Free Days – <http://worldstreets.wordpress.com/category/cars/car-free/>

2011 WCFD Quick Survey: Tell the world about your plans for 2011 at <http://guestbook.sparklit.com/entries.spark?gbID=110020>

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