

Open Streets: Streets for People



Implementing the New Urban Agenda (iNUA) #10: Open Streets: Streets for People

"We will promote access for all to safe, age- and gender-responsive, affordable, accessible and sustainable urban mobility and land and sea transport systems, enabling meaningful participation in social and economic activities in cities and human settlements, by integrating transport and mobility plans into overall urban and territorial plans and promoting a wide range of transport and mobility options, in particular by supporting: (a) A significant increase in accessible, safe, efficient, affordable and sustainable infrastructure for public transport, as well as non-motorized options such as walking and cycling, prioritizing them over private motorized transportation."

New Urban Agenda #114

Introducing Open Streets/Ciclovía:

The concept of shutting down streets to motorised traffic so people can cycle, walk and enjoy safe and welcoming streets was first tested on a large scale in Bogotá, Colombia in the mid 1970s. It is called Ciclovía and it happens every Sunday and public holiday between 07h00 and 14h00, during which 120km of streets go car-free. On average, 1.5 million people (over 10% of the city's population) step outside to enjoy the space on a weekly basis. The concept has spread throughout the world, often under the banner of "Open Streets" with hundreds of cities, both in the global north and south, adopting similar interventions.

Ciclovía grew from a desire to create a better urban environment which included helping to tackle Bogotá's mobility challenges. Over time, the focus of the programme shifted to providing an opportunity for healthy recreation, but continuing to be an alternative to daily transport as the routes cover a large part of the city. Indeed, on Sundays many people use the network to travel to work and other destinations. The programme is largely credited as being a catalyst for bicycle infrastructure provision in the 90s.

"Without Ciclovía there would be no bicycle lanes in Bogotá"

- Andres Vergara, Bogotá's transport department

What are Open Streets Days good for?

Streets are large areas of public space and reimagining them as places for people to meet, interact and play helps a city become healthier and more socially integrated. >

Open Streets Days demonstrate this potential and encourage spontaneous activity in this space, creating opportunities for citizens to make the most of their streets. Besides encouraging people to come along and simply enjoy a car-free street, the concept entails mobilising partners and volunteers to co-create the space.

Open Streets Days have proven to be a way of suspending reality and showing urban residents a glimpse of an alternative future for streets. For children growing up in cities, it's a crucial opportunity to introduce bicycle riding, walking and other sustainable transport modes in a safe environment.

Challenging the status quo beyond the day

Our cities have developed during an age of car-centrism, which makes us believe mistakenly that motorised vehicles can lay claim to streets, and all other road users should stay out of their way. We believe Open Streets can help change this perception and encourage us all to share this public space with respect for one another.

"It was conceived as a neutral space that everyone – rich and poor, young and old, female and male, from the left and the right – could access. And we achieved it. Ciclovía recovered 'The Street' for the citizen, snatching it from a mixture of traffic, pollution, crime and state, and turning every citizen into a 'main actor' in the play that unfolded every Sunday."

- Jaime Ortiz, Ciclovía co-founder

In 2012, building on previous attempts by local government to replicate Ciclovía in Cape Town, a citizen-driven group established an 'Open Streets' programme guided by a Manifesto which outlined that streets should:

- Enable safer and more cohesive communities
- Provide platforms for creative expression of local cultures and values
- Be places for recreation and social interaction
- Contribute to job creation and local economic activity
- Provide choice in how we move around the city

How can I plan an Open Streets Day and what do I need?

- **Create a team:** An Open Streets Day will be successful if a variety of people get involved as volunteers. But a core organising team is necessary. Ideally you will have people who can be responsible for the following areas: project management, operations and permits, communications and community engagement. If you have limited resources, it might be that one person wears a few hats. If this is the case, this person will have to complete tasks in order of priority. Getting the road closure and logistics in place are crucial.



- **Find volunteers:** For the day you will definitely need volunteers. Invite people to get involved from the beginning of the stakeholder engagement process to encourage buy-in. Equally important is ensuring the involvement of local communities.

Suggestions for volunteers:

- Invite key volunteers who have knowledge and experience to step into roles with more responsibility
 - Give clear instructions
 - Create a team feel (T-shirts help with this)
 - Give more work than not enough (volunteers like to feel needed)
 - Have a celebration afterwards and get the team's input for future Open Streets Days
- **Engage in partnerships and find co-hosts:** It costs money to shut down a street. Even if government funds the closure, you may need to pay for marshals and other staff. You will also need people to activate the space. This makes seeking out good partners an integral part of the preparation. But it's not only about money. A good partner sees an Open Streets Day as an opportunity and contributes to making it a success. The more diverse your partners are (e.g. government, local shops, sports clubs, NGOs, etc.), the better buy-in, you will ensure.

Often, there might be a good degree of resistance to Open Streets from some local government officials who aren't familiar with the concept and only buy into it once they've seen it implemented successfully. Try and give these potential "gatekeepers" as much information as possible to make their job easy. Develop good relationships with various government departments and invite them to take part on the day. They might be able to tick a box for their awareness programme and help you out at the same time.

- **Plan well and choose a good location:** A good place to start is to hold a planning workshop with the core organising team and brainstorm ideas together. The nature of the street will have an impact on your Open Streets Day. Streets that give some sense of human scale, with places to rest and explore, seem to attract more people. Visiting the site and walking along the street is crucial and can help identify challenges and opportunities. Once you have identified a route, it is important to discuss it with the City's traffic department to make sure there are no obstacles to a road closure. Approach them with two or more options in case they object to your first choice.
- **Communicate widely:** Once you have a basic proposal in place, start speaking to as many people as possible. This will get the ball rolling and attract "champions" to get involved. In addition to inviting people in the local area to join in, it is also vital that you communicate the idea for an Open Streets Day early on, as the road closure will affect them. You'll run into major problems on the day if local residents or others weren't informed in advance! The first step is to do some research and map all the relevant local stakeholders.

Once you've identified a list of stakeholders, draft a summary of the concept of Open Streets and your proposal to bring it to the area. Most importantly, include a clear invitation of ways they can get involved (volunteer, host an activity, become a vendor etc).



Key questions to answer:

- In which area and street do we want to host an Open Streets Day?
- When are we aiming to host it?
- What are we hoping to achieve with it?
- What are the planning milestones that will get us there?
- Who do we want to approach as main partners?

Local stakeholders include:

- Schools, tertiary institutions
- Faith-based organisations
- NGOs & sports clubs
- Civic associations
- Improvement districts
- Neighbourhood watches
- City councillors
- Businesses
- Libraries
- Public transport operators
- Iconic local figures & celebrities
- Police & fire stations

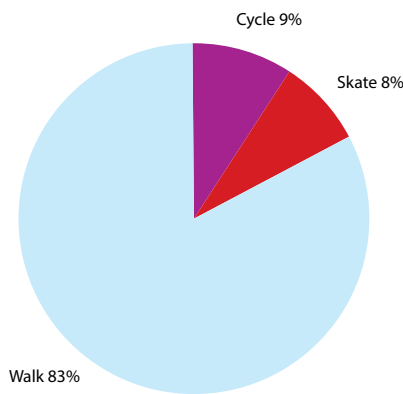
Bringing the street to life: Open Streets Days show the potential of streets as public space that can host a variety of different activities. Rather than trying to programme activities yourself, simply invite other people to use the platform: There might be a resident or business owner along the route who wants to set something up outside their front door, or a local organisation that wants to bring along an activity to share on the day.



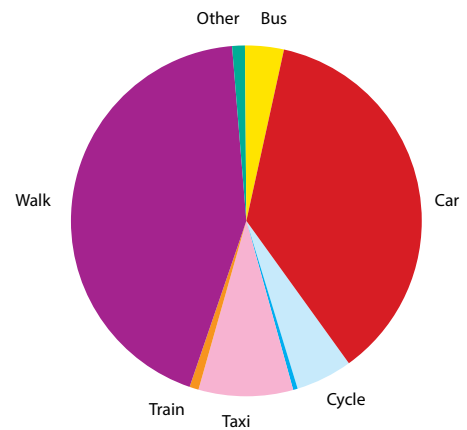
Measuring success

The only way to know what is working and what isn't is to get input from people taking part, including participants, volunteers, activity organisers, vendors, local businesses and government departments. It is important to keep most questions consistent for every Open Streets Day, only tweaking small things as the programme develops to ensure the information elicited is valuable and relevant. This will help you undertake comparative analyses of demographics, travel modes, what people enjoy or don't enjoy and more. Look to partner with a local university if possible to develop surveys and look for a partner with strong research skills to help train your volunteers in this area.

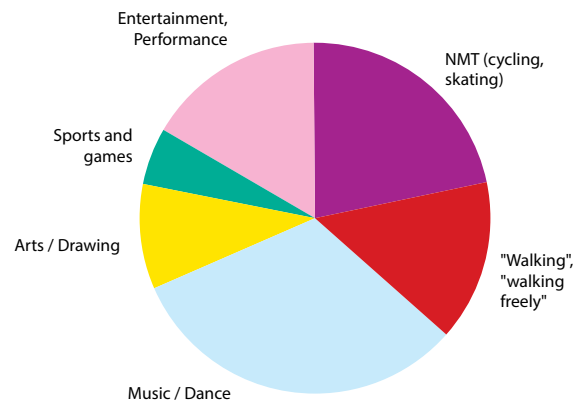
How people move around at Open Streets in Cape Town (2018 - 2019 season)



How people travelled to Open Streets in Cape Town (2018 - 2019 season)



Favourite activities at Open Streets in Cape Town (2018 - 2019 season)



Additional resources:

- > **Open Streets Toolkit** (South Africa) bit.ly/2eLgj1F
- > **Streets for All toolkit** (India) bit.ly/2P5r2Hq
- > **Open Streets Toolkit** (North America) bit.ly/2o2SXww
- > **Cicloviás Recreativas manual** (Latin America) bit.ly/31tCvTK
- > **Healthiest Practice Open Streets toolkit** (North America) bit.ly/2P5B5MH

See how an Open Streets Day feels like in this video

- > **Watch the video on Youtube** bit.ly/33Ncnol



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