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TRANSPORTATION

How Vancouver got half of its citizens out of their cars

50 percent of trips are taken on foot, bike, or transit—including a SeaBus!

BY **ALISSA WALKER** | @AWALKERINLA | DEC 7, 2016, 11:00AM EST



Vancouver's low-impact, high-return bike lanes | [Jeff Arsenault](#)

The news that Copenhagen now has more bikes than cars on its streets seems like a distant fantasy—if not downright impossible—for vehicle-bound American cities. But when it comes to weaning cities off the automobile, the U.S. has a fantastic example to learn from right here in our backyard. Vancouver residents now take an incredible 50 percent of their trips by walking, biking, and riding transit.

Back in 2012, the city set a goal to shift half of its traffic to “sustainable modes” by 2020. Last year, the city achieved that goal, a full five years earlier than expected. A [Streetfilms video](#) explores how, with smart policy and political will, the Canadian city became the best city for walking and biking in North America.

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How did Vancouver do it? One key is improving the infrastructure for people using active modes like walking and biking—keeping them [separated and safe from cars](#). In some cases you’ll see that doesn’t necessarily mean paving new paths and building new sidewalks. Some of the [landscaped bikeways](#) on Vancouver streets are simply large planters blocking off a lane of vehicular traffic. These are instant road diets that add color and life which everyone can appreciate.

But infrastructure isn’t the only investment Vancouver made. There’s an entire part of the plan that’s [just focused on promotion and marketing](#)—all the non-physical ways the city makes people feel welcomed on the streets. Like [incentives for biking to work](#). Now 10 percent of commuters are cyclists.

Another reason Vancouver achieved success so quickly can be attributed to the foresight of the previous generation. It’s the only North American city that has no freeways slicing through its center, which not only improves overall quality of life and transit

connectivity, but also avoids expensive infrastructural overhauls to [reconnect severed communities](#).

Vancouver is now doubling down on its goals as part of a broader [renewable energy mandate](#) to address climate change. The city's new plan is to hit a two-thirds sustainable mode share by 2040. With this kind of momentum, there's no doubt Vancouver will be able to achieve this goal. Every U.S. city should be taking detailed notes.

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