



ENABLING CYCLING CITIES INGREDIENTS FOR SUCCESS

INTERVIEW WITH IDOIA GARMENDIA

Deputy Mayor of Vitoria-Gasteiz City Hall, Councillor of the Environment and Public Space Department,
President of the Environmental Studies Centre





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Deputy Mayor for the Environment
and Public Space of Vitoria-Gasteiz

VITORIA-GASTEIZ

Interview by **Oliver Hatch**, Urbtrans.org

As a city, Vitoria-Gasteiz offers ideal conditions for using bicycles as a mode of urban transport. It is mostly flat, the weather is benign and its size makes it easy to get around by bicycle.

Since the 1980s, Vitoria-Gasteiz has created a large infrastructure of cycle paths. In recent years, as a development of the city's Mobility Plan, the city has made great efforts both to develop and modernise this infrastructure as a solution to the need to interconnect this with the existing cycle lanes.

Over the last 15 years, the city has almost doubled in size. Vitoria-Gasteiz has been transformed from a city in which it was possible to get virtually anywhere on foot into one in which distances have increased considerably. The new Vitoria-Gasteiz of the second decade of the 21st century is a bicycle friendly city. This fact, together with the promotion of bicycles as an alternative form of mobility (Sustainable Mobility and Public Space Plan and the Cycling Mobility Master Plan), has, without doubt, increased the number of journeys made by bicycle. Today, and according to the latest mobility survey, 12% of journeys to places of work and study are made by bicycle.

Today, the challenge is to complete the main network of cycle paths (165 km planned) which at this time amounts to 125 km, calm traffic in most of the streets in the city in order to enable bicycles to share road space with other vehicles in total safety, and to bring about changes in cyclist behaviour to avoid frictions with pedestrians and prevent the circulation of bicycles from endangering the recreational quality of our public spaces.

In your view, how important is political support and commitment for pro-cycling policies?

As in other aspects, political commitment is also a key issue in this matter. In Vitoria-Gasteiz, there is general agreement about the model of city we want from the point of view of mobility and the public space. All the political parties have signed the Citizens Agreement for Sustainable Mobility. This document, which defines a future scenario for the city in terms of mobility, objectives and actions to be developed in order to bring this about, came about as the result of a process of public participation. With the support of all our political parties, the agreement was used as a reference for drafting the Mobility and Public Space Plan of Vitoria-Gasteiz.

Have you a particular success story you can describe in respect of this?

Over the last five years, bicycles have become a real alternative form of mobility in Vitoria-Gasteiz. The change has been spectacular. The increase in the presence of bicycles in the city has been very noticeable. From the mobility survey carried out in 2006 to the one made in 2011, the percentage of journeys made by bicycle has doubled. According to the latest survey, 7% of journeys made in Vitoria-Gasteiz are by bicycle.

Is a well-planned and steady flow of finance for cycling measures necessary?

The policies drawn up to promote bicycles as a functional alternative form of mobility are long-term policies. Therefore, before initiating a project of this type, first we must ensure, from the financial viewpoint, that we can develop these policies in a sustainable manner.

What is the position of cycle planning within your wider land-use and transport policies?

In Vitoria-Gasteiz, the use of bicycles as an alternative form of mobility through the Cyclist Mobility Plan is being promoted within the context of a Mobility Plan, the main objectives of which are to reduce the number of private car journeys and to recover quality public space for the people. At this time, we are working on the review of our General Urban Planning Programme. Without doubt, this is a magnificent opportunity to integrate bicycle mobility planning in the urban planning system of our city.

Does your city have a cycling department or team and if so, how vital are they in promoting cycling?

No, at this time, Vitoria-Gasteiz City Hall does not have a Bicycle Department. Nevertheless, the Environmental Studies Centre (CEA) is performing similar duties to those of a Bicycle Department. In coordination with the Public Space Department, the Traffic Department and the local police, CEA is working to implement the measures proposed in the Cyclist Mobility Plan.

Do you consult with your cycle user groups and neighbourhood groups on cycling and how useful are their views and their role?

We work closely with the Urban Cyclist Association of our city (Gasteizko Biziklteroak). City Hall has signed an agreement with this association to carry out the work of a bicycle observatory and to collaborate with City Hall in promoting the bicycle culture. Members of this association are monitoring the development of cycling mobility in the city. Municipal specialists are discussing with members of this association all the projects designed to create cycling infrastructures and to promote this mode of transport.

How necessary for cycling is it that different city departments cooperate and work together?

As I pointed out above, it is essential for all municipal departments responsible for matters relating to cycling mobility to work in a coordinated manner. It is also essential for there to be a person or department responsible for facilitating the coordination between departments. At this time, the CEA is doing this work.

Has your city been able to learn and adapt ideas from other cities for cycling - if so, how?

As in other European cities, we are promoting the bicycle as an alternative form of mobility within the framework of the Sustainable Urban Mobility Plan. We are promoting active mobility (pedestrians and cyclists), public transport and we are trying to discourage journeys made in private cars. By structuring the city into superblocks, we are trying to avoid the through traffic of motorised vehicles in a large part of the streets in the city. We are taking measures to calm traffic in those streets in which there is no through traffic of cars.

Thus, at this time, we are working to calm traffic in 47 streets in the city centre by reducing the maximum permitted speed to 30 km/hr. Moreover, in those streets in which there is sufficient space, we have created bicycle lanes that run against the flow of traffic and which contribute to improving the permeability of the city to bicycles. This measure contributes to creating safe conditions so that cyclists can share road space with cars. Even though the measure has not been fully implemented and despite the fact that the public has not had time to internalise the reasons that have led to it being taken, we have already seen that this measure has been welcomed by cyclists.

Having almost completed the main network of cycle paths that articulate cycling mobility in the city, in Vitoria-Gasteiz, efforts to promote cycling include motorised traffic calming and achieving infrastructural conditions and of public perception that will allow the coexistence of the bicycle and motorised traffic in most streets.

To what extent do your city transport planners listen to the views of residents on cycling?

Since the beginning, the Mobility Plan has been developed with public participation. A citizen participation platform has been created, the Citizen Forum for Sustainable Mobility, with a broad representation of the social agents of the city. This forum has defined the future scenario of mobility we want for Vitoria-Gasteiz. At this time, and with the intention of reforming the Circulation Bye-law, within the framework of the forum, the coexistence model for pedestrians and cyclists is being discussed.

During the period of five years, during which the mobility plan has been developed, each of the interested parties has been consulted before putting any measure into force. Public participation is a key aspect in any decision-making process. In addition to making sense in itself, it is essential to ensure the feasibility of any measure.

How does your city balance the provision of ‘hard’ measures for cycling (infrastructure) with the provision of ‘soft’ measures such as maps and promotion measures. How necessary are the communications and marketing of cycling initiatives to all your city residents?

Although, traditionally, cyclist mobility has been promoted through infrastructural measures (bicycle racks and bicycle lanes), since the drafting of the Cyclist Mobility Plan, we have made great efforts to use social tools (communications, education, public awareness and participation) in the promotion of the bicycle as an alternative form of urban mobility: we have drawn up a map of bicycle lanes and streets with calmed traffic; we have created a bicycle route planner on the municipal website; we have signed an agreement with the Urban Cyclists

Association to promote cycling mobility and to create a bicycle observatory; we have developed communications campaigns aimed at different sectors of society; we have created a guide with advice on cycling safety; we have programmed training courses for bicycle safety; and on an annual basis we programme Bicycle Week with a wide range of activities focusing on bicycle culture, etc.

Why is cycling important to you and your city?

As a result of the characteristics described above, pedestrian mobility has always played a very important role in the city of Vitoria-Gasteiz. Although Vitoria-Gasteiz has ceased to be a pedestrian-scale city as a result of the growth it has undergone over recent decades, its dimensions make the bicycle a viable mobility alternative to the car. Within the context of the efforts made by our city to promote car free lifestyles, we wish to continue promoting active mobility modes (pedestrians and cyclists) so that, together with public transport and other alternatives such as car sharing, they can help us to minimise the use of private automobiles.

On the other hand, the promotion of sustainable mobility is a consequence of the “Strategy of Vitoria-Gasteiz in the struggle against climate change”. Taking the Mayors’ Agreement as a starting point, our municipality has set a target to obtain by 2020 a reduction of at least 20% of CO2 emissions compared to 2006.

How did you become convinced that cycling has an important role in your city?

When I became aware of the opportunities (efficiency, competitiveness and improvements in quality of life) that become available for a city that supports the idea of making economic dynamism compatible with innovation, preservation of air quality, reduction in the emissions of greenhouse effect gases and the recovery of public space for functions other than mobility and transit. In such an endeavour, the bicycle plays, without doubt, a very important role.

If you had one recommendation to make to another city starting to plan for bicycles, what would it be?

I would recommend it to promote the bicycle as a real, alternative form of mobility within the framework of proposals for a Sustainable Urban Mobility Plan, which must be integrated in the urban planning programme of the city and the territorial development of the region.

I would seek to create a basic network of cycle paths to articulate cycling mobility in the city and, in turn, would take measures to calm traffic allowing bicycles to share space with other vehicles in all the other streets in which they are no cycling infrastructures. Communications, education, public awareness and participation must play a very important role in this process of promoting the use of bicycles.

The interviews were taken by Oliver Hatch,
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THIS INTERVIEW IS PART OF 'ENABLING CYCLING CITIES: INGREDIENTS FOR SUCCESS'

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The CIVITAS Initiative is co-funded by the Energy and Transport parts of the EU's RTD Framework. This publication is produced under the auspices of CIVITAS MIMOSA, a collaborative project of the CIVITAS Initiative, funded through the EC's Seventh Framework Programme for Research and Technological Development. All text in this publication is based upon the experiences gathered by the editorial board of CIVITAS MIMOSA and by the contributing authors. The images used have been provided by CIVITAS MIMOSA and by the contributing authors, unless stated otherwise.

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