

COVID-19, Public Transportation, and Public Health Communication

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Although necessary for controlling the COVID-19 pandemic, public health and social measures (PHSMs) that restricted public transportation in cities diverted people to private motorized vehicle use, a trend that persisted despite evidence that public transit represented a low-risk COVID transmission environment. Mass transit and active modes of transportation in cities are key for preventing noncommunicable diseases (NCDs) and injuries and for reducing traffic-related emissions. Under the Partnership for Healthy Cities, Buenos Aires, Bangkok, Cali, Ho Chi Minh City, Istanbul, and Kyiv implemented communication campaigns to encourage and inform citizens how to safely resume use of public transportation and alternative safe, active transportation. Between July 2020 and March 2021, campaigns reinforced adherence to the 3Ws (wash hands, watch distance, wear a mask), and promoted walking and cycling as commuting alternatives. In

total, the cities conducted social media campaigns, displayed posters (605), billboards (50), and videos (15) at bus, train, and bike stations, cycling lanes, and hospitals. Posters at bus stops in Buenos Aires were visible to 286,000 passengers/day, 16% of the city's passengers. Cali's social media campaign reached 1.7 million people. 70 km of new cycle lane added 1,527 cycling trips, preventing an estimated 266,920 tons of CO₂ emissions. Bangkok's social media campaign reached 511,660 people and videos on television reached 1.75 million people. Ho Chi Minh City reached 48,000 passengers/day on public transport and totaled 4 million impressions on social media. Istanbul's social media campaign reached 20,000 people, promoted messaging on 50 billboards across the city's cycling network, and 4 Turkish cities replicated the campaign. Kyiv reached 800,000 transit passengers with 2,200 posters in metro stations. Simple and clear messaging is key for crisis communication and is essential to address overlapping public health and mobility priorities.

Key messages:

- Cities are at the forefront to use communication campaigns to promote PHSMs and transport alternatives when adapting COVID-19 responses to address negative impact on urban transport and mobility.
- Simple and clear messaging is key for crisis communication and is essential to address overlapping public health and mobility priorities.