

PRO/CON: Would city centers be better with no cars on the streets?

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Word Count **963**



Copenhagen, the capital of Denmark, was the first city to experiment with a car ban. Wikipedia

PRO: Air quality and noise levels improve

The record is clear. Cities that have eliminated automobiles from their busy city centers have improved not only their air quality but also the overall livability of those crowded business areas.

This change has led to an increased use of public transportation. That has helped subways, trams, monorails and buses running on clean-burning natural gas.

Banning motor vehicles has made working and living in city centers much more enjoyable for commuters. Without the gases that the vehicles let out, commuters no longer gag on harmful fumes while rushing to and from work.

Less traffic also means workers spend less time sitting idly in their cars and more time being productive at work.

Walking, Bicycling Are Less Risky

Recent studies show that turning city centers into traffic-free zones is also good for local businesses. It gives workers more time to visit these businesses during their lunch hours and breaks.

And city-center residents find car-free environments, which are less noisy, much more enjoyable.

People walking around also do not have to fear being hit by cars, which is especially important to families with children.

Furthermore, people who travel by bicycle instead of by car experience health benefits.

All in all, there is hardly any downside to imposing vehicle bans in downtown areas.

Money Needed For Public Transportation

But more support is in order. Public transportation systems desperately need more money from the government.

Washington, D.C.'s Metro system is a great example of that need. It has massive safety problems that cause daily delays and shutdowns. In addition, there are almost daily reports of its passengers being beaten and robbed.

The system needs a major injection of tax dollars. With more government money being spent on its metro, D.C. could follow the examples of European cities.

Last year, Oslo, the capital of Norway, began banning some of the cars in its central business district.

And presto! There was a marked improvement in quality of life, worker productivity and sales for downtown shops and restaurants.

As a result, Oslo plans to ban all cars from its city center by 2019.

Copenhagen, the capital of Denmark, was the first city to experiment with a car ban. From a partial ban in 1962, Copenhagen quickly became a shining model for other cities.

Its central thoroughfare was transformed from a traffic-clogged street to a walkway with designated bike trails. It is now one of the major tourist attractions in Europe.

Even California has recognized the benefits of traffic-free downtown zones.

Change has obviously begun. Car-free city centers are on the way! Their time has come.

ABOUT THE WRITER: Wayne Madsen is a progressive commentator whose articles have appeared in leading newspapers throughout the U.S. and Europe. Readers may write him at 415 Choo Choo Lane, Valrico, FL 33594.

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CON: Alternatives are more expensive, less beneficial

"Take back our streets!" is a common slogan among city activists.

No, they're not talking about reducing violent crime. What they want to take city streets back from is cars, which they think lower their quality of life. But the alternatives they propose cost more and provide fewer benefits.

In the 1970s, anti-car activists persuaded the government to fund public transportation systems more than highways.

Today, even though more than 90 percent of households have cars, governments spend 28 percent of the nation's transportation funds on public transportation. Yet public transportation makes less money than it did in 1980.

Public Transportation Service Is A Myth

The myth that mass transportation can serve most people also contributes to unemployment and poverty.

In New York City, one-third of residents take public transportation to work. It is where 40 percent of all U.S. public transportation trips happen. However, only 15 percent of jobs can be reached by public transportation in less than an hour. New Yorkers with cars can reach more than five times as many jobs in 60 minutes.

When cities such as Chicago, Philadelphia and Sacramento tried to change streets to pedestrian-only areas in the 1960s and '70s, customers stopped coming and businesses closed.

Environmental activists claim that automobiles should be banned to stop air pollution, but that's not quite right. Cars have become far cleaner in recent years and will be even cleaner still in the near future.

With Speeds Slow, Risks Are Low

Then there is the issue of traffic safety. The traffic and low speeds in America's downtowns help keep serious car accidents rare relative to the rest of the country.

The majority of deadly car crashes occur in rural areas, where fewer than 20 percent of Americans live. The rest largely occur in the auto-oriented suburbs where most Americans reside, not in city centers. Banning cars in the dense cities where crashes pose the lowest risk is both an overreaction and a misapprehension of the problem.

None of this means that there aren't problems with cars in our major cities, many arising from poor highway planning in the 1950s and '60s.

But 21st-century problems will not be solved by trying to return our cities to the auto-free 19th century. We should work to improve technology, not outlaw it.

ABOUT THE WRITER: Marc Scribner is a research fellow at the Competitive Enterprise Institute, a free-market think tank in Washington, D.C. Readers may write him at CEI, 2, 1899 L St NW, Washington, D.C. 20036.

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Directions: Read “PRO/CON: Would city centers be better with no cars on the streets?”

Write sentences about the article by using **FOUR** vocabulary words. Write them as **QUIZ QUESTIONS**, so you can switch with a partner in class tomorrow. (Put your key on the back.)

A. _____ B. _____
C. _____ D. _____

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

