



Putting feet first in Curitiba



Pedestrianised streets are used for open air concerts and contribute to vibrant city life.



Pedestrians get red carpet treatment in Curitiba where public transport and the pedestrian mode has priority over private cars.



In South Africa, where the majority of people do not have access to cars, it makes sense to prioritise pedestrian traffic and public transport, and there's a lot to be learnt from this inspiring Brazilian city.

BY MARGARET MCKENZIE

In 1972 the city of Curitiba took a bold step, paving the main business street in its city centre to create a social space that could only be used by people on foot.

After an initial outcry against the move, Curitiba residents have come to love this pedestrian area, so much so that in a recent ballot on the issue, 95% of voters supported keeping the area paved. This was not the only road to be turned over to walkers – a further 52 roads were paved and made pedestrian-only areas.

The benefits of having pedestrian zones are many. They give city spaces back to the people who use them. Pedestrians no longer have to compete with cars when moving around, so they can walk around the area safely and freely. Paved spaces are also used to host craft and other markets, providing a relaxed outdoor retail experience for locals and tourists. And they are regularly used for special events such as outdoor music concerts and health programmes, such as vaccine campaigns.

These paved zones are just one of many initiatives in Curitiba that reflect respect and care for pedestrians. Another impor-

tant feature of this city – which has impressed many South African planners and politicians – are high-density mixed-use corridors. These corridors are lined with high-rise buildings that have shops and other businesses on the first two floors and residential apartments on the upper floors. The corridors promote pedestrian use as residents can access many shops and services in close proximity to their homes. They also provide covered sidewalks for shelter from the frequent rain.

Other important features that promote pedestrian use and pedestrian safety are wide, well-defined pavements and street furniture for waiting and resting.

In addition to its support of pedestrians the city also prioritises users of public transport. Curitiba has a world-renowned Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) System, which has now been included in the South African national approach with systems being planned for many cities, including Cape Town and Johannesburg. Whereas most cities with effective public transit systems have subways or light rail systems, Curitiba has designed their bus-based transport system to include many

of the features that make subways popular with public transit users. Key features of the BRT are:

- Dedicated roads for public buses, which means that buses do not compete with private transport and can move quickly between stops. In addition to dedicated bus roads, there are also dedicated bus lanes that assist in keeping public buses moving quickly.
- A system where users pay for tickets before the bus arrives and wait in a dedicated, raised space which enables commuters to walk directly onto the bus without having to mount stairs. In traditional bus systems users pay for tickets once they get onto the bus, which causes delays and slows the entire trip.
- Integration terminals that link up bus routes. On arrival in the terminal users can transfer to another bus without paying for a new ticket. Integration terminals often include a shopping area within the terminal, which are controlled spaces as you can only enter them if you pay for a bus ticket. As a result integration terminals are safe spaces for shopping and waiting for transfers.



The BRT facilitates access for people in wheelchairs.

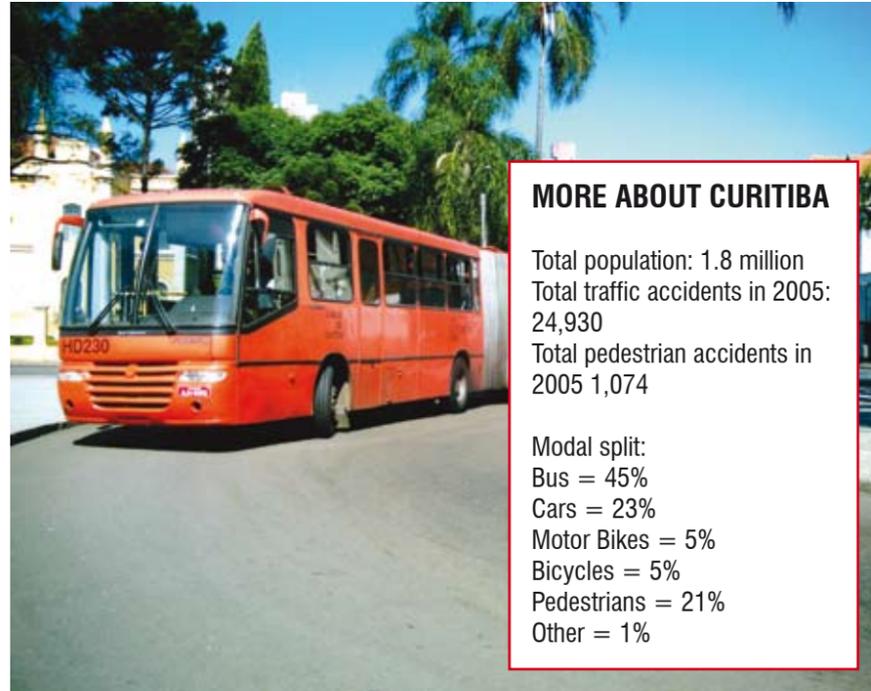
Photos: Vivi Chi



Photos: Wikipedia

The dedicated bus lanes of the BRT system run alongside the high-density zones, which ensures that there are sufficient users to make the system financially viable. Currently the City of Curitiba raises sufficient funds through the ticket sales to pay for the operation and maintenance of the BRT system.

Margaret McKenzie is the local project officer for Imagine Durban, a long term planning project that is a joint initiative of the eThekweni Municipality and the PLUS Network. She visited Curitiba to attend the PLUS Network's Public Transportation Workshop held in December 2007



MORE ABOUT CURITIBA

Total population: 1.8 million
Total traffic accidents in 2005: 24,930
Total pedestrian accidents in 2005 1,074

Modal split:
Bus = 45%
Cars = 23%
Motor Bikes = 5%
Bicycles = 5%
Pedestrians = 21%
Other = 1%

BRIGHT IDEAS

This South American city of around 1.8 million people has also inspired other cities with its forward thinking ideas. These are some of them.

Easy access to services

Curitiba has built citizen streets in each of its city regions, which include the offices of the major government services that Curitiba residents may want to access on a regular basis. For instance, you can sign up for lights and water at your local citizen street, apply for a building permit, claim unemployment insurance, use a public library, apply for an ID book and buy monthly passes for the Curitiba BRT. In addition to government departments citizen streets include commercial shops, meeting spaces for community meetings and government consultation meetings and an indoor football pitch. To make citizen streets as accessible as possible they have been located next to integration terminals of the BRT.

Pioneering recycling

All residents are expected to separate their waste into three basic categories – organic waste, recyclable waste (metal, paper, plastic and glass) and toxic materials. Organic waste is collected from three times a week in outlying areas and daily in closer areas. The same municipal waste collection service is then used for a separate collection of recyclable waste which generally takes place two to three times a week. Bigger waste generators like shopping malls must separate their waste, although households are not expected to. Toxic waste is collected monthly on designated dates at the major bus terminals. The municipality has a factory where the recyclable waste is separated and then sold. The municipality makes between R270 000 and R310 000 a month, which is used to pay for social projects within the city. The rationale for this recycling system is to reduce the amount of garbage placed in its landfill site, reduce the amount of pollutants entering the environment and to save on natural resources that would have to be used for making products that can now be used from recycled material.

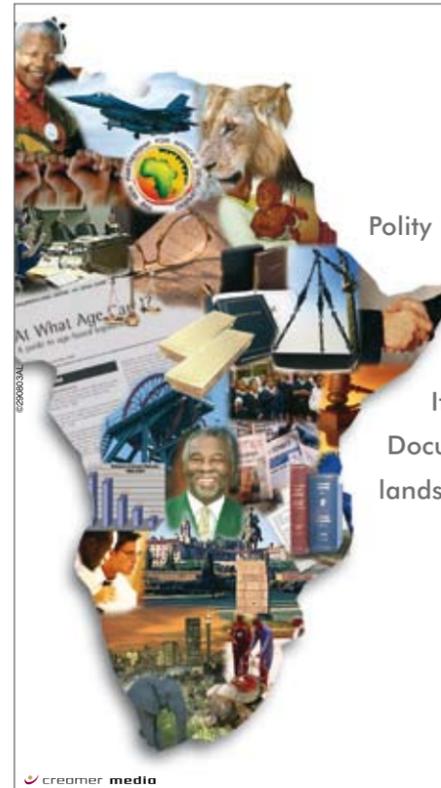
The municipality also assists individual waste pickers who make a living from collecting recyclables. A special programme provided them with customized trolleys for collection and education on road rules and waste picking etiquette. The city encourages waste pickers to pick up recyclables before the municipal trucks drive through the area. As a result of the formal separation of waste, waste pickers have been able to increase their collection rates and improve their livelihoods. There are about 4 000 waste pickers working in Curitiba.

Food for waste

In 1991 Curitiba initiated an innovative programme called the Green Exchange, which exchanges recyclable waste material for food. As part of this programme municipal waste collection trucks regularly visit high-density poor areas at designated times, accompanied by food trucks. For each four kilograms of recyclable material handed into the waste truck, one kilogram of food is exchanged. Generally the food is fresh vegetables and fruit sourced from local farmers. This increases the collection of recyclable material from high-density poor areas, which can be difficult to service because of narrow roads, provides healthy food for poor communities and supports local farmers by buying up their leftover produce.



Photo: Vivvi Chi



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