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Implementation Guides May 2021

15-minute cities: How to create connected places

[Inclusive and Equitable Climate Action](#)[Spotlight On: 15-Minute Cities](#)[Transport](#)[Urban Planning and Design](#)Author(s): **C40 Cities Climate Leadership Group, C40 Knowledge Hub**

The major advantage of 15-minute city neighbourhoods is that they offer convenience and quality of life, but not isolation. A 'complete neighbourhood' gives personal time back to people by reducing the frequency and length of unwanted trips, but physical and digital connectivity must be at the heart of any 15-minute city strategy, prioritising equitable access to social and economic opportunities. This article looks at how cities can foster greater connections between and beyond neighbourhoods, drawing on the good-practice ideas and experience of leading cities, as well as research on *Green and thriving neighbourhoods* by Arup and C40.

The 15-minute city integrates a set of four complementary, overlapping principles for people-centred urban development. It ties together and builds on strands of equitable urban climate action to create a model that helps to build more liveable, human-scale cities – prioritising the most underserved neighbourhoods and disadvantaged groups. Already, there are cities adopting this approach around the world; every city can join them. Read about what the 15-minute city offers, about common myths and misunderstandings, and our series of four articles on how to design and implement a 15-minute city strategy. Also find relevant policies and initiatives in our 15-minute city initiatives explorer.

Develop the accessibility and affordability of public transit for longer trips

While residents of a 15-minute city shouldn't *have* to travel far to meet their basic daily needs, public transit – as well as walking and cycling – connections to the rest of the city are critical to facilitate longer commutes, social trips and other cross-city travel. Efficient, affordable and well-designed transport

systems improve the ease and quality of longer trips, reducing the use of private vehicles and traffic in neighbourhoods across the city. *How to make public transport an attractive option in your city* looks at what makes a good, well-used public transport system that serves the whole city, and *How cities can make public transport inclusive, equitable and accessible for everyone* looks at addressing issues associated with coverage, affordability, accessibility, safety and security. The following points will help to improve the quality and equitable use of any public transport system, but are especially relevant to a 15-minute city strategy:

- **Provide good walking and cycling connections to existing transport stops and stations.** Ensure that transit stations, interchanges and bus routes are well served with secure bike parking and clear wayfinding signage, with quality pedestrian space in the surrounding area, and that stations and stops are connected to the network of walking and cycling street infrastructure. Jakarta, for example, is using low-cost materials such as paint and planters around public transport stations and stops to improve the public realm and increase safety for pedestrians and cyclists.¹ Heidelberg's new Bahnstadt neighbourhood, a brownfield site next to the central train station, has been designed to maximise walking, cycling and transit connectivity in addition to being one of the largest passive-house districts in the world. The National Association of City Transport Officials' (NACTO) *Transit Street Design Guide* offers practical advice.
- **Improve the quality and density of public transport links between neighbourhoods and to poorly-connected neighbourhoods.** This might mean adding connecting bus routes through underserved neighbourhoods, improving the density of bus stops and increasing the speed and frequency of service, including by upgrading bus systems to Bus Rapid Transit (BRT). For example, building on the success of temporary lanes implemented during the pandemic, Boston has permanently reserved a lane on primary roads for buses.² Informed by extensive community engagement, Medellín built a highly successful Metrocable cable car network to improve city access from the most underserved informal settlements on the city's hillsides. Metrocable is integrated with the metro network and has slashed travel times, reduced travel costs and improved economic opportunities for low-income residents. It has also leveraged further public and private investment in kindergartens, sports facilities, public space and more, and has become a symbol of equity and social transformation in Medellín.³
- **Maximise the affordability and accessibility of the public transport system.** This means designing or adapting bus stops to ensure that all residents, including people with disabilities and care-giving responsibilities, are able to use the service. Low-income residents should be prioritised for any transit subsidies. *Disability Inclusive Public Transport* gives practical advice and low-cost solutions, focusing on African and Asian cities. Cities should also ensure that street space reallocation schemes and walkability improvements are designed with vulnerable users in mind.



- **Facilitate multi-modal journeys with digital technology.** An integrated digital system should be designed to ensure the ease and affordability of multi-modal journeys. Residents should not be penalised for a poorly connected trip that requires multiple buses, for instance. It should also enable easy payments, provide live transport updates and be easily integrated with other modes, such as shared bike schemes. Consider partnering with private-sector suppliers to develop these services and make use of existing technologies. The [Citymapper](#) app, for example, operates in over 50 cities globally and uses mobile and open transport data to help residents and visitors navigate the public transport system. Dar es Salaam's [DAR City Navigator](#) app provides users with real-time information on multiple transit modes, while Madrid has several online [multimodal transport apps](#) to inform travellers about the best ways and times to travel. Apps can also help to improve travel safety: Bogotá's [Safetipin](#) app allows women to rate their perception of personal safety on the transit system, providing georeferenced data to inform improvements.

Develop digital infrastructure to ensure everyone has internet access

Access to education, job opportunities and more often relies on digital as well as physical connectivity. The shift to widespread remote working and the digitalisation of services, fast-tracked by the pandemic, also supports 15-minute city strategies as it means more people spend their weekday in their own or nearby neighbourhoods, supporting local high-street shops and frequenting local co-working spaces, for instance, rather than commuting into the centre of the city. As well as fast-tracking the digital shift, however, the pandemic exposed inequalities in access to services, making investment in affordable, high-quality digital connectivity for all critical to realising the benefits for all.

To fast-track wi-fi access in ‘internet deserts’, where access is most limited, cities can focus on public places:

- **Partner with internet providers to offer fast and free wi-fi in public spaces and on key public transport routes.** Bangkok Metropolitan Authority, in collaboration with mobile operators and internet service providers, offers a free public wi-fi service at 23,000 hotspots in schools, on main streets and in parks, hospitals, trains and bus stations around the city.⁴ In the five New York City boroughs, [LinkNYC](#) offers free wi-fi, phone calls, device charging and tablets to access city services, maps and more, provided by the City of New York and a NYC-based tech business, CityBridge.



“Especially in the outskirts of the city, telecentres are crucial for those who don’t have computers or smartphones.”

Daniel Annenberg, São Paulo Municipal Secretary of Innovation and Technology⁵

- **Upgrade facilities in government-owned buildings to offer internet access and co-working spaces.** Comfortable neighbourhood working spaces with good internet access will help to inject life into neighbourhood main streets and encourage people to work remotely. These spaces are especially valuable for residents who are unable to work or study at home, whether due to a lack of internet access or a lack of suitable workspace. As well as incentivising and encouraging businesses to use their premises as co-working spaces in quieter hours, cities can upgrade and expand municipal facilities. In São Paulo, where a home internet connection can cost more than 10% of the minimum wage and internet services are patchy in low-income neighbourhoods, the city government has upgraded its telecentres for co-working.⁶ During the pandemic, the City of Melbourne opened pop-up community working and meeting spaces in council buildings and vacant shops to support greater local working as part of its 20-minute neighbourhoods pilot project. London’s Creating Open Workspaces guide gives more information and examples of ways to provide and promote co-working spaces.

Digitalise city services to reduce unnecessary and unwanted trips

Also invest in decentralised, in-person public services as part of a 15-minute city strategy

In-person access is still important to serve those who are unable or uninterested in using online platforms. The neighbourhood-level provision of basic services is a core part of a complete 15-minute city neighbourhood.

The digitalisation of public services allows residents to avoid unwanted trips, improves efficiency and lowers costs. Building on and learning from the rapid, widespread digitalisation of public services during the pandemic, cities can strengthen and expand online services further as part of a 15-minute city strategy. This might mean, for example, upgrading digital healthcare apps to facilitate online diagnosis, providing online library-book renewals or improving ease of access. Estonia is a world leader in the digitalisation of public services thanks to the E-Estonia programme, which now offers a briefing service to support other institutions.

Cities can also advance the use of online platforms and technology for community engagement in

planning projects. Santa Monica, California for example, uses a ‘dating app’ format for planning consultations. A smartphone app shows residents a series of images and asks them to ‘swipe’ yes or no, with a view to simplifying and democratising the planning process.⁷



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