

- World Carfree Network -

Charter

The Heavy Costs of Automobile Dependence

Automobile dependence has led to the global spread of an environmentally and socially destructive way of life. In 1950, the world had 70 million cars, trucks and buses. By 1994, there were nine times that number, or 630 million – which since 1970 has been growing at the rate of 16 million vehicles per year. If this growth continues, by the year 2025 there will be well over 1 billion motor vehicles on the world's roads. They consume 37 million barrels of oil a day – half of the world's petroleum consumption. They are responsible for nearly half of our air pollution and at least one-third of our greenhouse gas emissions.

Cars – whether labelled 'clean,' 'green' or otherwise – have become one of the leading causes of injury and death in almost every nation. Motor vehicle traffic kills four times as many people as wars – 1.26 million people a year. That's more than 3,000 people killed on the world's roads every day, not even counting the contribution to asthma, cancer, leukemia and lung disease. When the 10-15 million annual road injuries and disabilities are factored into the equation, along with the deaths and injuries caused to animals, the problem reaches truly catastrophic proportions.

Adding to the tragedy, automobiles shape and distort our urban environment. They replace lively, pleasant, walkable, human-scaled communities with low-density, sprawled-out environments designed for getting elsewhere as fast as possible. With wide streets devoted to car traffic and vast seas of asphalt devoted to park-

ing, our daily destinations are placed increasingly out of reach of our feet. Space for social interaction and cultural exchange is diluted and dispersed, inhibiting the informal social contacts that bind societies together. Life is pushed indoors, separated and compartmentalised.

Our society's dependence on an expensive, inequitable technology – the most resource-intensive means of locomotion ever devised – has expanded to achieve a radical monopoly in much of the industrialised world. This automobile-motorway-petroleum system denies free mobility to children, the elderly, the poor and the physically handicapped. Public transport, bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure is tacked on as an afterthought, if at all. Our physical and emotional health suffers and our level of physical activity plummets, contributing to a global obesity epidemic. By accommodating the car at all costs, our society creates an urban wasteland that substitutes sense of place and sense of community with isolation and alienation.

Carfree Communities for the Future

With the car responsible for such a litany of negative impacts on humanity and nature, carfree communities are a logical cornerstone of a sustainable society. By following ecological and socially inclusive principles, we can build exciting, beautiful and harmonious environments on a human scale. By creating pedestrian-oriented, bicycle-friendly human habitats, we can reintroduce routine physical activity into people's daily lives. We can make destinations easily accessible to children, the elderly, the poor and the physically handicapped. We can transform existing

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villages, towns and cities into more desirable places to live and work, with a healthy density and mix of homes, shops, businesses and cultural destinations. We can at the same time minimise our ecological footprint by dramatically reducing our contribution to oil dependence and climate change.

In addition to building carfree communities, we will work to improve the viability of alternatives within the car-dependent context. We will promote alternative transport infrastructure that physically replaces car lanes and parking space, in order to tangibly reduce car traffic and car-based pollution. We will campaign against proposals for new roads, road widenings and new parking facilities. We will point out that social and ecological health cannot be achieved simply by using cars less, or switching to 'greener' cars – which displace pollution while leaving the car-

based urban form intact, along with its patterns of high consumption and energy use.

In seeking alternatives to our present system of industrialised traffic, the concept of access by proximity can be much more useful than mobility. Human settlements, we often forget, were built to maximise the opportunities for interaction – to bring people and destinations together and to minimise transport of goods and people. Therefore – in addition to promoting alternative transport – we will work to reallocate dead, empty, car-dominated spaces to destinations such as shops, workplaces, gathering places, playgrounds, parks and community gardens. Utilising carfree days, Bike to Work Weeks and other innovative programmes, we will work together to improve local livability and build broad public support for transport reform.



Member Organisations

World Carfree Network welcomes new member organisations whose policies and practices are consistent with those of the network.

According to Article 5 of our statutes: "Member Organisations and 'Active Individuals' (those involved in the network but not associated with a member organisation) sign the network's charter to officially join the network. By signing they agree to abide by both the charter and [the network's] statutes." The full statutes, as well as other information for member organisations, can be found at www.worldcarfree.net/about_us/.

Organisation name _____

Individual signing / position _____

Signature /date / place _____

Organisation address _____

City / country / postal code _____

Telephone / fax _____

E-mail / web address _____

*Prospective member organisations must return a signed original of this charter to:
World Carfree Network, International Coordination Centre, Krátká 26, Prague 10, Czech Republic*