

Paris boulevards car-free for a day (Update)

September 27 2015



People walk and cycle along the Champs Elysee Avenue during the "Car-Free Day" event taking place in the French capital Paris, and organised by the offices mayor Hidalgo, on September 27, 2015

Paris staged a car-free day for the first time on Sunday, with large parts of the increasingly polluted French capital taken over by cyclists, joggers and families with pushchairs on roads normally choked by vehicles.

The roaring traffic of the world-renowned Champs-Elysees avenue was replaced by people strolling in the late September sunshine.

Paris became the latest city worldwide to hold a car-free day as it prepares to host United Nations-led climate negotiations this December seeking to seal a post-2020 pact on curbing greenhouse gases.

All traffic except taxis and emergency vehicles was banned in four central arrondissements, or districts, from 11:00 am to 6:00 pm.

Paris mayor Anne Hidalgo said she would have liked cars to be silenced across the whole city.

'It's a first'

"We didn't get as wide a perimeter as we'd have liked, we asked for the whole of Paris," she said at the start of the event.

"But it's a first and I think next year it will be even bigger."

Hidalgo was accompanied by the mayors of Brussels, Sao Paulo in Brazil and Bristol in southwest England, which have also held car-free days.

Elsewhere in Paris, cars were asked to stick to a pedestrian speed limit of 20 kilometres (12 miles) an hour—although many drivers ignored the request.

Still, the initiative drew rave reviews from many of those who took advantage of the car-free streets on Sunday.



Picture taken early in the morning on September 27, 2015 shows two men with bikes chatting in front of the Eiffel Tower before taking part in the day's "Journey without cars" event

"It's very pleasurable," Randy, an American tourist, told AFP. "It's wonderful to be able to just ride freely and not worry about cars."

French cyclist Renaud, echoed that sentiment, saying Paris needed to take more steps to stem the daily flow of vehicles.

"If we want a city that is clean, beautiful and green... I believe that we must not hesitate to ban and thus limit cars in the city," he added.

Paris has struggled with an increasingly troubling air pollution problem caused by vehicles, heating and heavy industry, which generate tiny

floating particles that can penetrate deep into the lungs and the blood system, causing health problems.

Twice in the past two years authorities have invoked drastic restrictions—which had not been used since 1997—that forced half the cars off the road in the French capital and its surroundings in an effort to curb smog.

The restrictions allowed drivers to take to the road every other day and were enforced by hundreds of police officers writing citations carrying a fine of 22 euros (\$25) to those who defied the rules.

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