Pedestrians take over Champs-Elysees as Paris goes green

May 8 2016

People walk on the Champs Elysees in Paris, France, Sunday, May 8, 2016. Pedestrians have taken over the Champs Elysees as part of a new program to ban traffic from the famous Paris avenue once a month. The initiative, for what is usually one of the busiest roads in the French capital, was launched by Paris Mayor Anne Hidalgo and is aimed at reducing pollution in the city. (AP Photo/Kamil Zihnioglu)

Pedestrians took over the Champs-Elysees on Sunday as part of a new

program to ban traffic from the famous Paris avenue once a month.

The initiative, for what is usually one of the busiest roads in the French capital, was launched by Paris Mayor Anne Hidalgo and is aimed at reducing pollution in the city.

Hidalgo couldn't have dreamt of a better day to launch her project as temperatures reached 27 C (80.6 F) in Paris on Sunday and tourists basked in the sun.

Without the noise of traffic that usually envelopes the avenue, an uncommon sense of quietness reigned on the Champs-Elysees.

"I've been here before, and the last time there were like thousands of cars," said Tony Weng, a Taiwanese tourist. "We could only stand on the side of the street. This is the first time that we can actually stand on the street, so it's awesome."

The city had already sought to cut pollution levels by introducing rental bicycles in the streets, adding cycling paths and adopting a fleet of electric cars for residents to incite drivers to keep polluting vehicles at home.

According to World Health Organization data published last year, air pollution is leading to 600,000 premature deaths each year in Europe.
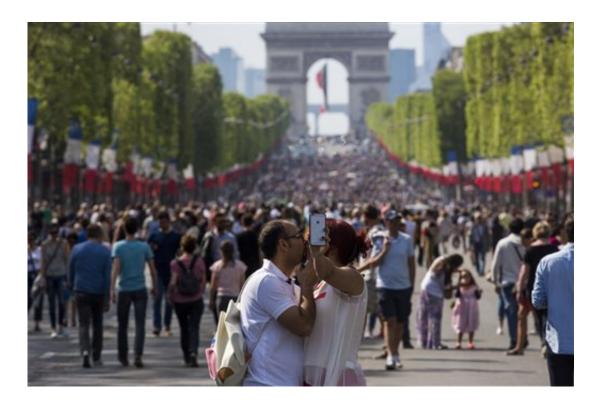
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"Pollution kills people every year, especially because of particles," Hidalgo said. "We absolutely need to change our habits, change our attitude and chose mobility.

"Paris encourages mobility through its public transport, its electric rental cars and car-sharing system, its rental bikes but also by promoting gentle traffic," she said. "It is our ambition. It is our plan to make the city more environmental-friendly."

A couple kisses as they take a selfie on the Champs Elysees in Paris, France, Sunday, May 8, 2016. Pedestrians have taken over the Champs Elysees as part of a new program to ban traffic from the famous Paris avenue once a month. The initiative, for what is usually one of the busiest roads in the French capital, was launched by Paris Mayor Anne Hidalgo and is aimed at reducing pollution in the city. (AP Photo/Kamil Zihnioglu)

A man performs during a street show on the Champs Elysees in Paris, France, Sunday, May 8, 2016. Pedestrians have taken over the Champs Elysees as part of a new program to ban traffic from the famous Paris avenue once a month. The initiative, for what is usually one of the busiest roads in the French capital, was launched by Paris Mayor Anne Hidalgo and is aimed at reducing pollution in the city. (AP Photo/Kamil Zihnioglu)

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