

# Paris bans cars along part of River Seine

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Medical experts blame air pollution for 2,500 deaths each year in Paris

Strollers and cyclists can breathe easy on the banks of the Seine after Paris on Monday approved a plan to ban cars on a long stretch of riverside road cutting across the city.

Socialist Mayor Anne Hidalgo hailed the move as a "historic decision, the end of an urban motorway and the taking back of the Seine."

A centrepiece of her battle against pollution, the plan has divided opinion in the French capital.

"We need to slow down a bit, let go, stop and relax," said Violetta Kolodziejczak, a restaurant greeter.

"If you're in a car, who has time to appreciate all this?" asked the Polish 56-year-old, sweeping an arm towards the turret-topped stone facades on the riverside, with the Eiffel Tower in the distance. "It's magnificent."

A recent opinion poll found 55 percent support for the plan among Parisians.

Nearly 19,000 people signed a petition in favour, while a motorists' association gathered 12,000 signatures of members who oppose it.

The car ban applies to 3.3 kilometres (two miles) of an expressway on the Right Bank of the Seine.

The project, with a cost estimated at eight million euros (\$9.0 million), will add wooden walkways and greenery while leaving a lane for emergency vehicles.

As expected, left-wing and environmentalist members of the city council approved the plan on Monday, while the minority right-wing opposition voted against it.

The right-dominated greater Paris region has been hostile to the plan, citing fears that bottlenecks on alternative routes will hurt businesses and delay commuters.

Pensioner Veronique Gryson, out walking along the Seine with her husband, said the car ban could be "an expensive privilege" for

pedestrians.



The banks of the Seine, a magnet for lovers as well as tourists, have been classed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site since 1991

"For us, it's very pleasant," she said. "But during the week if there are 200 pedestrians and at the same time you have 20,000 disgruntled motorists up there (on another road), that might be a problem."

Opponents have also complained of a lack of consultation and insufficient testing of the plan.

Paris police chief Michel Cadot, whose remit includes ensuring smooth traffic flows, said Monday that a committee would track the impact of closing the road previously used by around 43,000 cars each day.

## 'Right side of history'

The banks of the Seine, a magnet for lovers as well as tourists thronging to the Notre Dame Cathedral or the Louvre museum, have been classed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site since 1991.

The newly pedestrianised section has been car-free for a month every summer since 2002, for the hugely popular Paris Plages riverside beach bonanza. This year, it remained closed to traffic for an exhibition after the sand was cleared away.

Hidalgo's "Paris Respire" (Paris Breathes) anti-pollution programme has also included banning cars from the Champs-Elysees avenue on the first Sunday of every month.

Another nine new routes are reserved for pedestrians and bicycles every Sunday and public holiday.

The mayor is determined to fight pollution in a city where air quality regularly violates EU norms, sometimes rivalling that of heavily polluted cities such as Beijing and Shanghai.

Medical experts blame air pollution for 2,500 deaths each year in the city, and 6,600 in the greater metropolitan area.

On Sunday, a large part of central Paris was closed to cars, repeating an exercise first carried out a year ago, when [nitrogen oxide emissions](#) dropped by between 20 and 40 percent.

Socialist Environment Minister Segolene Royal has praised Hidalgo's "courage" for the latest initiative, saying that banishing cars from the Right Bank puts Paris "on the right side of history".

To ensure its effectiveness, the city plans to monitor traffic on other main arteries, as well as noise and emissions levels in the area—as well as use of the river bank by pedestrians, cyclists and rollerbladers.

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