

Fortaleza



Intervention area: Increasing physical activity

City action: Encouraging cycling in the city

In 2017, cardiovascular diseases accounted for nearly a third (28%) of all deaths in Brazil.ⁱ One way that local authorities decided to address this was by helping citizens increase their physical activity – a major risk factor for cardiovascular disease. Encouraging cycling was a popular option. Regular use of bicycles can help avoid a sedentary lifestyle, and when used as active transport in place of cars or other motor vehicles can also contribute to healthier air quality within a city. By 2017 Fortaleza already had 261 km of cycle lanes, but their level of use was unknown. City authorities also wanted to ensure that they were safe for citizens to use: in 2017, 7.2% of road safety deaths had been cyclists.ⁱⁱ

To encourage the use of bicycles and cycling lanes, Fortaleza opted to run a pilot project in the city using an integrated bike share system to increase cycling while raising awareness about its benefits. A major focus was on promoting “active commuting” through Bicletar Corporativo, a collaboration between six government departments and local businesses. It was hoped that the partnership model would increase awareness of the scheme, and that employer support would also encourage participation.

The pilot project used promotion for the scheme as an opportunity to increase awareness about road safety for cyclists. An extra incentive for uptake was provided by offering a bicycle parking programme to encourage cyclists to use existing cycle lanes. City authorities also worked to create a supportive environment by introducing new policies designed to improve road safety. These

included adding bicycle boulevards at intersections based on recommendations from road safety audits, as well as reducing the speed limit for motor vehicles.

There were some difficulties at the outset, due to the decision to use a new technology for tracking the use of the free bicycles. A dockless bike system was required to ease locating and using the bikes and to allow data on bike use to be collected. This needed to be developed from scratch, which took time, but was important to be able to collect data to demonstrate the scheme's usage. There were also doubts about the effectiveness of the pilot campaign for creating any lasting behaviour changes in commuting habits.

Implementation was facilitated through strong support from the Mayor's office, whose commitment supported development of the programme in a way that envisaged its use beyond the pilot phase. The city administration saw urban mobility as a political priority, and Mayor Roberto Cláudio Rodrigues Bezerra was a key advocate of the scheme and of urban mobility in general. It was also in line with a broader national commitment to increase cycling and improve road safety, which had seen the establishment of other national programmes.

For the first stage of the pilot in 2018, 40 bicycles were deployed to six docking stations around the city. Over 5 months, local media ran campaigns advertising the service, and the local organizations involved amplified the messages to their employees.

Contrary to fears of low uptake, data on system usage showed the scheme was well used. In the first 5 months there were almost 500 registrations with the scheme, and over 2000 journeys made. On average, half of the bikes were used daily. As the project progresses, an analysis will be conducted of typical journey patterns based on GPS systems built into the bikes, which will help to gauge where additional bikes could be added to maximize usage.

From a qualitative perspective, high demand for the initial 40 bikes shows there is room to expand the service. Strong interest from local organizations indicates the project's potential value, and based on these early results, the project looks set to continue to engage new organizations. It has also expanded to collaborate with 16 government departments.

The programme has been recognized nationally as an innovative policy approach to urban mobility that other cities could follow. On 29 June 2018 it received international recognition by winning the Sustainable Transport Award from the Institute for Transportation and Development Policy in the United States. Future plans are to expand the successful pilot into a larger programme and monitor the health of the most frequent users of the system, in partnership with local universities and the Municipal Health Department. Good communication campaigns will be a priority to engage the public and attract new partner organizations. Data will continue to be collected on bike use patterns to inform future decisions on how to expand the programme and cycle lane design.

ⁱ WHO NCD country profiles: Brazil. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2018 (https://www.who.int/nmh/countries/2018/bra_en.pdf, accessed 19 September 2019).

ⁱⁱ Fortaleza Road Safety: Road Deaths 2017. Fortaleza: Prefecture of Fortaleza [no date]
(<https://www.unifor.br/documents/929808/0/Fortaleza+-+Fatal+Crash+Report+-+2017+%281%29.pdf/bfd7d867-2bca-05ff-5bac-342bb4ccd73e>, accessed 19 September 2019).