

# OPEN STREETS TRENDS AND OPPORTUNITIES

POLICY BRIEF SUMMARY PRESENTATION





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# OPEN STREETS

***Open Streets*** or ***Ciclovías*** temporarily repurpose city streets into car-free spaces for people complemented by programmed activities fulfilling the intent of the program. These programs include encouraging physical activity, civic engagement, local economic development, community development, recovery and revitalization of public spaces and/or changing transportation behaviour through walking and cycling advocacy.



Based on recent expansion of Open Streets throughout the world, the policy brief summarizes trends in the Open Streets movement based on findings of Open Streets surveys in the United States and Latin America.



Accessible at:  
[www.880cities.org](http://www.880cities.org)  
&  
[www.openstreetsproject.org](http://www.openstreetsproject.org)  
(in Spring 2017)

The brief highlights the results of papers curated for Active Living Research's Physical Activity in Public Spaces Supplement in Preventive Medicine. Papers by Hipp et al. (2016) and Sarmiento et al. (2016) explicitly surveyed Open Streets and Ciclovía programs in the United States and Latin American cities, respectively. These surveys were complemented by in-depth interviews with willing program organizers of 32 unique programs across the United States and in five Latin American cities to understand measures of success and the factors discouraging or enabling program sustainability. The lessons learned offer insights for future Open Streets program planning.

# THE BENEFITS OPEN STREETS

In Latin American cities, studies have shown where Open Streets programs are implemented with regularity their benefits are multiple. Open Streets have been shown to:

- Provide opportunities for meeting physical activity recommendations for both adults and children;
- Improve quality of life measurements;
- Promote social capital;
- Encourage increased uptake in cycling for transportation;
- Reduce particulate pollution and street noise;
- Increase local business activity;

Open Streets are ultimately a platform for change in any community – whether the goals are to improve community health, engagement, or advocate for more sustainable and human-scale cities.

**Sources:**

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. 2008 Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans. 2008. Available at [www.health.gov/paguidelines](http://www.health.gov/paguidelines).

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Torres A, Sarmiento OL, Stauber C, Zarama R. The Ciclovía and Cicloruta Programs: Promising Interventions to Promote Physical Activity and Social Capital in Bogotá, Colombia. *Am J Public Health*. 2013;103(2):e23-e30.

Shu S, Batteate C, Cole B, Froines J, Zhu Y. Air quality impacts of a CicLAvia event in Downtown Los Angeles, CA. *Environ Pollut*. 2015:1-7.

Sarmiento O, Torres A, Jacoby E, Pratt M, Schmid TL, Stierling G. The Ciclovía-Recreativa: A mass-recreational program with public health potential. *J Phys Act Health*. 2010;7 Suppl 2 (Suppl 2):S163-S180.

Chaudhuri A, Zieff S. Do open streets initiatives impact local businesses? The case of Sunday Streets in San Francisco, California. *J Transp Heal*. 2015;2(4):529-539.

# THE RISE OF OPEN STREETS

- The most significant growth in the Open Streets movement has been seen in the last 16 years.
- Open Streets expansion in Latin American cities account for 93% of all regularly occurring Open Streets programs.
- 56.7% of programs operated weekly and overall frequency of surveyed programs ranged from 8-169 dates per year (some occur weekly and include holidays whereas others occur on a monthly or seasonal frequency).



Countries with Ciclovía programs in Latin America from 1974-2016. The grayscale corresponds to the number of programs per country. Only programs that occur at least twice per year are included.

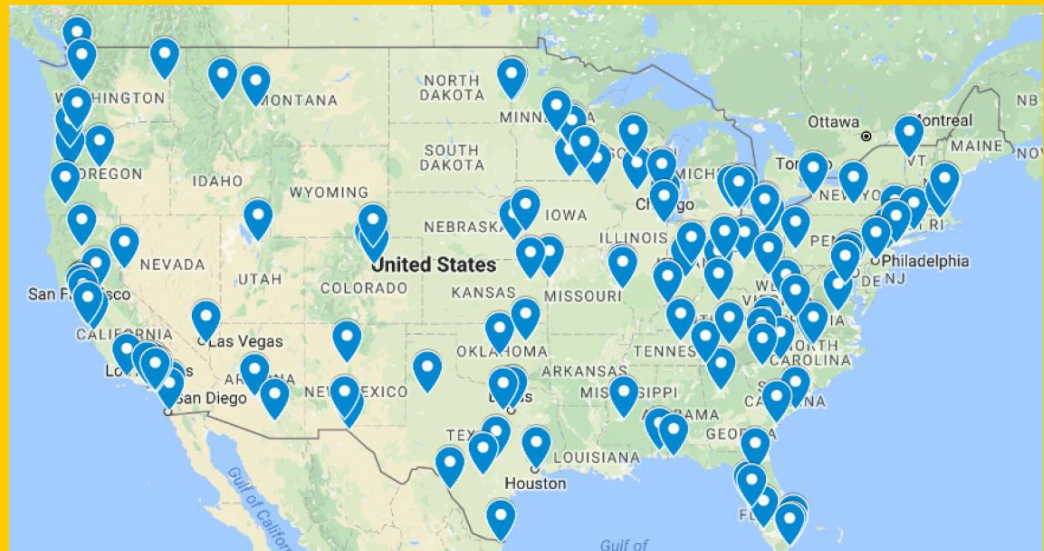


# THE RISE OF OPEN STREETS

In the United States, as of January 2017, Open Streets have taken place in 135 different cities (see Figure 3), though the majority have occurred with limited frequency.

- 62% of U.S. programs with data available were found to occur only once per year;
- 15% occurred six or more times per year;
- And only 2.8% occurred weekly.

13/32 stated they were open to increased frequency but expansion would require overcoming significant barriers including imbalances in expenses (permitting, police, barricades, etc.) and funding.



Open Streets Programs in the United States  
(count taken December 2016).

# OPEN STREETS ROUTES

## In surveyed Latin American Cities:

Route lengths vary between

**1 & 113.6 km**

Median length:

**3 km**

**74.6%**

of routes are  
less than 10  
km in length.

**95.5%** noted that their routes had connectivity to suggested sites such as parks, plazas, sports venues, tourist destinations, beaches and other points of interest unique to their city.

**94.8%** of routes included a main street or commercial iconic street.

**89.3%** routed through different economic areas. **53.7%** included low-income areas with the intention of fostering social inclusion.

**Source:** Sarmiento O; Díaz del Castillo A, Triana C, Acevedo M, González S, Pratt M. Reclaiming the Streets for People: Insights from Ciclovías Recreativas in Latin America. *Preventive Medicine*. 2016; Physical Activity in Public Space Supplement.

## In surveyed American Cities:

All Open Streets in the United States have route lengths

**<16 km**

\*with the exception of Phoenix  
Silent Sundays

**Source:** Hipp J A, Bird A, van Bakergem M, Yarnall E. Moving Targets: Promoting physical activity in public spaces via open streets in the US. *Preventive Medicine*. 2016; Physical Activity in Public Space Supplement.

Routes often change locations with each date in the U.S. context in attempt to highlight different districts or neighbourhoods, infrastructure, parks, cultural assets or encourage new participants.

Due to shorter route lengths, it's difficult to determine whether Open Streets in U.S. cities have been able to connect different socioeconomic areas, which would encourage social inclusion.



# OPEN STREETS COMPLEMENTARY ACTIVITIES

- A common characteristic of Open Streets programs in comparison with other street closure festivals is complementary activities.
- In the surveyed Latin American programs, all offered at least one complementary activity with the main activity being a physical activity class (94%); Approximately 80% of all programs also offered a cycling-focused complementary activity.

**Source:** Sarmiento O; Díaz del Castillo A, Triana C, Acevedo M, González S, Pratt M. Reclaiming the Streets for People: Insights from Ciclovías Recreativas in Latin America. *Preventive Medicine*. 2016; Physical Activity in Public Space Supplement.

- Evidence suggests that U.S. cities have similar if not higher numbers of complementary activities and a more diverse purpose at Open Streets.

**Source:** Hipp J A, Bird A, van Bakergem M, Yarnall E. Moving Targets: Promoting physical activity in public spaces via open streets in the US. *Preventive Medicine*. 2016; Physical Activity in Public Space Supplement.



Cooking class, San Antonio TX



Skipping, Guadalajara MX



Library outreach, Long Beach CA

# SUSTAINABILITY & SCALING UP

- To provide consistent opportunities for participation, Open Streets dates must occur with regular frequency.
  - Frequent programs requires resources in the form of funding, staff, political support, volunteers, and civic support.
  - In Latin American Open Streets funding is mainly public. **79%** of programs are led by public entities from government.
- Source:** Sarmiento O; Díaz del Castillo A, Triana C, Acevedo M, González S, Pratt M. Reclaiming the Streets for People: Insights from Ciclovías Recreativas in Latin America. *Preventive Medicine*. 2016; Physical Activity in Public Space Supplement.
- In the United States Open Streets to-date are implemented with limited frequency. 62% of U.S. programs with data available were found to occur only once per year.
  - Based on results from 13/32 interviewed Open Streets organizers would be open to scaling-up their programs to 12 dates per year if a number of barriers could be overcome.
  - Consistent funding was noted as the greatest barrier to Open Streets programs in the U.S. as well as the costs of street closures (permitting process, police, barricades, etc.).

**Source:** Hipp J A, Bird A, van Bakergem M, Yarnall E. Moving Targets: Promoting physical activity in public spaces via open streets in the US. *Preventive Medicine*. 2016; Physical Activity in Public Space Supplement.

# DISCUSSION

- It's undeniable that Open Streets programs have the potential to make a positive impact on our communities, witnessed by the sheer number of Open Streets programs we see around the world.
- With greater frequency, longer routes, public and civic support, Latin American Open Streets programs have been able to sustain themselves over time and many have continued to grow despite facing challenges for funding and/or political support. We should continue to look to them as models in the movement.
- Open Streets in the United States have multiple barriers to growth and sustainability have yet to be overcome.





# DISCUSSION

To overcome these barriers evaluation and research of Open Streets should continue.

- measure beyond simple participation counts and social media feedback.
- critically analyze their budgets to make their programs as cost-effective as possible.
- Results of this work should not be done in isolation and should be shared with the Open Streets community.
- Additionally, more research should be focused on the policy context that increases the cost of U.S. Open Streets programs.





# MORE RESOURCES

[www.880cities.org](http://www.880cities.org)

&

[www.openstreetsproject.org](http://www.openstreetsproject.org)

