Temporary Mobility Changes for the COVID-19 Transition Period in Tirana

What’s next?
Temporary Mobility Changes for the COVID-19 Transition Period in Tirana

Key concepts: Holistic health response, economic recovery, prioritize active transport, widen bike lanes, widen sidewalks, define open spaces, transition from private vehicle to public mobility, temporary to permanent.

Building the Infrastructure for Physical Distancing

As cities emerge from lockdown, a transition period of distanced public activity needs to be designed for and implemented.

Indeed, every two pedestrians now need the same amount of space as a car (Fig 1) to be able to follow WHO-recommended social distancing guidelines.¹

![Figure 1. Graphic of space needed for pedestrians to maintain social distancing. Source: Queen Anne Greenways](image)

Public transport, sidewalks, and outdoor spaces must be altered or substituted to comply with distancing guidelines. By making no changes, people will be forced to create their own solutions to get around, increasing not only the chances of more outbreaks, but also road accidents from unpredictable behavior.

Distancing measures will benefit physical and mental health,² allow businesses to recover more quickly, and contribute to a sense of calm during a period of so much uncertainty.

What we know

- **Public Transport** service will be non-existent or at best limited over the next 6 months – 1 year due to risk of a second outbreak.

- 20-30%³ of Tirana residents rely on public transport to get to work, family care duties, and to patronize central Tirana businesses.

- Without the participation of these consumers, economic recovery will be stunted in many sectors.

- For bars and restaurants to operate while enforcing safe distancing guidelines—many will need to serve customers outdoors as well as expand delivery.

- **Destination open spaces**, such as Tirana Grand Park, are not viable in times of lockdown or limited mobility for the daily needs of families and elderly.

- Recent data from China’s transition show that private car buying and use increases—it is instinctively the safe choice.⁴

- Drivers in Tirana, and globally, react intuitively to wide emptier streets by speeding. The behavior puts streetlife at even more danger than usual.⁵

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²[https://www.who.int/news-room/q-a-detail/be-active-during-covid-19](https://www.who.int/news-room/q-a-detail/be-active-during-covid-19)

³ Estimate to be confirmed, based on mode split


⁵ [https://nyti.ms/3cdtsMn](https://nyti.ms/3cdtsMn)
Summary and Recommendations

- Public transport needs a viable substitute over the next 12 months. Biking is the best option.

- Residents, especially the elderly and very young, need open space options close to home for safe social and physical activity.

- Physical distancing requires 2-3x more space per person. If a city does not provide for this new need, the only alternative becomes dangerous choices, as well as a counter-productive cycle of shaming and punishment.

- There is no “return to normal” after COVID-19. An expansion of private vehicle use is inevitable unless countered by viable alternatives. Concrete actions to improve walking and cycling now will shape Tirana’s sustainable mobility agenda for years to come.

- New, positive networks like volunteer delivery services for medical and food provisions grow and thrive in strong bicycle networks.

Proposed actions

Large streets:

Install temporary bike lanes

1. **Convert traffic lanes** to temporary bike lanes on existing transit corridors.⁶ (Fig 3–6)

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⁶ Acknowledging that emergency vehicle access is a major consideration to lane conversion.
In some cases like Myslym Shyri, road beds could be converted to non-motorized only and maintain a parking lane. In other cases it may make the most sense to temporarily remove the parking lane.

Figure 6. Ex. of Myslym Shyri with a temporary bike lane added. Phase 2 sees the parking lane moved to the center.

3. Install new bicycle parking along streets.

4. Adjusting signal timing on large roads would give cyclists

5. Start data gathering to measure cyclist volumes to build evidence to make the network permanent when and where possible.7 (More detail on final page)

How to get bikes people who need them?

1. Rapidly revive bike sharing programs and all existing stock.

2. Subsidize for free to every qualifying citizen who needs a bike: especially low-income and essential workforce. This program will likely be abused in some percentage. But that is irrelevant to the larger goals of growing repair businesses and total volumes available in the market.

3. Announce bike donation programs, many people may have bikes they don’t need.

4. Subsidize bike repair shops for 1-2 months for a campaign to gather and prep thousands of needed bikes.

Widen Sidewalks on intermediate streets and near shopping areas

Figure 7. Ban parking where buildings temporarily impede the safe width of sidewalk.

1. It will be difficult to widen sidewalks in Tirana without removing a parking lane. Removing street parking may not be possible

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7 The Tirana Green City Action Plan states that in Tirana the length of roads dedicated exclusively to public transit and kilometer bike path per 100,000 population is low. Suggest to develop further policies on the extension and improvement of public and non-motorized would encourage mode shift.
on long stretches of road. Widen sidewalks into the parking lane when there are stretches of too narrow sidewalk. “Safe sidewalks” (Fig. 7)

2. Sidewalk widening and street parking removal could be focused on a single block where more gathering or queuing need is foreseen, such as near clusters of businesses.

**Partial street closures & open schools on neighborhood streets**

1. **Open schoolyards** for community use. Young children and caregivers need them close to home. (Fig 8, 9)

![Figure 8](image8.png)

Figure 8. Primary school in a neighborhood with locked gate. Photo taken on April 11, 2020.

![Figure 9](image9.png)

Figure 9. Schoolyards such as this one should remain open during the day to allow for community access.

There are 0-9 and high schools integrated into almost every neighborhood in Tirana, sitting with locked gates. These are immediate wins for families and elderly.

2. Keep multiple gates open, adding more where possible, to prevent bottlenecks at entries. (Fig 10)

![Figure 10](image10.png)

Figure 10. Schoolyard should have multiple gates.

3. **Install signage** and other pavement markings to remind pedestrians of social distancing protocols. It is important to post rules clearly, and hold residents for responsible behavior.

4. If crowding becomes an issue, consider sign-up sheets for usage times.

5. **Mark play areas off with tape or chalk**, to help keep kids separated.

6. **Install additional seating** and shade elements when possible.

7. Smaller neighborhood streets **can be temporarily closed to through traffic** for play and being outside the home (Fig 11, 12, 13). Likely already functioning at dead-ends and non-essential through-streets.
Figure 11. This street near Qazim Turdiu School is a non-essential street and could be closed to through-traffic for months to create safe space for distanced play.

Figure 12. Pocket parks like the above are needed within a 5-10 minute walk of every household in Tirana to be able to function as daily use. Pocket parks can be substituted with open school yards and partial street closures.

Figure 13. Safe social distancing in Hackney, London, requires a large amount of space. Street closures are the only way to achieve this needed space.

8. Use traffic cones, flexible bollards, plastic barriers or heavier barriers to delineate sidewalk space. In the case of street closures, use barriers that can be moved in case of ambulance traffic.

9. Lower speed limits throughout the city, especially on neighborhood streets. Neighborhood streets without centerline marking should be treated as school zones at 20km/hr.

10. No surface street should be above 35km/hr.

Quantifying the benefits: simple data gathering ideas

1. Track the number of bikes that enter into circulation through the program; number of new and number of repaired. Ask sales and repair shops for their numbers before and after the program.

2. Track the amount of wide bike lane added by linear km. Redundant bike lanes, such as if added to Rr. Kavaje, is crucial because of the increased volume it permits safely.

3. Perform spot checks on bike ridership numbers at major intersections a few times weekly.

4. Count the amount of meters squared added into the parks system via open school yards, as well as street closures for play streets.

5. Count the amount of “safe sidewalk” added where there were previous bottlenecks.
6. Keep track of air quality and noise levels (QM) on streets.

7. Track linear amount of streets with speed limit reductions.

8. Keep simple survey questions for parents and users of open spaces about frequency of use, quality, and suggestions for improvement.

Other Resources

- Public access Google Sheet documenting local mobility initiatives for social distancing: https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1c6QmxkUwNjoajYaRgqEjc14PtyGtushhQY7wNaZdjKk/edit#gid=1346680693
- English translation of CDMX bike infrastructure expansion strategy: https://docs.google.com/document/d/1BNwO14E1qXz6P9_KhOUr79xx9WnSXvBOlwHVwpdECM/edit