

# **Quick fixes:** How one European city got moving (literally)

**Going after quick wins helped city leaders create momentum for continuing improvement.**

**Yakov Sergienko,**
McKinsey & Company

It's an all-too-common collection of sights, sounds, and emotions: major roads that are clogged with traffic, resounding with car horns, and oozing with exasperation. The daily, relentless annoyances associated with getting to work and then back home put millions of people on edge.

In one European city, one in five people spent more than three hours a day commuting, while more than 50,000 cars were parked illegally each day, forcing pedestrians to wend through a treacherous obstacle course. Most taxis on the road were unregistered and unsafe at any speed. Overcrowding on public transport was common.

The city leadership inherited plans that called for tens of billions of dollars in capital spending for new roads, subways, and trams. But there was no strategy. How all this was supposed to fit together, with respect to timing or functionality, was apparently never considered. Moreover, millions of miserable commuters would have to wait and stew many years before these projects could begin to deliver.

So the mayor decided to take a different, complementary approach: go for fast, cheap, and relatively easy wins. In a matter of months, commuters experienced a discernible, positive effect. This is not the end of the road by any means. Much more

needs to be done. By delivering real improvements, however, the city enhanced people's lives and created confidence that it could do more. Successful, speedy change, in effect, is creating momentum to do more.

### How they did it

City leaders started by defining a set of objectives and announcing the formation of a committee to come up with ways to address them. They had a fairly good idea of what to do first; voters had made it clear that congestion was their biggest concern. So the government set a goal of cutting commuting time, improving the loading and unloading of cargo, and reducing the number of cars on the road during peak hours. The overall idea was to help commuters and improve economic efficiency.

Then they began to devise solutions to the problems identified. At a high level, one key was to consider various data from public and other sources. For example, they analyzed transport demand and supply to identify the places where commuters hit the most congestion. Armed with this information, they formed a data-driven strategy to reduce congestion. As with any strategy, this required good governance, in the form of leadership, performance metrics, and regular public engagement. The city also systematically involved the private sector, for instance, in towing, mobile-app development, and the creation of a bicycle-sharing system.

That is the broad view. Here are some of the quick wins the city delivered (defined as those achieved in no more than three years—and usually less).

Parking management. The city implemented a comprehensive parking-management system that dramatically increased the number of paid parking spaces in its central areas. Enforcement was also stepped up, through the use of such technologies as vehicles enabled with license-plate recognition and handheld electronic sets that could issue on-the-spot violations. Fines and tows now force drivers to take the system seriously. An Internet portal allows drivers to find streets and parking lots with vacancies; mobile apps support payment and navigation. A network of new parking meters collects payments. In one district in which these changes took place, the average travel time and road-occupancy rate both improved, even though car ownership grew by 7 percent. Crucially, the authorities did an extensive information campaign first, explaining the rationale and how it would benefit the city. This helps to explain a surprising result: even the majority of car owners viewed the introduction of paid parking positively; only 28 percent thought it was a bad idea. The reason was that most drivers noticed fewer traffic jams and less rule breaking. Moreover, average traffic speed rose by 10 to 30 percent, depending on the neighborhood.

Transit-ticket system. People will not use public transport if it is difficult to use. The introduction of longer-term, refillable tickets compatible with all kinds of transport cut purchase lines and made public transport cheaper and easier to use. As a result, more people used it; just six months after the pilot project started, the average number of daily passengers was up by more than 10 percent.

Commercial traffic. New regulations restricted truck access to the inner city during business hours; that rule alone helped to increase local speeds noticeably. Truckers did not love the idea at first because it was less convenient for them;

on the other hand, they found that they could work more efficiently because they were not spending nearly as much time stuck in traffic. This change cost the city nothing but the time to devise the new rules on travel hours, weight, and class for cargo traffic. Again, the authorities made the case to the public before instituting the program.

Improved road usage. Through the effective use of data, the city instituted "reverse lanes" (in which traffic moves in different directions depending on the time of day) and integrated traffic-light control; this smoothed and speeded traffic on major arteries. The development of a methodology to track and improve effectiveness of dedicated bus lanes led to a 15 percent increase in ridership and 20 percent higher speeds for 25 percent of passengers. Reallocating buses to areas of peak demand increased capacity without the need to buy more buses and pay more drivers.

The usual instinct in dealing with poor transit is to go for big, expensive, long-term projects, led from the top down, with little analysis of effects on residents or the local economy. There is, of course, a place for big projects; this city is also extending its subway and suburban-rail lines. But the approach described here is an excellent way to spark ideas about how to carry out low-cost, high-return, high-speed change.

**Yakov Sergienko** is a principal in McKinsey's Moscow office. 