



Forum

Lerner, Peñalosa, Livingstone, Lee Myung-bak: why were they successful?

Who in the world of urban mobility and public transport has not heard of Curitiba, Bogotá, London or Seoul? These four conurbations have each devised their own innovative urban mobility policy and are an example to public transport actors as well as urban decision-makers. Behind each of the four, a visionary and courageous mayor who did not hesitate to challenge taboos and face down tough critics in order to impose his vision of the sustainable city for the well-being of his citizens ... and the happiness of us all. How and why did they succeed where a majority of their peers have failed or, worse, not even tried?

Lerner, the pioneer

Jaime Lerner was the first of the quartet to make his mark. He served three terms as mayor in Curitiba between 1971 and 1992. His name is associated with the BRT (bus rapid transit) concept, and he may be regarded as the inventor, or at least the instigator, of this system. Brazil's federal government had initially granted the city of Curitiba a budget for the construction of a metro system. However, while others would have jumped at the chance to begin a construction site lasting for several years, plunging their city into debt solely for the pleasure of ambition and leaving behind their own legacy, Lerner did his sums and realised that a railway system would cost ten times more than buses running on a dedicated bus right-of-way. As Lerner said: "Creativity starts once you take away a zero from your budget."¹ He therefore placed an order with Volvo for a double-articulated bus capable of carrying up to 300 passengers. As an architect/urban planner, Lerner favoured the creation of high-density population and employment corridors around the BRT routes, with the density dropping as the distance from the route itself increases. He also brought in a bus network hierarchy to ensure an efficient and dense feeder system. BRT stations were designed to facilitate and speed up bus loading and unloading: platforms, tickets validated at the station itself, disabled access, shelters. In his own words, he 'metro-nised' the bus, introducing the 'bus' while utilising the advantages of metro: capacity, journey speed, service frequency. To celebrate his positive impact on public transport and on the lives of people throughout his career, Lerner received the 'Leadership in Transport Award' in May, making him the first winner of the new award created by the International Transport Forum at the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.

In 1972, one Curitiba resident in every 30 used public transport; today, the figure is three out of four residents,

representing over two million passengers a day. The 1970s pre-dated considerably the concept of sustainable development, which was born in 1987. Yet Lerner multiplied actions designed to reconcile economic development, social equity and environmental protection. In addition to public transport, he also introduced the *Cambio verde* scheme, which involved the exchange of waste in return for baskets of vegetables, created a host of green spaces (51m² of green space per inhabitant, well above the UN-recommended minimum of 16m² per inhabitant), introduced waste recycling, launched 'beacons of knowledge' in disadvantaged districts, built an array of cultural monuments, and more besides. It is not without reason that Brazilians refer to Curitiba as 'the people's city' (*A cidade da gente*).

Peñalosa, the humanist

It was not until the late 1990s that the BRT concept was embraced on a large scale by Enrique Peñalosa, mayor of Bogotá between 1998 and 2000. Peñalosa launched a series of imposing projects which changed the face of Bogotá. In so doing he was aided by the windfall tax instituted by his predecessor and the fact that Colombia's central government had granted the mayor's office a certain level of independence. During the three years of his mayoral term of office, Peñalosa undertook five major projects: removing the casual traders who occupied many roads and public spaces; improving urban parks and gardens and designing several others (there are 1,100 today); refurbishing the city's main boulevards; a strict ban on pavement parking; and construction of TransMilenio, heralding the renaissance of bus rapid transit – all in just three years! As Peñalosa put it: "You have to think before being elected, because afterwards you no longer have the time to think, you have to act."² During his campaign he had also announced everything he would do in terms of urban planning and transport, and kept his word. All the economic and technical studies



Photo: Morio



Photo: carlosparde

••• Left: *Bus Rapid Transit, Curitiba.*
Right: *TransMilenio bus, Bogotá.*

related to these projects were ready, thus allowing implementation to start on day one of his term of office. He also expressed his clear preference for a bus system from the very start of the electoral campaign, during which his main rival defended the option of light rail.

TransMilenio began operations in December 2000. Today it boasts nine lines, covering 84km of network, and carries 1.5 million passengers a day. The launch of TransMilenio was accompanied by a restructuring of the existing bus routes, making it possible to introduce feeder services that provide the link between the main BRT stations and areas not served by TransMilenio. One of the system's specificities is that it offers express services, calling at the main stops, as well as omnibus services. This necessitated the arrangement of passing lanes at certain stops, thus enabling an increase in the available capacity without any loss of journey speed. The redefining of Bogotá's mobility plan around TransMilenio also had the effect of reducing automobile traffic by 22% and of cutting the number of road accident victims by 50% due to the restrictions on cars during peak periods along certain corridors (*Pico y placa* programme). Bogotá also chalks up 400,000 cycle journeys a day on 60km of cycle lanes.

Since the advent of TransMilenio, a rapid development of BRT systems has been recorded all around the world. At present there are a hundred or so such systems in operation or under construction. Colombian electoral law did not allow Peñalosa to stand again at the end of his term of office. Since then, however, he has served as an 'ambassador' for the sustainable city in both professional and university circles, and is one of Colombia's most prominent politicians. Peñalosa: "The real class struggle is not between rich and poor, but between motorists and the rest of society."³

Livingstone, the non-conformist

While Peñalosa was completing his term of office as mayor of Bogotá, Ken Livingstone was beginning his in London.

London's population is more or less the same size as Bogotá's. It also has the same severe problems in terms of mobility (notably traffic congestion), ageing infrastructures (in particular its famous *Tube*, but also its buses), and the declining performance of the city's public transport network. Just like Peñalosa, Livingstone ran an electoral campaign in which urban transport featured heavily. His election in 2000, and then his re-election in 2004, illustrated the importance which Londoners attach to improving their mobility as well as mobility's contribution to their urban quality of life.

Livingstone distinguished himself in particular by introducing congestion charging, whereby vehicles have to pay to enter London's central area. The measure cut traffic by 20% at a stroke; the charge also brought about a 30% increase in the number of cyclists. Buoyed by the measure's success, Livingstone decided to extend the charge zone and increase the level of the charge itself. In order to offer an alternative to motorists who decided not to use their vehicle, the bus network was reinforced both in qualitative and quantitative terms. For instance, London introduced its first-ever articulated buses alongside the famous red double-deckers. The number of network users recorded a 40% increase between 2000 and 2008.

Since 2003, an integrated fare system has been boosted by the introduction of the Oyster multi-modal smart card. The launch of Oyster made it possible for London to innovate in terms of fare collection, e.g. differentiation between the fares paid by Oyster users and by those still paying for their tickets in cash; or the daily cap on the cost of travel, whereby an Oyster user will pay no more than the cost of a daily travel card regardless of the number of journeys he or she makes on any given day. Livingstone also brought in reduced rates for children and students. Foreign visitors can also pick up an Oyster card before they arrive in London.



••• Left: Congestion Charge Zone, London.
Right: Cheonggyecheon canal, Seoul.



Despite Livingstone's political opponents casting doubts on the effectiveness of the congestion charge, the London experiment has been emulated. For example, Stockholm and Milan have opted for a similar approach – with a few technical differences – and some countries such as France have made the institutional and regulatory arrangements necessary in order to allow French cities to introduce an urban toll. As Livingstone said: “Congestion charging was a radical solution to a long-standing problem.”⁴ Between 2000 and 2008 there was a 5% modal shift from the private car over to public transport. Despite being criticised during the run-up to the last mayoral election, Boris Johnson, mayor of London since 2008, has continued with the main thrusts of the mobility policy initiated by Livingstone, including the congestion charge.

Lee Myung-bak, the ecologist

Despite receiving less media coverage than Peñalosa or Livingstone, Lee Myung-bak is no less adept when it comes to radical urban policy solutions. As mayor of Seoul from 2002 to 2006, he completely transformed the appearance of the South Korean capital through projects such as the restructuring of the Cheonggyecheon canal and the development of a BRT network.

The Cheonggyecheon started life as a waterway running from east to west through parts of Seoul. In the 1950s it was covered over and turned into a roadway; then, in 1968, an elevated expressway was built along the former canal bed. Up to 168,000 cars travelled along this route daily. In July 2003 Lee Myung-bak unveiled plans to close the road and expressway and to uncover the enclosed canal once more. The waterside walk, which opened to the public in September 2005, has been acknowledged as a highly successful example of urban rehabilitation. Following the demolition of the urban motorway, the number of vehicles entering Seoul was cut by 2.3%; at the same time, there were 430,000 registered new users of public transport (+1.4% for bus; +4.3% for metro), not to mention better air quality in the zone through which the old road used to

pass. This urban regeneration made it possible to create a cultural and economic hub around the Cheonggyecheon.

The other major project led by Lee Myung-bak involved the reorganisation of the bus network via the introduction of a BRT system, which today boasts 74km of eight separate bus-only central corridors. The immediate impact of this project was to double the average bus journey speed in the six months after service commissioning (from 11 to 22km/h). BRT speeds currently outstrip average car speeds for the same journeys. Moreover, bus passenger numbers went up by 10% in less than a year. Beyond the technical and commercial performances, this scheme was also a success in terms of restructuring and overhauling services by bus. For instance, at the instigation of the mayor's office, the city's 63 bus operators formed an association, facilitating contractual arrangements with them and enabling economies of scale thanks to grouped orders for new buses and other equipment. Network reorganisation was also accompanied by a new hierarchical structure of bus routes, which users find easy to understand by virtue of simple colour coding corresponding to each type of route (shared section, express route, local route, feeder route). The integrated electronic ticketing system, T-money, enabled the introduction of distance charging as well as modal integration. Finally, the TOPIS bus information system, based on real-time vehicle location, offers a tool for improving operating performances and customer service.

Lee Myung-bak's time at the Seoul mayor's office was marked by a pronounced orientation towards supporting a cleaner urban environment and a better quality of city life. “If we do not emphasise environmental protection, the city will not only lose citizens, but also foreign investors,” he commented. “The right balance has to be struck between the environment and the different urban functions.”⁵ Lee Myung-bak has been President of the Republic of Korea since 2008.

Four mayors, each with a different approach to improving mobility in their respective city, but with a shared resolve to favour public transport. Despite the different socio-political contexts, urban frameworks and transport environments, it is possible to detect a host of factors common to their success. Firstly, they arrived in office with a strong will and a determination to radically alter the situation. It is not just a matter of introducing measures to improve mobility in the short term, but to pave the way for a far-reaching change to the mobility system that will shape the city in the long run. Even more so, it involves undertaking a global and coherent urban project, with mobility as one of its components. This is particularly the case in Curitiba, where transport and urban planning are inseparable, and in Bogotá, where public transport is a society-based project and a means of eradicating social differences. All four cases, moreover, involve a 'flagship' project to drive both the process of change and the policy of sustainable mobility.

Then there is the resolve to fight the private car head-on by making car journeys more difficult and expensive to the benefit of public transport and non-motorised modes. The enemy of the sustainable city is singled out unceremoniously and the car courageously prevented from gaining ground. The car loses a proportion of its road space and also faces temporal restrictions. The four mayors in this regard have shown remarkable bravery where most local decision-makers, even those who are developing public transport, do not dare to restrict car use. The ineffectiveness of journey policy then is hardly surprising.

Another common denominator is the speed of project implementation. In other words, when people show resolve there is no time to lose. "Any city in the world can be improved in under three years,"⁶ says Lerner. The four mayors actually managed to do in three to five years what others have taken ten or fifteen years to achieve. Even though these are long-term projects, a great deal can be done in the opening years; at any rate a positive momentum can be initiated and the direction of the project set in stone. In each case there have been numerous, at times virulent, opponents, but they never lost sight of their final goal and certainly did not give in, showing fighting spirit, as waiting for a consensus would have risked watering down the project.

Finally, before becoming mayor, each of the four was an active, i.e. engaged, citizen in his city, even campaigning in favour of the city's sustainable development. This gleaned for them a wealth of valuable knowledge on the ground and thus a capacity to figure out problems and quickly identify solutions. This is vital in order to forge a clear vision, which mayors 'parachuted in' by their political party's head office can only acquire after many years, with the attendant danger of it then being too late. It is impossible to take over a city if on unfamiliar ground and without knowing the exact details of how it works.

Despite these similarities, there are nonetheless differences between these four personalities, but it would appear that these differences did not stop them enjoying the same success. I shall merely dwell on one aspect: their political affiliations. Lerner was backed by Brazil's ruling military junta to become mayor of Curitiba back in 1971. Peñalosa was a long-standing independent before co-chairing an ecologist party. Livingstone had a Trotskyite past in the Labour party, which earned him the nickname of 'Red Ken', prior to his ejection from the party ahead of his election as London's mayor in 2000. Finally, Lee Myung-bak was a member of the Liberal party when elected mayor of Seoul in 2002. He defines himself as a 'liberal ecologist'. These varying, even opposing, political preferences did not prevent the four personalities from becoming champions of sustainable mobility, which proves both that public transport transcends the political divide and that no one political party can claim exclusivity over the issue.

- 1 *Royal Institute of British Architecture International Dialogues Talk: 'The Sustainable City'*, Jaime Lerner (Video), 2009.
- 2 *'Bogotá Change'*, film by Andreas Møl Dalsgaard, Denmark, 2009.
- 3 *'Enrique Peñalosa et la réforme urbaine de Bogota'*, Groupe Chronos, Entretiens (interviews), 2010.
- 4 *'C-Change Celebrates Successful First Year'*, www.tfl.gov.uk/static/corporate/media/newscentre/archive/4376.html, 2004.
- 5 *Time*, 'Lee Myung-bak', by Bryan Walsh, 27 October 2007.
- 6 *Royal Institute of British Architecture International Dialogues Talk: 'The Sustainable City'*, Jaime Lerner (Video), 2009.



Take up your pen!

Note from the editor - UITP has opened this column to give all readers the chance to freely and personally express views on public transport, its strong and weak points.

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