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WORLD CAR-FREE DAY

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Date: September 27, 2000 10:19 AM
Author: Ethan Gelber (ethang@gorp.com)
Subject: fighting for urban improvement

September 21 is World Car-Free Day, a moment observed by more than 700 cities around the globe. It is a day when urban dwellers trapped in the smog and din of gasoline-clogged cities can experience life as it could be lived, liberated from more than just the crush of traffic.

An introduction from the Carfree.com clearly states that "The industrialized nations made a terrible mistake when they turned to the automobile as an instrument of improved urban mobility. The car brought with it major unanticipated consequences for urban life and has become a serious cause of environmental, social, and aesthetic problems in cities."

Statistics abound citing 265,000 deaths (and 10 million injuries leaving about 800,000 permanently handicapped) worldwide on the roads every year and Forecasting that by 2030 this will have risen to 2 million deaths a year and 50 million injuries. In the U.S., the American Lung Association estimates traffic-related air pollution kills between 10,000 and 24,000 people each year

Given these kinds of statistics, why are car lobbies as strong as they are? And why do we continue to settle for poorer qualities of life in our cities when there are other ways of dealing with things, including mass transport, more careful and responsible urban planning, respect for shared space, etc? European cities have made great strides in these areas and the European Union officially celebrates World Car-Free Day (although it is on the 22nd for them).

Where do you stand on this issue? The only American city to lend an ear to freedom from cars is Boulder, Colorado. Can you imagine how glorious it would be to spend a day without cars in New York,

or San Francisco, or Chicago? Should we be fighting the uphill battle to call more attention to this?

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Date: September 28, 2000 07:46 PM

Author: Kate Tanski (evaryana@yahoo.com)

Subject: more on the urban environment

All hail the humble bicycle! It is clean, quiet, healthy, and the most efficient vehicle on the planet. However, it does have its limits. Cars (and other motorized vehicles), also, have their useful times and places.

For many people, getting on a bike would solve many problems. For every bicycle, one less car would be on the road: freeing up space, not causing noise, pollution, and less empirical problems like road rage, aesthetic, health, and other quality of life issues. Needless to say, bicycles are much healthier than cars for those who can take advantage of them, like people who commute during rush hour.

But sometimes someone needs a car. For some, self-powered and public transportation are not an option. Due to illness, injury, age, or other reasons, some people have to depend on cars to get around. The volume of stuff that needs to get from place to place is too great to be hauled by human power, and emergency vehicles will not be easily replaced by something more environmentally friendly. In these circumstances, internal combustion vehicles are, and will probably stay, the standard.

The importance of the bicycle movement lays in the appropriate use of the (wonderful!) bicycle. Not all the ills of city life can be solved with a bike; the problems cropping up (pollution, noise, health, lack of space, et cetera) are much too complicated for a simple solution, and each of the solutions will have its own problems. Bicycles will not save the world, not by themselves. Still, they are an important part of a possibly big change for the better, especially in the cities. Most importantly, a cultural change is going to have to take place that allows people, and makes it practical, economical, easy, and enjoyable, to get out of the cars and into a more human speed of life.

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