

Driverless Paris?

Bicycles and bans are reshaping the city
But motorists denounce a hipster takeover

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THE quayside roads that wind along the Seine used to throb with hurtling traffic. Today, potted palm trees have been ranged along the tarmac. Joggers and cyclists enjoy the waterside calm. On a stretch of the right bank opposite the Eiffel Tower formerly used as a convenient express route, cars have been squeezed into a single lane, leaving the other to bicycles. Over the centuries, the French capital has been the backdrop to many warring tribes. Today's conflict pits contemporary urban combatants: enraged car owners, and everybody else.

A sense of siege is keenly felt by the capital's motorists. Anne Hidalgo, the Socialist mayor, is waging "a war against cars", said *Le Monde* earlier this year. Parisians, says Pierre Chasseray of "40m Motorists", a lobby group, are "living in daily hell". As part of the town hall's plan to increase the share of trips taken by bicycle from 5% to 15% by 2020, protected cycling routes are being extended along some of the city's main arteries. An entire lane on the busy Rue de Rivoli is being converted into a two-way bike route. The left bank's quayside road was closed to cars in 2013, six years after the city installed a bike-sharing scheme. Inevitably, until habits change (assuming that they ever do), traffic on those roads still open to vehicles is now more clogged than ever.

Paris is "not anti-car, but anti-pollution", retorts Jean-Louis Missika, the head of planning at city hall and a deputy to the mayor. Small-particle pollution levels in the city are particularly high. With its narrow medieval streets and its 19th-century boulevards, the transport reformers seek above all to discourage cars that do not carry passengers. Fully 80% of vehicles circulating in central Paris carry only one person, and 79% of those on its roads are privately owned, according to the town hall. On

September 14th BlaBlaCar, a French ride-sharing startup, launched BlaBlaLines, a new app designed to help commuters in the Greater Paris region organise carpooling with a couple of clicks. With 1.2m commuting trips of over 10km (six miles) made each day in outer Paris, there is “massive potential” to curb the number of empty cars, says Frédéric Mazzella, the firm’s boss.

Ms Hidalgo’s crusade against motorists is partly political. She governs Paris in a coalition with the Greens, who hold the transport portfolio. Her detractors say she is in thrall to “hipsters on bicycles”. But it is also part of a broader rethink of how the city should adapt to an age that will be shaped by electric vehicles and driverless transport. “It’s a revolution that will be as great as the transition from horse-drawn carriages to the motor car,” says Mr Missika. He expects to authorise the first experimental driverless six-person taxis in Paris next year, and claims that city hall will ban privately owned cars (as opposed to ones that are leased) in the centre by 2025-30. On current plans, diesel cars will be banned altogether from Paris by 2020. (London, by contrast, has nothing nearly as ambitious in place, though surcharges for older diesel models will come into effect in the centre of the city from next month. The mayor, Sadiq Khan, is reportedly planning to extend this to the whole city.)

The spread of electric, and in time driverless, vehicles means that Paris is not heading towards a post-car future. When it comes to making cycling the norm, the city still lags far behind others in Europe, such as Copenhagen or Amsterdam. A far bigger effort to invest in public transport may ultimately have a greater impact on car use, as well as help to spread jobs and businesses outside the city centre. The Grand Paris Express, Europe’s biggest infrastructure project at a cost of some €30bn (\$36bn), is a new fast train under construction that will link outer Paris with its airports, stadiums and universities in a figure-of-eight around the city. With four new lines and 68 stations, it is due to be in full service in 2030. A big stretch of each of the four lines should be open by 2024, in time for the city’s hosting of the Olympic games.

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