Basel for People or Cars? Why change matters and how to achieve it?

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1. Cities for cars: the origins of the idea 100 years ago

1. Where do we come from? - A brief history

- The development of urban mobility

2. Where are we now and what are the implications?

- Negative consequences of car centric cities
- Current challenges of urban mobility

3. How can we achieve change?

- Role models and best practices
- Main challenges

4. Summarising the key findings

5. Conclusion and discussion

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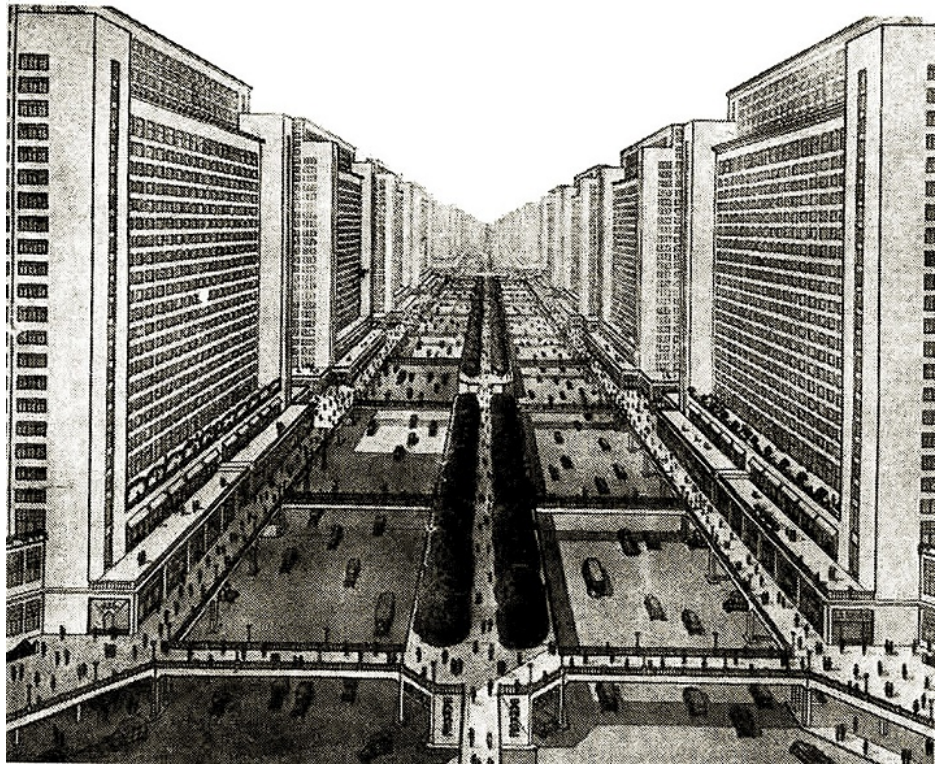
1. Cities for cars: the origins of the idea 100 years ago



The origins of the idea (1900–1930s)

- **1910s and 1920s**, cars were seen as future of transportation.
- Cities like **Detroit**) began designing streets and intersections specifically for cars.
- **Le Corbusier**, developed the concept of the **"Ville Radieuse" (Radiant City)** –vision of urban planning with wide roads and high-rise buildings to accommodate car traffic.

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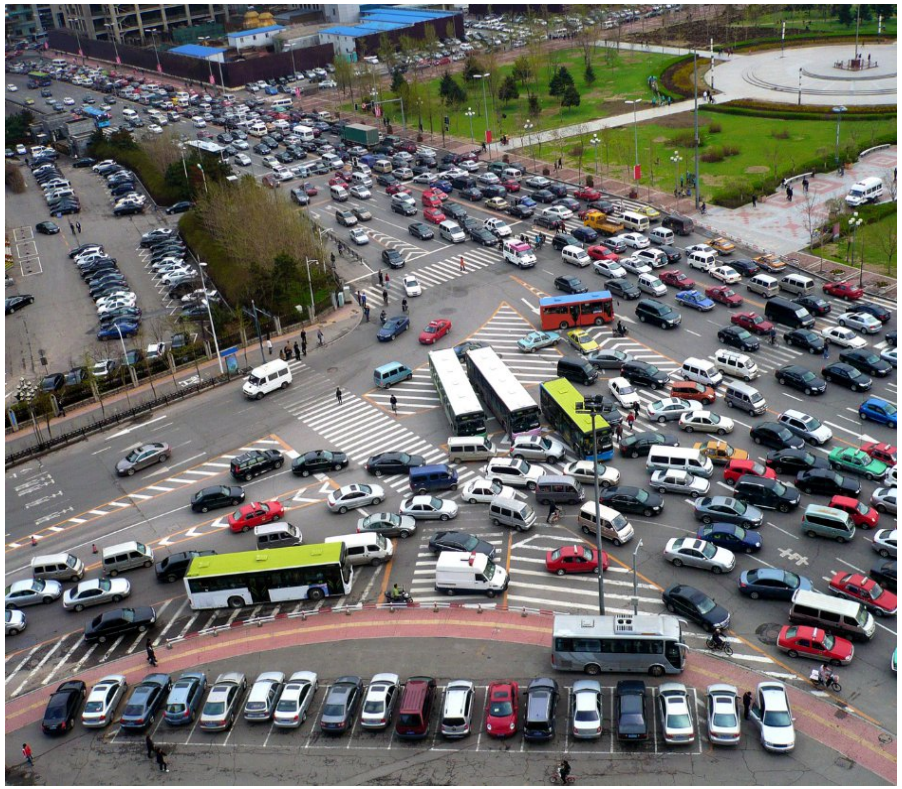
1. Cities for cars: post-war boom and the major shift (1945–1970s)



- After **World War II**, age of mass consumption started
- The car becomes a **symbol of freedom and progress**.
- **The U.S. pioneered the concept of the car-centered city**
- The **Interstate Highway System** (launched in 1956) connected cities and fueled suburban expansion.
- European cities followed this model to align with "modern" development –
- Residential areas were designed for cars

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1. Cities for cars: post-war boom and the major shift (1945–1970s)

Basel Steingraben Street. Space for cars

Key ideas behind the car-centered city

- **Separation of functions** (residential, work, and shopping areas are spatially divided).
- **Highways and expressways cutting through cities**.
- **Car-friendly infrastructure** (parking garages, large intersections, little space for pedestrians).
- **Suburbanization** (urban sprawl due to car-dependent suburbs).
- Car-centered city was a result of the faith in technology which lead to a better quality of life.

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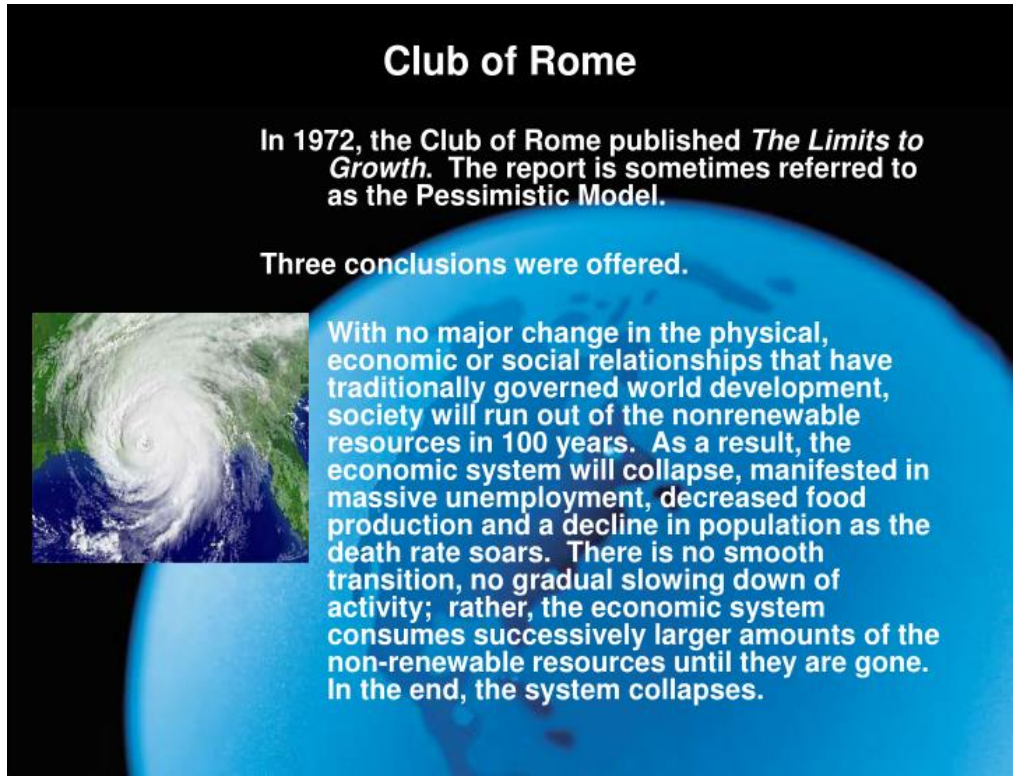
1. Cities for cars: criticism and countermovements (1970s–Today)



- 1970s onwards: Growing criticism of car-centered cities
- Issues: Air pollution, urban sprawl, traffic congestion
- New urban planning: Pedestrian zones, car-free districts
- Cities leading the change: Copenhagen, Amsterdam, Zurich
- Current trend: Rise of the 15-minute city (essentials within walking/biking distance)

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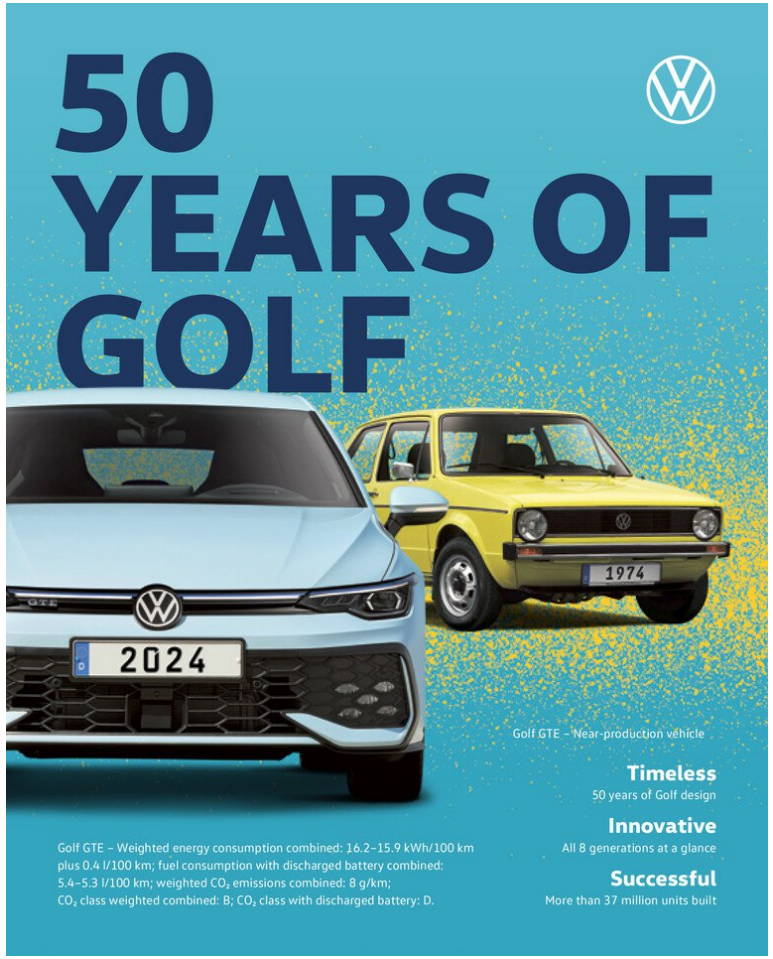
1. Car industry promises (brain washing measures)



- **Visuals:** Flashing sexy images of sparkling cars
- **Sound:** Husky voices accompanying the visuals
- **Message:**
- The machine (car) will liberate us
- It will expand our freedom
- It positions us to lead more beautiful, easy lives
- Promises of a more enviable lifestyle and self-determination

https://youtu.be/jSWGA1YITFA

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1.Reality of the car dominated system

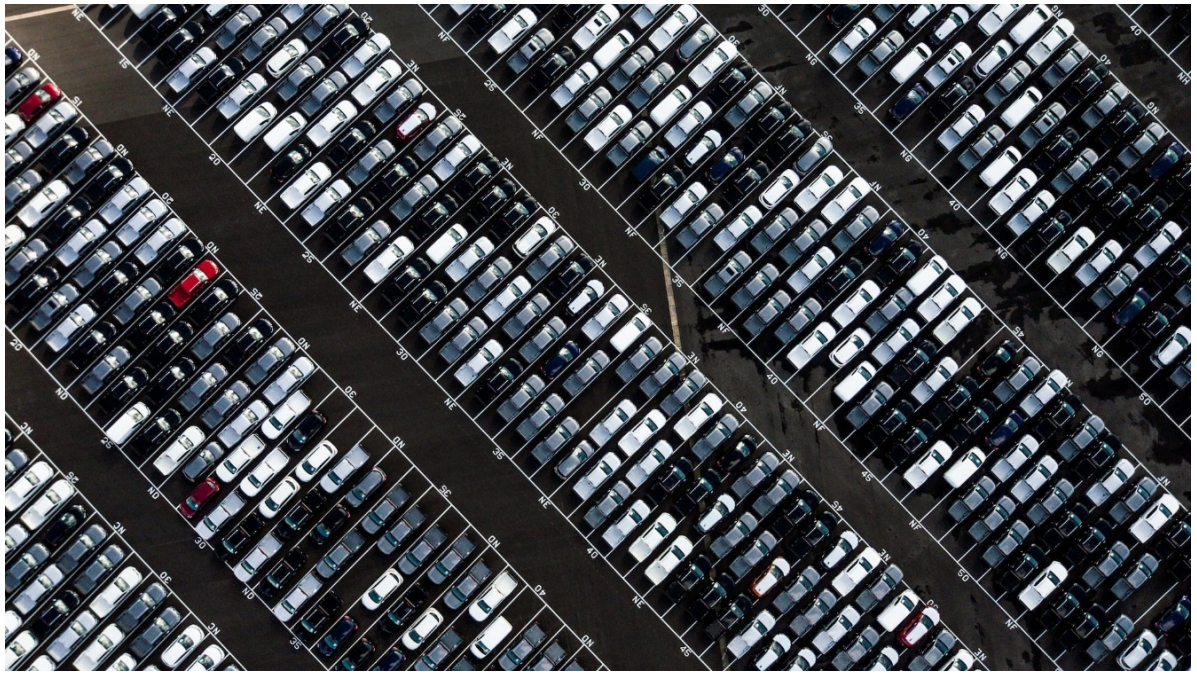

Foto from the Highway near Basel from the train 🏝

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1. The mobility paradox from design perspective

https://philarchive.org/archive/DORGUE

The Mobility Paradox:

- Small number of cars benefits the individual but harms society as numbers increase.
- **Individual benefits (few cars):**
- Barely noticeable problems (e.g., traffic jams, environmental pollution).
- **Collective disadvantages (many cars):**
- **Key Insight:**
- While cars offer individual advantages, mass usage leads to collective disadvantages.
- Mass car use displaces more sustainable mobility options.

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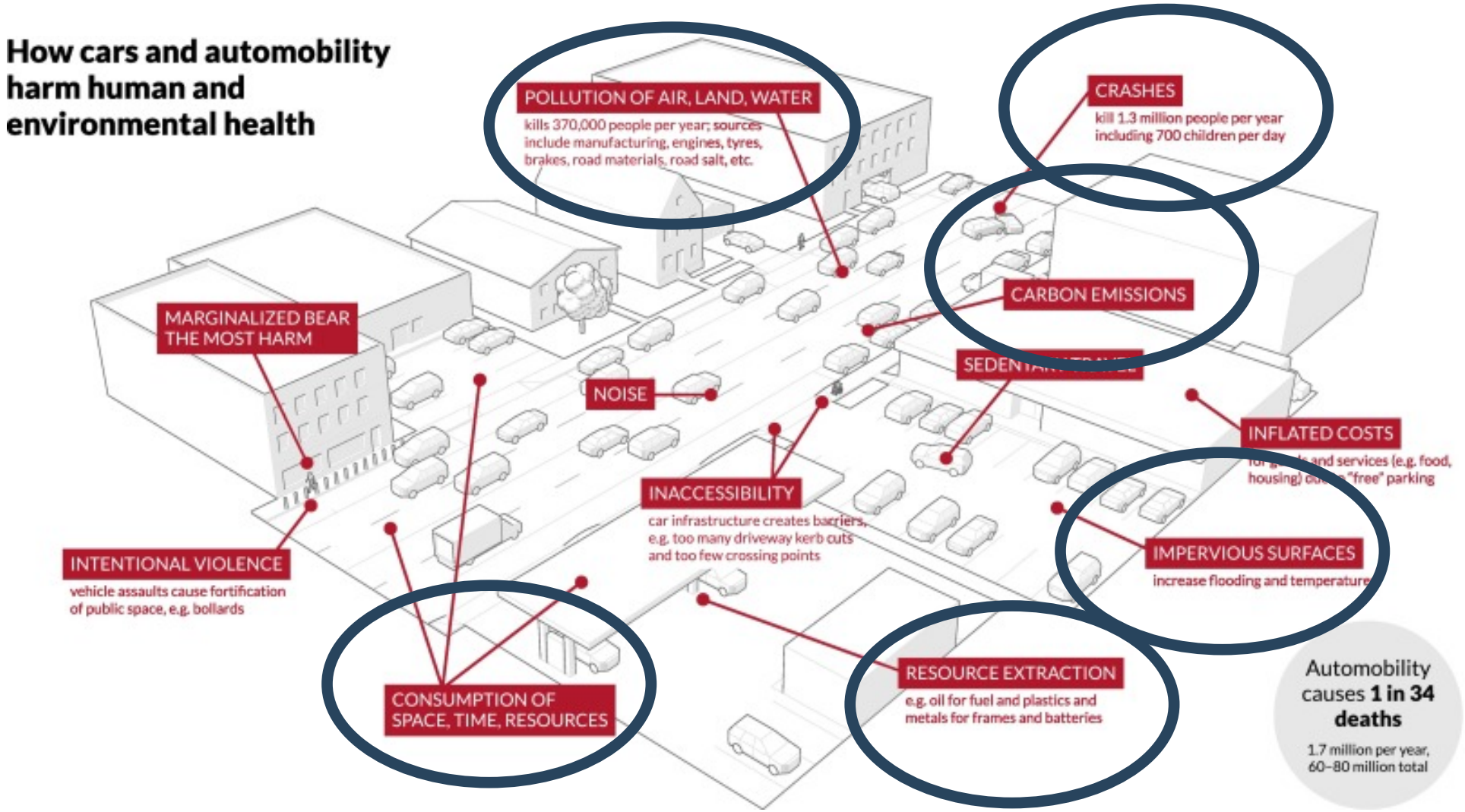
2. Negative consequences of car centric cities: why change matters!



https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0966692324000267

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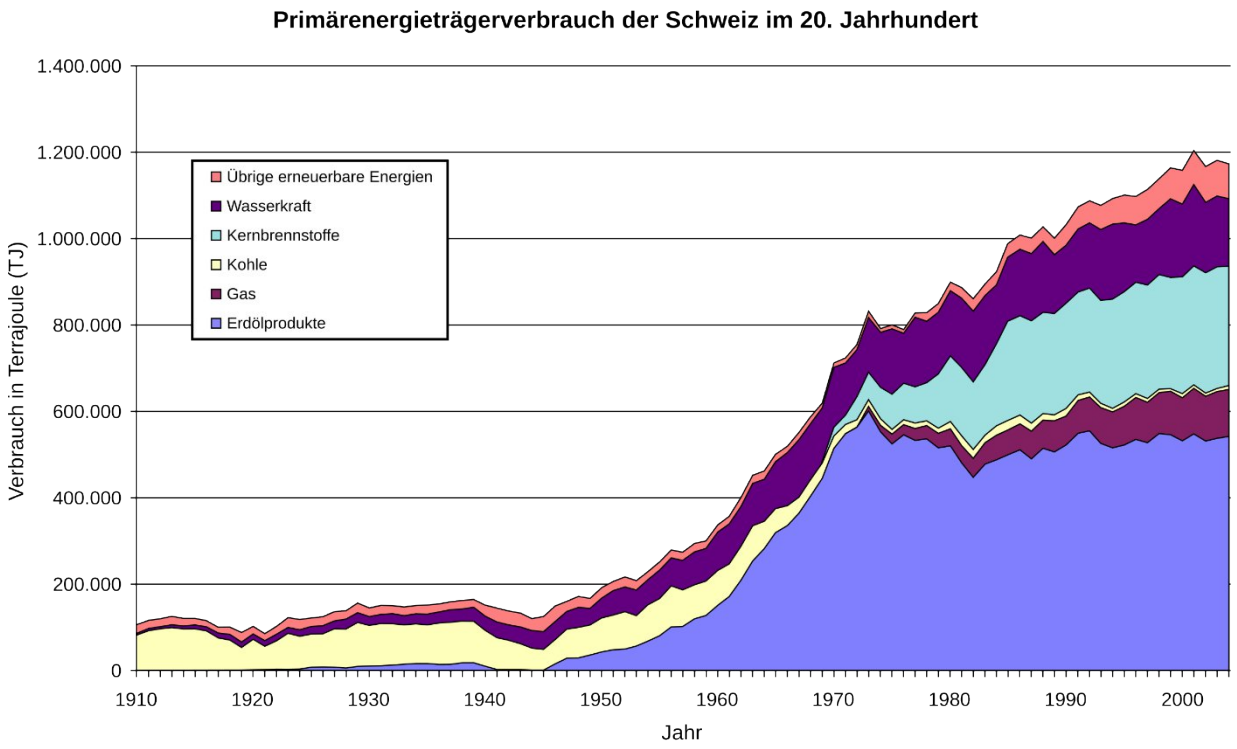
2. Ressource extraction: energy consumption Switzerland



https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/9/91/Primaerenergieverbrauch-Schweiz.svg/2560px-Primaerenergieverbrauch-Schweiz.svg.png

- **Transport and Energy Use:**
- Relies almost exclusively on fossil fuels (petrol, diesel, kerosene).
- Accounts for around **a third of Switzerland's total greenhouse gas emissions**.
- **Shift in Emissions:**
- Since 2005, transport has surpassed the building sector as the top emitter of greenhouse gases.
- **Economic and Political Impacts:**
- Enormous sums of money flow from Switzerland to countries with **low levels of democracy**.

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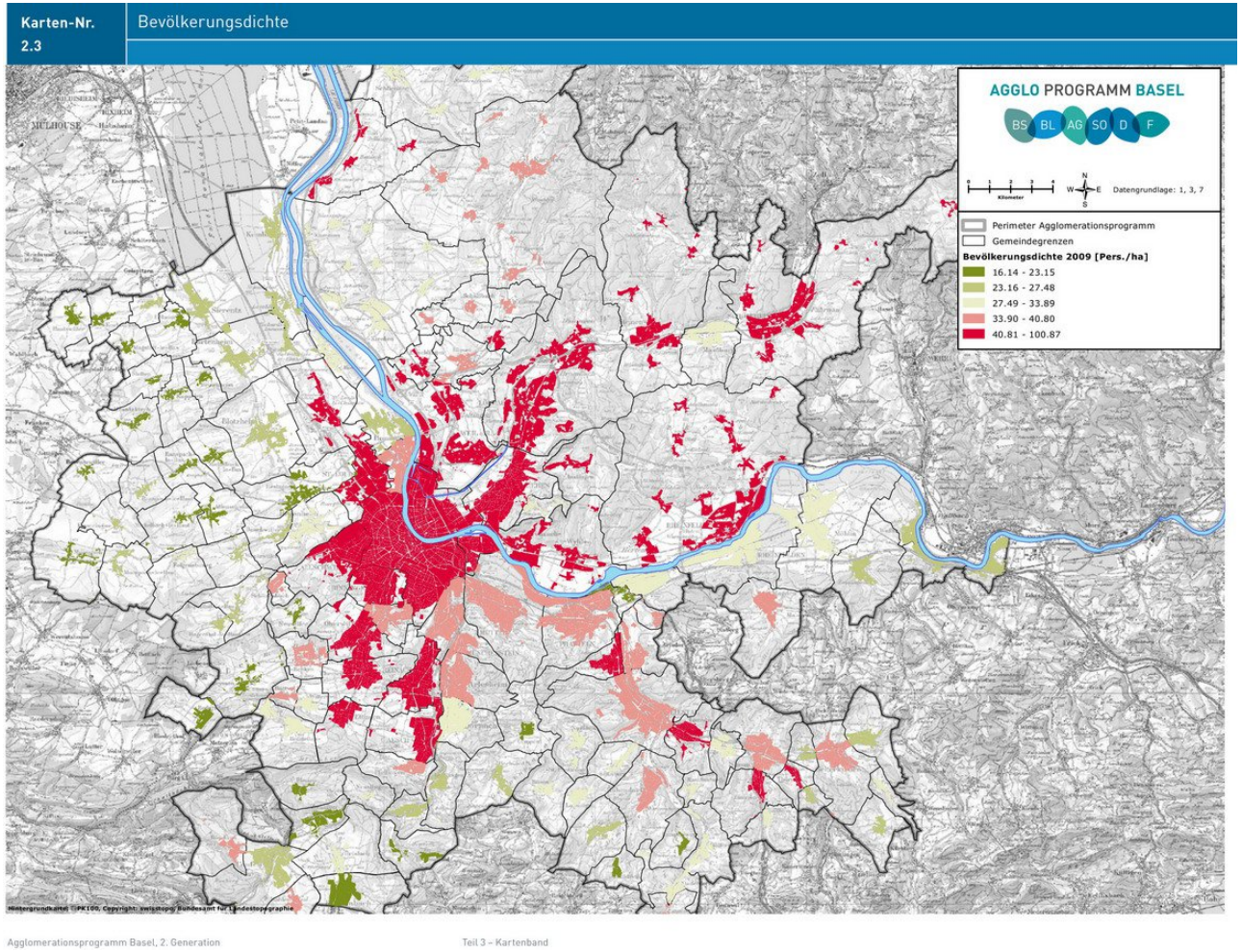
2. Spatial planning for cars leads to car commuters



Agglomerationsprogramm Basel, 2. Generation Teil 3 – Kartenband

- **Spatial planning in Greater Basel**
- Development strongly oriented towards the automobile.
- Increasing expansion of the agglomeration, closely linked to automobile infrastructure.
- **Urban planning Focus:**
- Motorized private transport has been the focus for decades.
- This focus is reflected in today's settlement structure.
- **Traffic in Basel:**
- 75 to 80 percent of traffic on Basel's hi
  is regional traffic from the Basel agglor

https://www.pendleratlas.ch/kanton-basel-stadt/, https://www.regionatur.ch/Themen/Siedlung/Agglomeration

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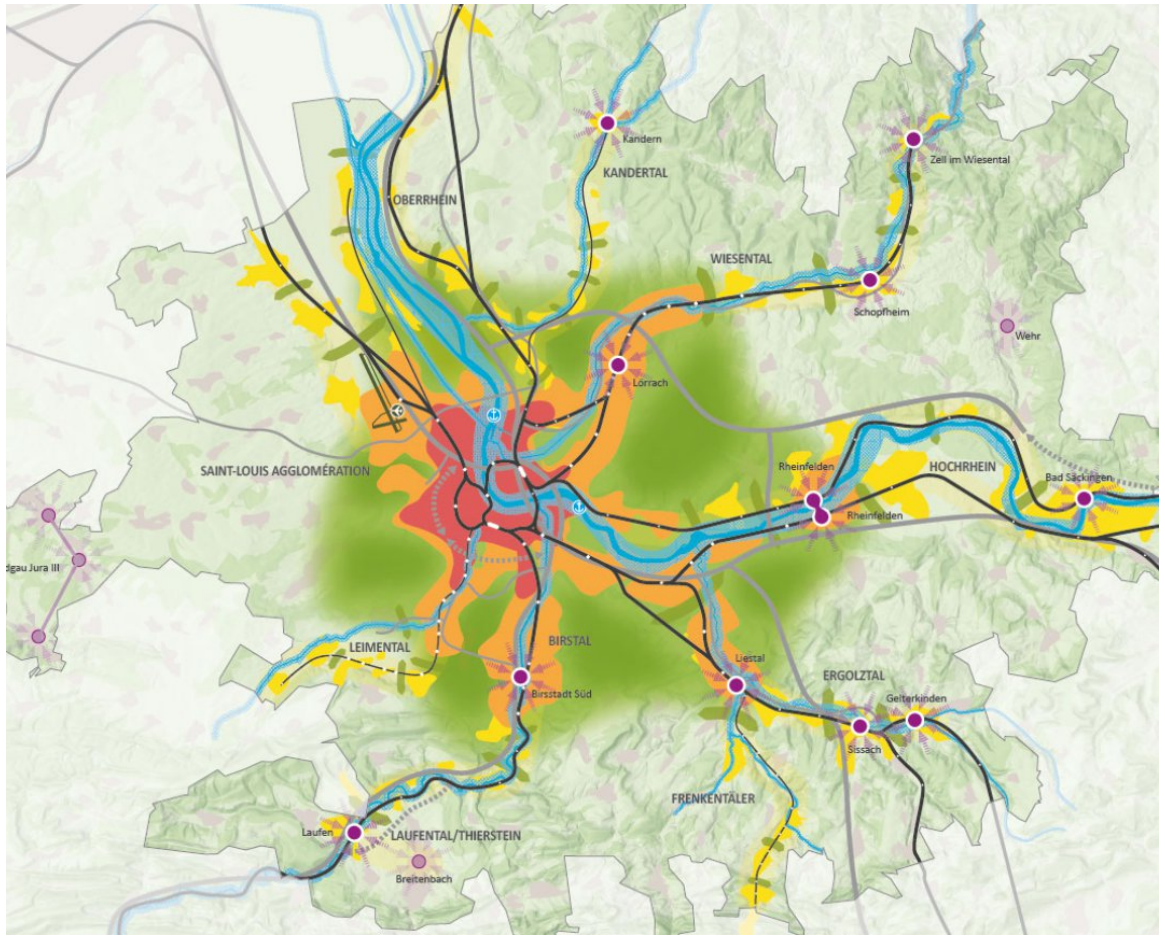
2. Spatial planning tries to lead to less cars: potential for improvement



Since 2014, it become clear that a new approach to planning is needed. (Revison RPG)

- Municipalities are now required to coordinate regionally and plan more efficiently.

Key priorities include:

•Making better use of residential potential
•Aligning transport and land use planning
•Addressing population growth in a sustainable way
•Ensuring the long-term protection of green and open spaces, which are under increasing pressure

https://www.pendleratlas.ch/kanton-basel-stadt/,
https://www.regionatur.ch/Themen/Siedlung/Agglomeration

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2. Energy consumption for mobility with cars in Basel per year: challenge

https://statistik.bs.ch/indikatorenset/city-statistics

What do you think? How much fuel do the 80,000 or so cars in Basel need?

The **annual fuel consumption** for **80,000 vehicles**, each driving an average of **15,000 km per year**, is:

Gasoline: 44,712,000 liters

Diesel: 26,784,000 liters

Total fuel consumption:

71.496.000 liters each year

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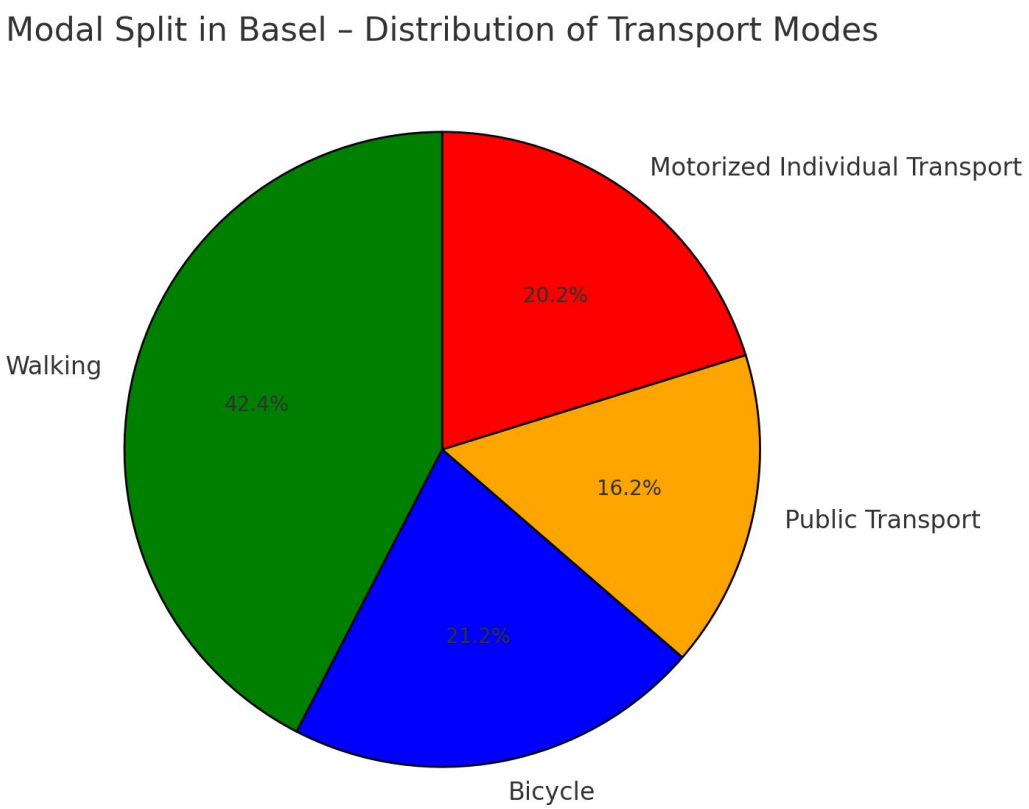
2. High resource requirements for mobility that could be organized with sustainable resources: potential for improvement



What do you think? How many trips are shorter than 5 km?

- **Short car trips in Basel:**
- 53% of car trips < 5 km
- 70–80% likely < 13 km
- Urban car use mostly for short distances (source: monitoring-fussvelo.ch)

https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/9/91/Primaerenergieverbrauch-Schweiz.svg/2560px-Primaerenergieverbrauch-Schweiz.svg.png

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2. Air pollutants caused by traffic: challenge

Quelle: Berechnung mit https://chatgpt.com

Annual road traffic emissions in Basel:

- CO_2: 41,400 tons
- NOx: 79,350 kg
- Particulate Matter (PM): 880 kg
- Microplastics (tire wear): 2,013 tons

These figures highlight the environmental impact of motorized individual transport in Basel.

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2. Air pollutants caused by traffic: better health potential for improvement

- **Potential Annual Emissions Reduction (if all trips <13 km shift to eco-modes):**
- CO_2: −20,700 tons
- NOx: −39,675 kg
- PM: −441 kg
- Microplastics: −1,007 tons
- → **Major air quality improvement** 🚲🚶‍♂️🚌

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2. Space requirements for public parking spaces in Basel: challenge

Quelle: Eigene Berechnung mit Chatgpt

- **The 27,000 public parking spaces in Basel cover an area of 0.34 km² (337,500 m²).**

  This corresponds to:

- **Almost 1% of the entire area of Basel-Stadt (37 km²)**
- **Over 42 soccer pitches (a soccer pitch has approx. 8,000 m²)**
- **More than the entire area of Basel's old town**

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2. New public green and social spaces in Basel: potential for improvement

Quelle: Bilder: **Vorher Nachher. Avenue Daumesnil, Paris.**
Berechnung: Eigene Berechnung mit Chatgpt

- **50% reduction (13,500 parking spaces)**
  → 168,750 m² of potential green space
- **70% reduction (18,900 parking spaces)**

  → 236,250 m² of potential green space
- **50% conversion equals 21 soccer fields**
- **70% conversion equals 29.5 soccer fields**
- **This space could be transformed into parks, urban greenery…**

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2. Death toll of the car dominated society: challenge

What do you think?

- How many lives has the current transport system already cost?
- How many people are killed every year in the world and in Switzerland?

Global perspective	Switzerland
• 1 in 34 deaths are caused by cars and automobility with 1,670,000 deaths per year. • Cars and automobility have killed 60–80 million people since their invention.	• In Switzerland, around 240 people die in traffic accidents every year. • Every fatality has a family and leaves behind traumatised people.

Car harm will continue unless policies change.

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2. Road accidents Basel City 2023 statistic: challenge

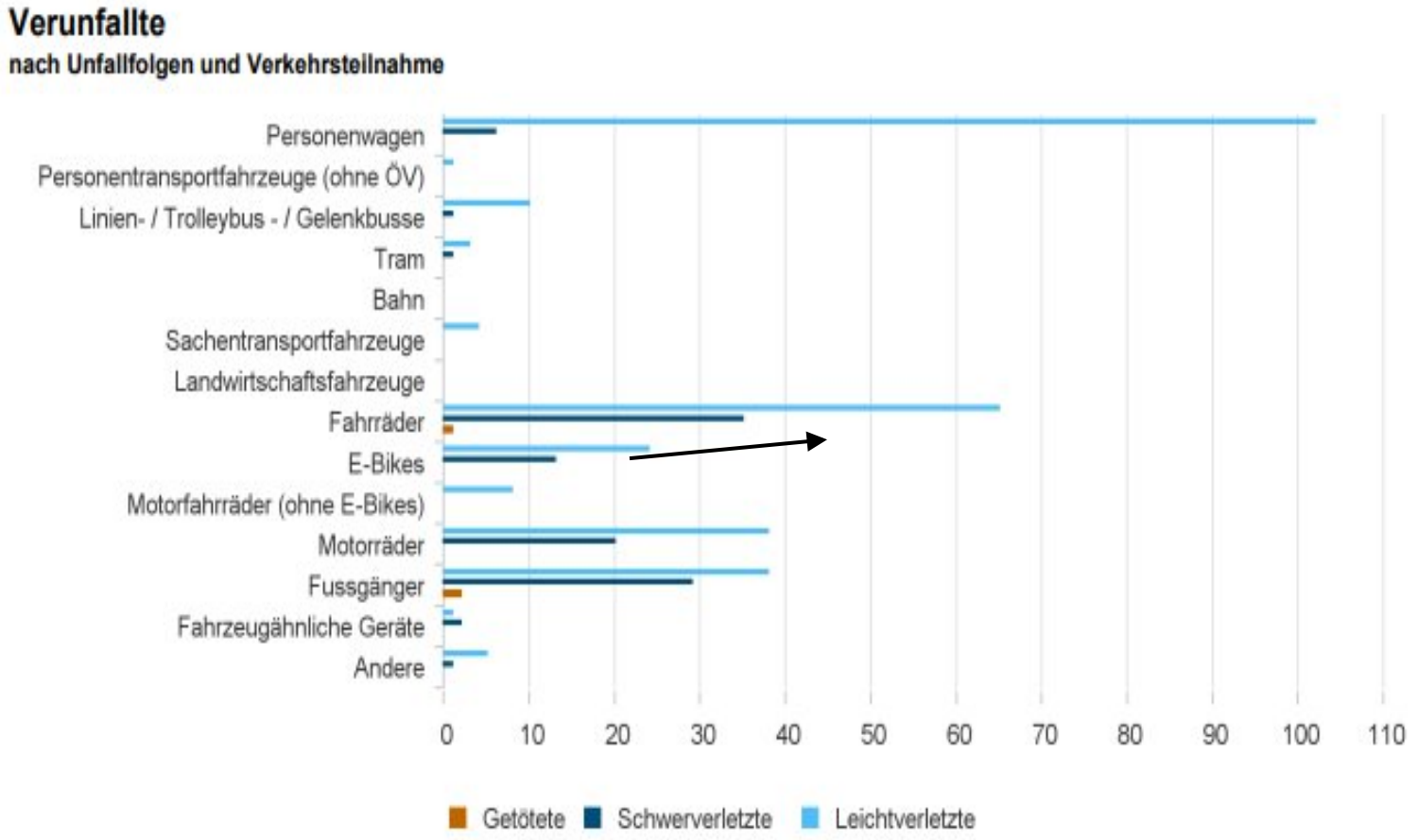
Basel City 2023 statistic
(graphic)

Seriously injured 2023

- 6 Car
- 48 Bikes (Total)
- 29 Pedestrians

2020-2023 traffic fatalities

- 1 Car
- 7 Bikes (Total)
- 6 Pedestrians



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2. Driving a car from the cabaret artist's point of view

- We usually drive 80 kg of people in 1.5-2 tons of metal through the countryside.
- We do this for a few kilometers that we could travel by bike as well as 1000 kilometers that we could travel by train.
- We are not aware of how crazy this is at its core.
- *«Driving makes no sense at all»*

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q8RAiqfEoXk

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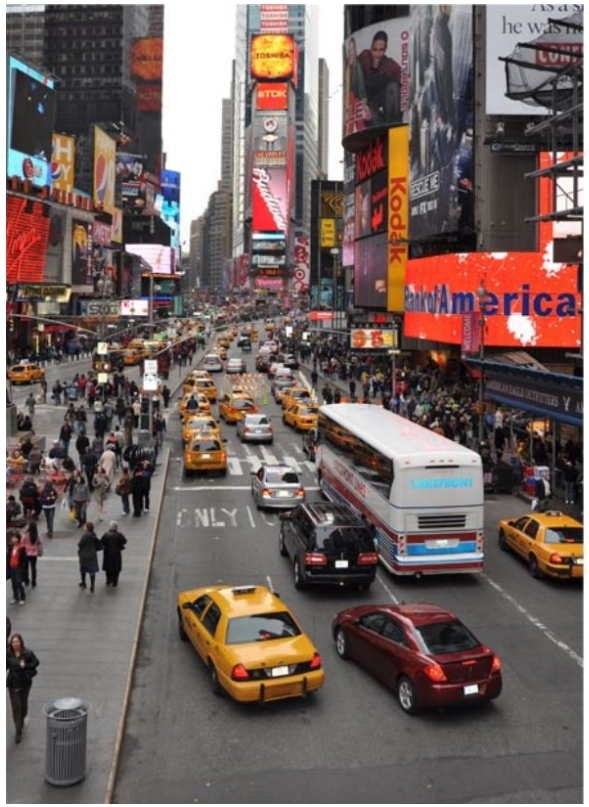
3. Cities for people: how we can achieve it



Learning from successful cities:

Paris

Oslo

Copenhagen

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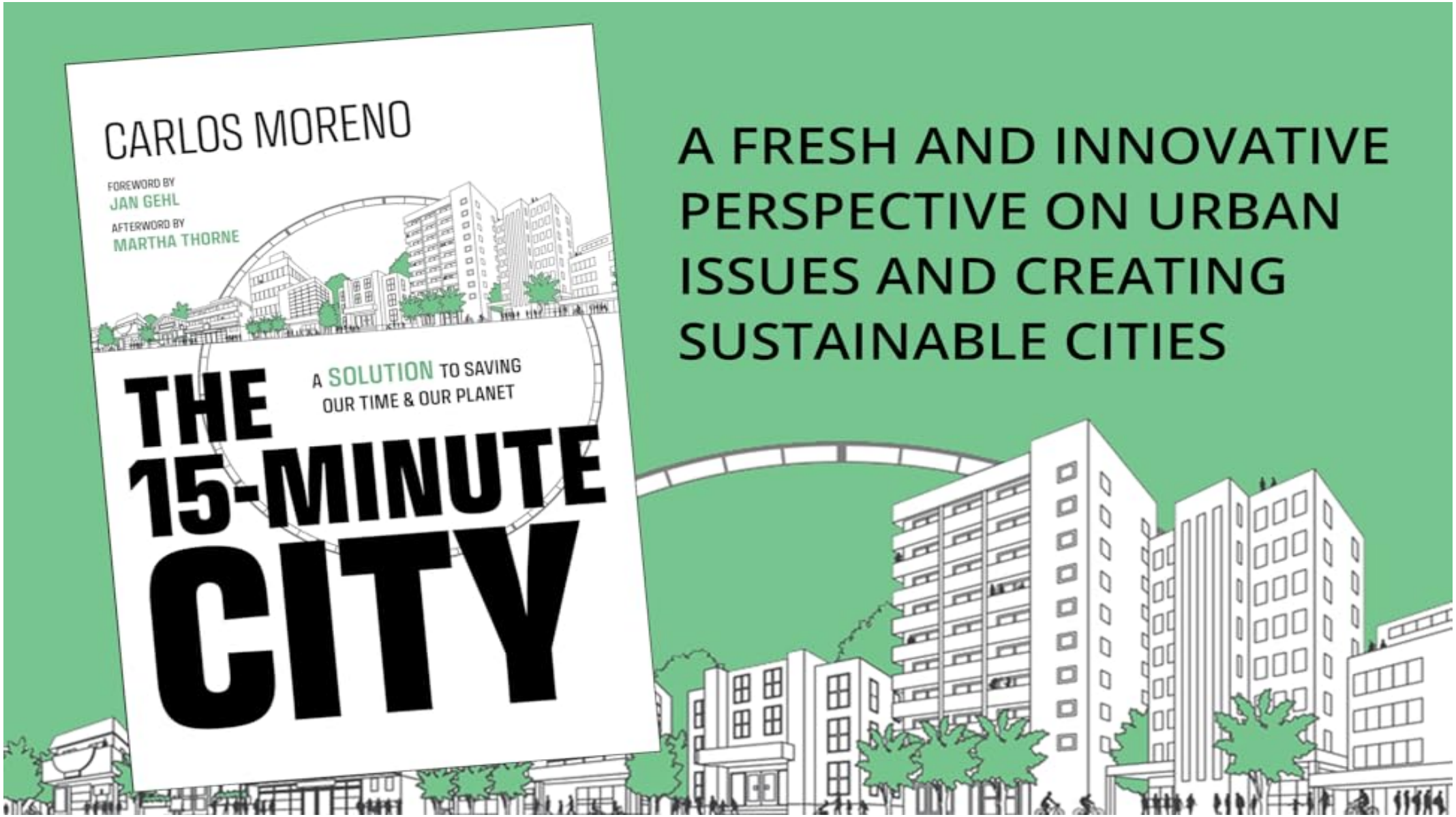

- /www.youtube.com/watch?v=nVLxUkVwgEU

3. Paris: succesfull example of improvement

In Paris, bicycles are increasingly dominating the boulevards

The car has lost its leading role as the main mode of transport

Only 4.3% of journeys in the city are made by car

11.2% of journeys are now made by bicycle

2.4 road death per 100.000 inhabitants (2021)

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3. Oslo: succesfull example of improvement

By turning the traditional planning pyramid upside down — putting people's needs at the top and private cars at the bottom — Oslo has managed to prioritize pedestrians, bikes, and city life in streets and squares that were formerly dominated by private cars.

0 road death per 700.000 inhabitants (2021)
Since 2019 until 2022 only 1 road death

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3. Copenhagen: succesfull example of improvement

Blaue Streifen leiten Radfahrer über Straßenkreuzungen: Kopenhagen hat dem gesamtwirtschaftlich kostengünstigsten Verkehrsmittel zum Durchbruch verholfen. (Foto: Mikael Colville-Andersen/Flickr)

Copenhagen - five times more bikes than cars. It has long since undergone a traffic turnaround in favour of cyclists' safety - the result is cycle paths that are often almost as wide as the car lanes. More bicycles than cars travel through the city centre every day, and almost half of all journeys to work, university and school are made by bike. In 2020, the approximately 630,000 inhabitants owned more than 730,000 bicycles, but only around 130,000 cars.

1.1 road death per 100.000 inhabitants (2021)

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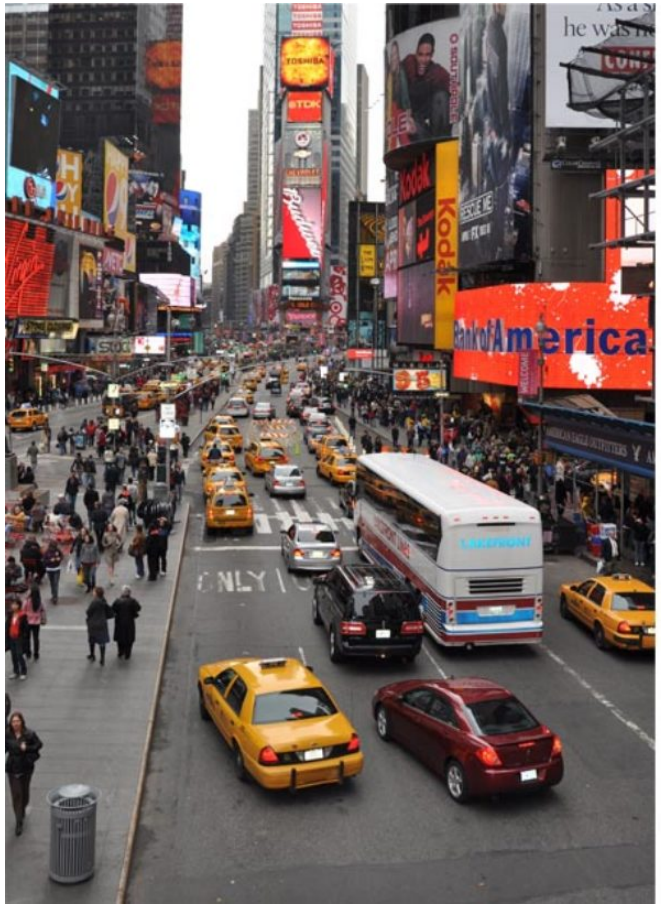
3. Cities for people: main challenges



https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tRZMpGyQBZ0

Main challenges

1. Embedded mobility habits as a barrier
2. Economic opposition from car-related industries
3. Legal hurdles
4. Resistance to sustainable urban design

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3.1. Embededded mobility habits as a barrier: the need for a cultural change

- **The Car Trap:**
- Our environment is built around cars — hard to escape.
- Laws and habits reinforce car dependency.
- Historic neighborhoods weren’t designed for cars.
- Streets were meant for people, not parking.
- Parking (stationary traffic) is a key leverage point.

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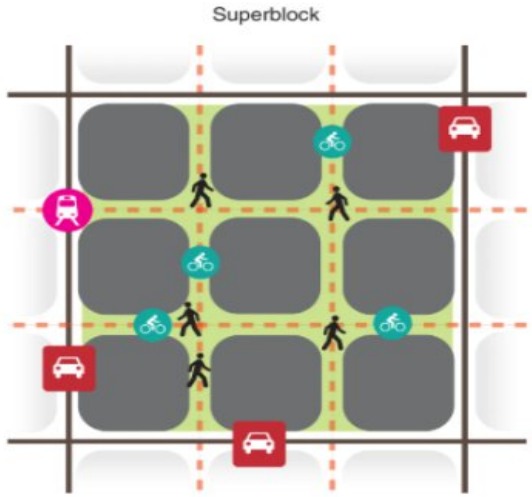
3.1. Embedded mobility habits as a barrier: Superblocks as change instrument

Optimize traffic flow
Reduce traffic speed
Minimize parking spaces

Promote sustainable mobility

Unsealing and tree planting
Facade greening
Temporary and **relocatable** measures

Creating meeting areas



Superblocks make cities more livable for people and improve the quality of life for the majority of residents.

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3.1. Embededded mobility habits as a barrier: Superblocks as change instrument

- **Superblock Festival Basel**
- First held on 12 Aug 2023 – Mülhauserstrasse became a lively, green space.
- Cafés, music, games, and info on mobility.
- Growing interest in the Superblock idea since then.
- 2 festivals in 2024
- How many in 2025?

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3.2. Economic opposition from car-related industries: money in mobility system in Basel-Stadt

https://www.pendleratlas.ch/kanton-basel-stadt/

Main Costs

1. **Fuel costs: ~370 million CHF per year**
2. **Vehicle maintenance costs: ~120 million CHF per year**
3. **Road infrastructure costs: ~75 million CHF per year**

☞ Total costs of fossil mobility: ~565 million CHF per year

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3.2. Economic opposition from car-related industries.
Money in the fossil mobility system: Example of lobby groups

auto schweiz suisse

- **AGVS (Auto Gewerbe Verband Schweiz):** nearly **4,000 garages** with **39,000 employees** generated **CHF 95 billion** in 2018.
- **auto-schweiz:**
  35 import companies distribute vehicles worth **CHF 10 billion** through **4,500 dealers**.
- **ASTAG (Swiss Road Transport Association):**
  4,000 member companies play a key role in the Swiss economy, though exact revenue figures are unavailable.
- **TCS (Touring Club Schweiz):**
  1.5 million members

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3.2. Economic beneficiaries of a non-fossil, bicycle-friendly city

https://www.pendleratlas.ch/kanton-basel-stadt/

- **Local Benefits of Active Mobility:**
- **Retail & Food:** More foot traffic = more sales
- **Bike Sector:** Higher demand for bikes, e-bikes, repairs
- **Urban Design:** Upgrades create jobs for planners & builders

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3.3. Legal hurdles

- **Car-Favoring Policies (Examples):**
- Road laws simplify car use & registration
- Highways get major funding
- Urban planning prioritizes cars
- Commuter tax break favors drivers
- Public funds support road & parking
- Speed & traffic planning favor cars
- Limited space for bikes & pedestrians

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3.4. Resistance to sustainable urban design from insight the government

- **Basel's Transport Policy (Last 10 Years):**
- Focus on traffic flow & highway expansion (e.g. Rhine tunnel)
- Few restrictions on cars
- Moderate cycling promotion, no major shift
- 30 km/h in residential areas, not citywide
- Unlike Paris, little urban space reallocation

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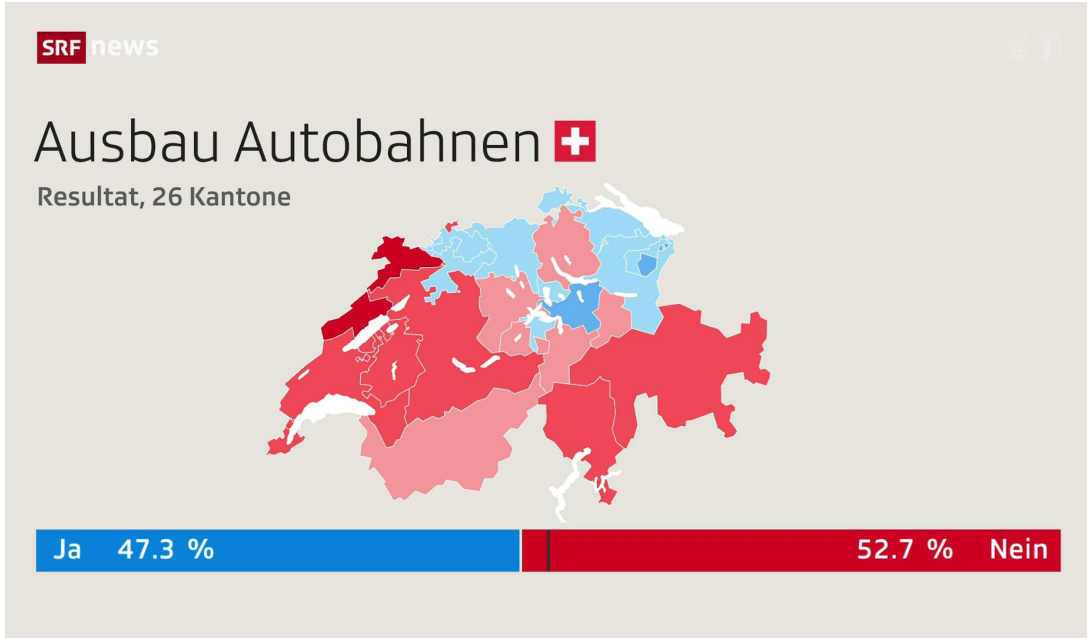
3.4. A strong civil society that fights for sustainable mobility*: e*xample of success



Rejected: Switzerland says no to highway expansion in November 2024

Bäume statt Parkplätze

Kontroverse Superblock-Tests können in zwei Quartieren starten

Achieved: Basel, Zurich and Bern to launch superblock tests in 2025

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4. Key takeaways: Why transformation is possible

Die Freie Strasse in Basel (Bild: © Pro Innerstadt Basel)

- **Towards livable Cities:**

Let's recap:

- Car-centric planning has major downsides
- Other cities show us that change works
- Basel has the potential – but also clear obstacles
- The good news is: none of the barriers are fixed. They can be shifted – with political courage, smart policy, and public engagement.

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4. Key takeaways: a city for people – what would that look like?

- **Towards Livable Cities:** Now, imagine a different Basel.

- Streets with trees instead of cars.
- Kids playing in safe spaces.
- Public benches, cafés, bike paths, and greenery.
- Clean air. Less noise. More smiles.
- It’s not a dream – it’s a design decision. The tools exist. The knowledge exists. What we need now is action.

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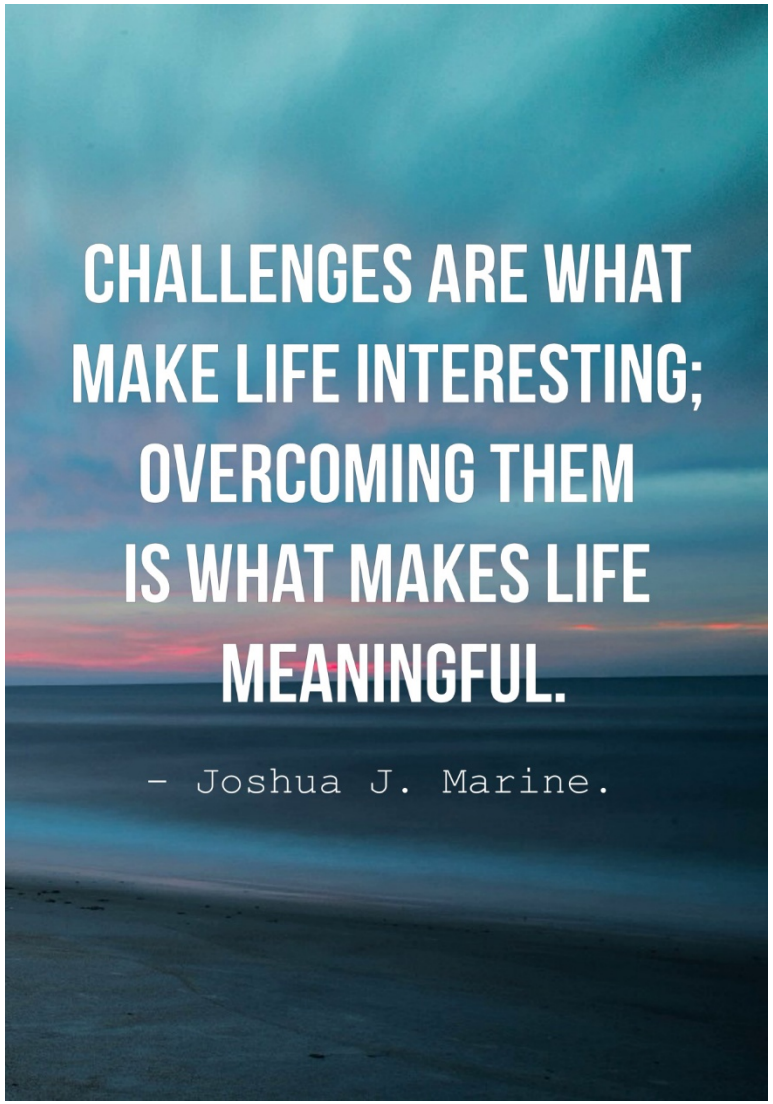
4. Key takeaways: challenges we had overcome to had success



4 Key steps for Change:

Transformation isn't magic. It's the result of four main ingredients:

- Change daily habits – make sustainable mobility the easier choice
- Create legal frameworks – enable progressive planning
- Confront fossil lobbying – support a just transition
- Inspire with examples – let people experience new realities

It's not just about policy – it's about imagination and courage

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4. Key takeaways: Urban transformation needs participation

- **Key Steps for Change:**

- No city transforms from the top down alone.
- Change only lasts when it’s rooted in the community.
- That’s why participation, local activism, and democratic processes are essential.
- From street festivals to neighborhood planning groups – people must be part of the process.

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4. Key takeaways: Get involved in the transformation

Driving change:

- We at **Grüne Superblocks Basel** are working to create people-centered neighborhoods right here in our city
- We organize festivals, workshops, and pilot projects.
- We collaborate with local residents, artists, and city planners.
- If you want to help shape Basel's future – join us. Your ideas, your voice, and your energy are needed.

Grüne Superblocks Basel – Advocating for livable streets. https://gruenesuperblocks.ch/andere-aktivitaten/

Basel 2030 – Campaigning for a sustainable Basel.

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4. Thank you for your attention – final thoughts

- The transformation won't happen overnight. But it will never happen at all if we don't start.

So let's ask ourselves:

- How many cars do we really need – and how many people do we want to make space for?
- Let's build a Basel for people – together.

—

Lecture by ***Björn Slawik***
Vorstand, ***Grüne Superblocks Basel***

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Resource selection

Car harm: A global review of automobility's harm to people and the environment:

https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0966692324000267

Gestaltung und Ethik von Andreas Dorschel:

https://philarchive.org/archive/DORGUE

Vision Zero Basel:

https://www.openpetition.eu/ch/petition/blog/manifest-fuer-null-verkehrstote-in-basel-vision-zero?language=en_GB.utf8

Driving makes no sense:

https://www.instagram.com/thewaroncars/reel/DAMytHtO2tw/

https://www.strongtowns.org/journal/2023/8/8/3-takeaways-from-ivan-illichs-critique-of-cars

https://urbancyclinginstitute.org/research-uci/#

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