

CREATING MORE LIVEABLE, ATTRACTIVE AND ECONOMICALLY EFFECTIVE CITIES

A BRIEF PRIMER TO IMPLEMENTING URBAN VEHICLE ACCESS REGULATIONS

By Lucy Sadler

Urban Vehicle Access Regulations (UVAR) are strategies that restrict or regulate motorised traffic access to an area, road, or portion of a road to all, or to specific vehicle categories of, motor vehicle traffic. This can be by banning or charging (certain types of) vehicles or behaviour, by taking space away from motorised vehicles to give to sustainable modes or by changing the road layout to ensure that drivers behave as desired. Sadler et al, (2022) describes them in more detail (see WTPP May 2022 issue); they include pedestrian streets, limited traffic zones, low / zero emission zones, and congestion charge zones.

Until recently, the motives to implement UVARs focused on improving air quality or protecting historic city centres, but now increasingly reasons are climate change. Cities are at the forefront of the move to decarbonize transport, thus cities are seeking increased use of public transport, active mobility, freight consolidation, cycle logistics etc. In addition, electric or fuel cell vehicles are being encouraged where these strategies are not possible. UVARs, by reducing vehicle traffic, are complementary with these strategies and indeed make alternate modes more attractive and thus more successful.



Photo credit: Artur Kornakov_Entry Totally Prohibited, Vladivostok, Russia, 2021. <https://unsplash.com/photos/qCxAc7lfsnU>

There currently are over 800 UVARs in Europe, and the vast variety in type and geographic location are documented at www.urbanaccessregulations.eu. (Figure 1).

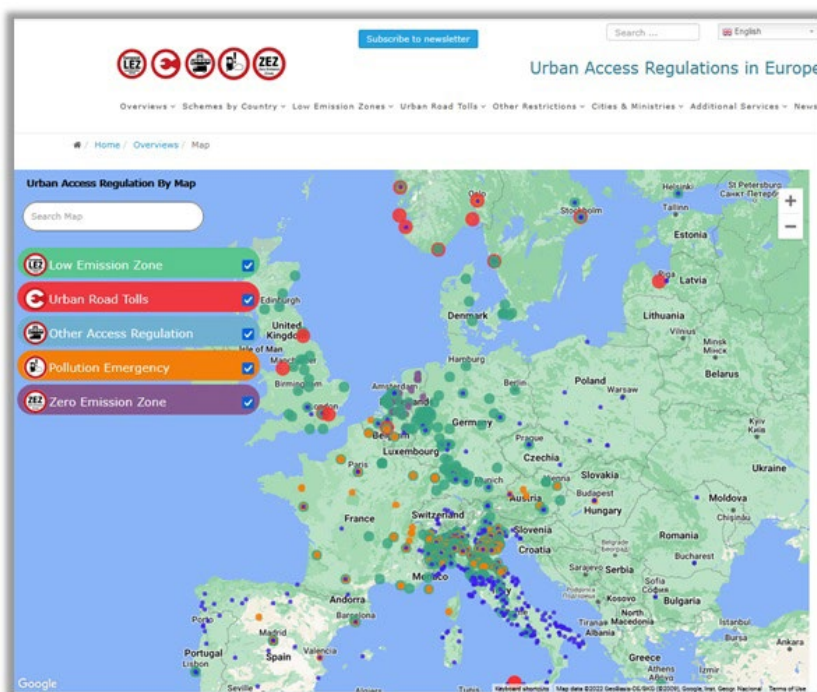


Figure 1: Map of UVARs in Europe, source <https://urbanaccessregulations.eu/home/>

Even once sustainable mobility options are available, convenient and cost effective, there is often a resistance to change habits. UVARs can help be the final ‘kick’ to ‘encourage people with a stick or boot’ to change their transport mode. (Figure 2). Charging schemes can, in addition, provide the funds to enable subsidised sustainable mobility.

Because sometimes, Carrots just simply aren't enough

The vast majority of people & companies change when the alternative is

- more convenient or attractive,
- ‘Visibly’ cheaper, or
- their current option is not possible or banned = UVAR

Picture sources: [Pixabay](#), [Sadler](#).

Figure 2: Sometimes carrots just simply aren't enough. Picture source Pixabay, Sadler Consultants.

Other Benefits of UVAR- Fairness and Attractiveness

Increasingly fairness is an issue: those travelling sustainably take less roadway and public space which are valuable and scarce resources. Why should space be granted automatically at low cost for those travelling unsustainably, subsidised by us all? Parking is also the least economically beneficial use of the kerbside (Figure 3).

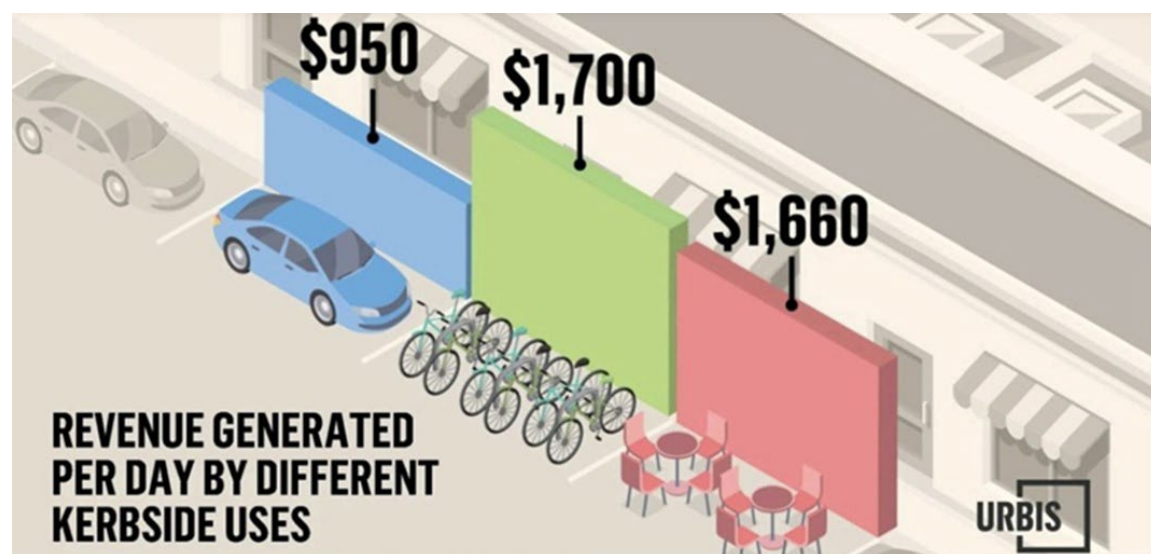


Figure 3: Revenue generated per day by different kerbside uses (Australia). Source [Urbis](#)

Ravensburg Centre (DE)



Ghent Braun Square (BE)



Figure 4: City centres previously as car parks, now as amenity areas.

UVARs are also about making cities more attractive. In the 1970's the town centre was accepted as a car park (parking lot); these days nobody would want to return to that, but the change (prohibiting parking in town squares) was very controversial at the time. (Figure 4).

UVARS AND LIVABLE CITIES

We are now at a new version of that radical change to cities: the assumption that roadspace is automatically given to the car is being questioned and the streets are now starting to be reclaimed for people.

City residents currently accept the reality that they need to spend much of their time travelling for their daily needs. However, this is one of the contributing factors that reduces the attractiveness of cities and make people move out of the city. Work-life balance is becoming increasingly important, and the cities with the best quality of life can attract the best people to live and work there. UVARs, as well as the 15-minute city concept (see e.g. [C40's 15-minute article](#)), of which UVARs are an essential part, will reduce traveling and improve life for city dwellers, as well as being more sustainable. The time that is not spent travelling can be used for more pleasant, or economically beneficial, purposes.

Not only the locals are affected by high traffic in a city. Tourists do not travel to cities to see traffic jams. They want to see the buildings, culture, and be able to enjoy their time in the city – and UVARs help to improve their experience. Travelling around central Paris today, for example, as a tourist is so much more pleasant on foot or bike than it was, since Anne Hidalgo (Mayor of Paris since 2014) has implemented many 15-minute city aspects. It is not to say everything is already perfect, but it is moving in the right direction. First, there needs to be the alternatives to enable people and goods to access the area, before schemes are implemented, and in Paris there have been, for example, issues with lack of alternatives from the poorer suburbs, which are usually by definition where there are fewer public transport options.

Picture sources: Ravensburg Blaserturm um 1970 Copyright Landesmedienzentrum Baden-Württemberg 01 08 1970, Lucy Sadler, Beeldbank from the city of Ghent; Databank Publieke Ruimte (Database Public Space).

Open Streets project



Source: Valentino Sevino, Milan Agenzia Mobilita Ambiente e Territorio (AMAT)



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Tactical Urbanism / Spatial Interventions

Streeteries and parklets - Regulation on Temporary Occupation of Public Space



Figure 5: Tactical Urbanism examples in Milan, Source: Valentino Sevino, Milan Agenzia Mobilita Ambiente e Territorio (AMAT)

Even in major cities, a large proportion of urban trips are short distance trips, and could be done by bike or foot. Tactical urbanism and spatial interventions (Figure 5) can often improve the use and experience of sustainable, and particularly active, modes, at relatively low cost and controversy (although taking parking spaces away can be tricky, and best with lots of work). European cities are increasingly taking a low-tech approach and ‘simply’ taking road and parking space away, and have implemented one or more of the following: large pedestrian zones, bus lanes and cycle paths, traffic blocks to prevent through traffic, Residential Areas/Encounter Zone/Superblock/Woonerfs, or circulation plans (where cars use the ring road but cyclists travel directly) etc. The numbers of Zero Emission Zones, limited traffic zones and neighbourhoods with 20-30 kph speed limits are also increasing.

Public Engagement

When implementing UVARs, it is important to include the public for several reasons. They will be aware of issues that the city authorities may not be. The more citizens are involved and understand the issues, and the

less they are presented with a ‘done deal’ the easier it is for them to influence and then accept the scheme. At the same time, cities need to balance the ‘I need an exemption too’ versus genuine need.

“Sometimes work is needed first for people to realise the problem”

Not only the public, but politicians also need to realise their role. Many cities have aims for “Net Zero” or “Climate Neutrality” but far fewer have actual plans to achieve them. Nice words won’t achieve these aims, and transport is one of the key sectors in which politicians need to take, or allow, action.

How schemes are communicated can make or break a scheme. Amongst other things people need to understand the scheme aims – which need to be clear, transparent, and tackling an accepted problem – and communicated as such. Sometimes work is needed first for people to realise the problem, perhaps involving non-government organizations (NGOs) or community groups.

Enforcement

An UVAR without enforcement is not an UVAR. Spatial interventions and tactical urbanism are often ‘self-enforcing’ and low tech. Cameras on buses (to enforce bus lanes, for example) can be really effective, (where permitted by local or national law). However, regulatory (prohibitions/banning) or charging (fee-based strategies) UVARs need active enforcement. Camera enforcement is the most commonly used and effective active enforcement method for UVARs.

New technology such as Intelligent Speed Assistance (ISA) can prevent vehicles speeding. These could be used as a permit requirement for Limited Traffic Zones, a requirement for taxi / bus licenses, or to help enforce school or 20 kph zones.

Resources to Implement UVARs

The purpose of the European Union (EU)-Funded project ReVeAL (Regulating Vehicle Access for Improved Liveability) was to add Urban Vehicle Access Regulations (UVAR) to the standard range of urban mobility transition approaches of cities across Europe. The [ReVeAL Guidance](https://civitas-reveal.eu) was developed to help address the issues described in this article and other issues involved in implementing UVARs. If you are implementing, or considering implementing an UVAR, please do use the ReVeAL UVAR development toolkit, <https://civitas-reveal.eu> described also in WTPP’s December 2022 issue in an article by Sadler, Fenton and Pechin.

For information on UVARs around Europe, see the user-friendly European UVAR databank <https://urbanaccessregulations.eu>, and there is also a free newsletter for those working in public authorities who are interested in UVARs, register [here](https://urbanaccessregulations.eu).

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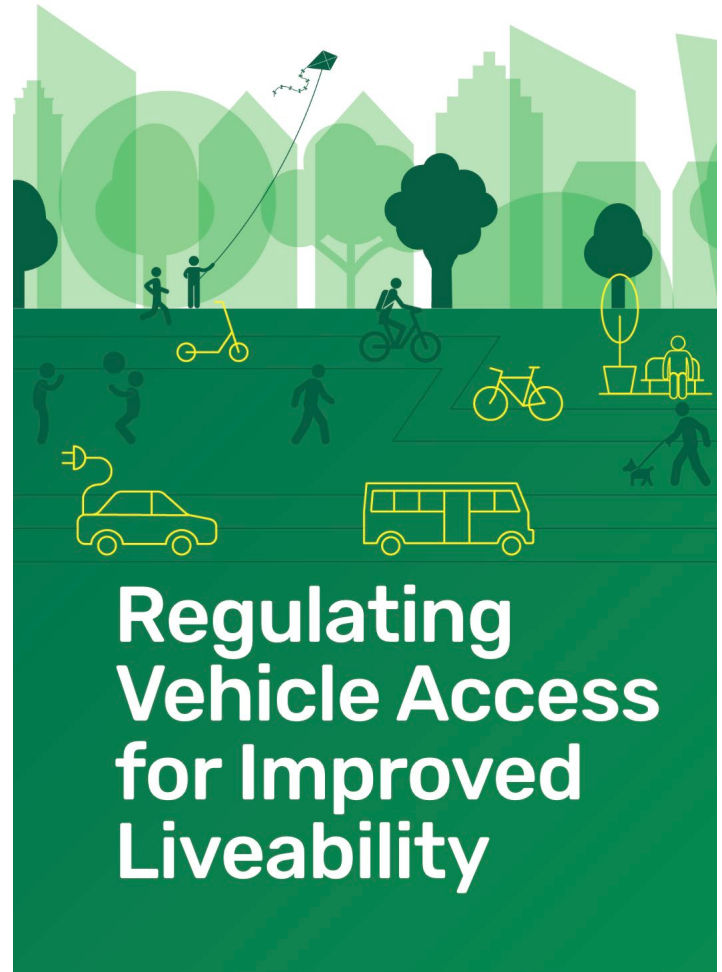


Image source: <https://civitas-reveal.eu/>

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