

# Curridabat & Montes de Oca, Costa Rica

Partner city

Status of the project: Completed pilot project



## Basic Information

Urban area: Curridabat 15.92 km<sup>2</sup>Montes de Oca 15.16 km<sup>2</sup>

Population: 79,577 (Curridabat) and 62,533 (Montes de Oca) |

Growth rate: 0.78% (Curridabat) and 0.36% (Montes de Oca)

Cantons of the Metropolitan Area of San José

GDP per capita: USD 11,215

Modal Share (Metropolitan San Jose Area, 2016):

Formal public transport: 26%

Informal public transport: 2%

Walking: 36%

Cycling: 1%

Private cars: 27%

Private motorbikes or 2-wheelers: 5%

Taxis: 2%

Train: 1%

Exposure to climate change: MEDIUM

## Context

Montes de Oca and Curridabat are two of the 21 municipalities of the Metropolitan area of San José, an urban agglomeration with more than 1.5 million inhabitants (one-fourth of the total national population). They are conurbations in the east zone of the metropolitan sprawl. Both cantons are highly developed and have a service-based economy. Moreover, Montes de Oca hosts many well-known universities in the country. Most of the residential and commercial activities for both municipalities are located in connection to the border with the canton of San Jose, Costa Rica's capital.

As of 2016, more than 2.6 million trips were generated within the metropolitan area of San Jose in a working day. Although sustainable transport alternatives dominate the modal split (36% walking and 26% public transport), private modes (cars and motorbikes) have gained relevance, sharing 32% of the total trips. The motorisation rate is 0.5 cars per household and is expected to grow 4% annually. In contrast, cycling has very low penetration as a transport mode.

Half of the trips in Curridabat and Montes de Oca are either internal or "inter-cantonal", falling within their own territorial boundaries. The rest have the canton of San Jose as their destination. Historically, and due to their geographic and social circumstances, cycling has held a more significant role in urban mobility in Curridabat and Montes de Oca than in neighbouring districts. This preference for the bicycle is influenced by the presence of students in the area and the working class in medium- and low-income settlements (mostly men).

The municipalities have no mass transit system, as in the rest of the metropolitan area. However, in 2017, an Integral Sustainable Urban Mobility Plan (PIMUS, for its Spanish acronym) was formulated for the metro area of San Jose, aiming to integrate all modes of transport with urban planning. The PIMUS proposes the promotion of active modes of transport and the deployment of cycling infrastructure.

Since 2002, Curridabat's administration has promoted and encouraged a progressive and environmental vision of the city. Under the slogan "Ciudad Dulce" (Sweet City), the local government has undertaken interventions favouring biodiversity and the balance between constructed and natural environments. The canton has set a long-term commitment to active mobility. Decision-makers and city officials in both municipalities consider themselves active urban cyclists. In turn, Montes de Oca implemented one of the first dedicated cycling lanes in the metropolitan area, enhancing its connection with the canton of San Jose.

The local counterparts do not have the mandate and responsibility to finance mass public transport as it is a national jurisdiction. As for the transport or cycling infrastructure, responsibilities are shared between national and local authorities, depending on the type of roads on which cycling lanes are located. Systems and procedures are partially in place to monitor, evaluate and report on urban mobility.

Considerable efforts were needed to consolidate the existing cycling infrastructure and to enlarge it beyond isolated initiatives. Additionally, governance schemes that could enable the construction and maintenance of cycling infrastructure were missing, leading to limited coordination between national ministers and local governments. In this context, the lack and atomisation of cycling infrastructure, and the ambiguous responsibilities of public authorities for active mobility planning, threatened the long-term scalability of such initiatives.

The objective of the pilot project was to improve the conditions for the mobility and accessibility of urban cyclists in the cantons of Curridabat and Montes de Oca by developing cycling demand data, a plan for cycling infrastructure for both cantons, and the design and adequacy of a prioritised network of cycling lanes. Participatory and educational processes for data collection and systematisation were implemented with cycling communities in the study area, although the pandemic limited in-person activities.

## Support from the Partnership

**Technical Assistance:** Pilot Project development

**Funded by:** European Union through EUROCLIMA+

**Funding amount:** EUR 400,000

**Implemented by:** GIZ through the EUROCLIMA+ Program

**Local counterpart:** Municipality of Montes de Oca, Municipality of Curridabat, Ministry of Public Infrastructure and Transport, Ministry of Planning, Ministry of the Environment (through the Dirección de Cambio Climático) and Ministry of Foreign Affairs

### Supported activities:

- Information gathering: Collect information on cycling infrastructure needs in a participatory manner in the cantons of Montes de Oca and Curridabat.
- Diagnostic: Identify the infrastructure needs of people who use bicycles as a means of transport, prioritised based on data collected, technical criteria, and participation.
- Implementation: Design and build the infrastructure in the cantons of Montes de Oca and Curridabat while strengthening the urban cycling planning capacities.
- Evaluation: Systematise and disseminate experiences and lessons learned during the project implementation

## Status of implementation

**Project start:** 2019 Q4

**Project completion:** 2022 Q1

### Completed outputs:

- Participatory data collection: participatory workshops with medium- and low-income cyclists to collect information on urban cycling in the canton identified participants' infrastructure and capacity needs for urban cycling. During the lockdowns related to the COVID-19 pandemic, some workshops were held virtually, and information was gathered through interviews and secondary sources.
- Prioritised planned infrastructure: identified priority infrastructure for urban cycling based on collected data and technical and participatory criteria. This proposal included 54km of cycling lanes in Montes de Oca and 60km in Curridabat. 20 km were to be implemented with EUROCLIMA+ funds.
- Adequation of cycling lanes: permanent implementation of an initial 4 km cycling lane in Montes de Oca in March 2021, followed by another 16 km in a second phase finished in late 2021.
- Scaling-up experience: experience and lessons learned documented and disseminated to promote the development of similar and complementary projects in other San Jose Metropolitan Area cantons.
- Strengthening capacities: The population of the cantons of Curridabat and Montes de Oca sensitised about better urban cycling.

## Insights from practice: key pilot project takeaways

### Tactical cycling interventions favour the efficient use of resources

The selection of tactical alternatives for bicycle lane implementation was a wise move that enhanced efficiency regarding the use of the limited available resources. Thus, the bike lanes were implemented with the minimal required elements for their operation, though ensuring adequate conditions of road safety and considering the national technical guidelines. The bicycle lanes implemented in this project became permanent as the experience tested and provided feedback to the national technical guidelines for cycling infrastructure adopted during the project execution. Other activities to foster intermodality were linked to the pilot project, such as cycle-friendly adequations in train stops to allow cyclists to access public transport facilities.

### Both political commitment and interinstitutional coordination enable project success

The driver for the success of this project was the joint political commitment regarding active mobility and the coordinated work among technical officials and decision-makers. This group of collaborators was flexible and acted promptly to tackle emergent challenges. They also leveraged opportunities, especially those from the sanitary situation in the pandemic. This group sought to enable synergies with other public and private stakeholders and civil society stakeholders. A governance structure for active mobility was created: "Red Intercantonal de Movilidad Activa - RIMA" (Intercantonal Network of active mobility) to consolidate the cycling and walking network among different levels of government.

### The pilot project contributed to building capacities within the local authority for cycling.

The project's greatest impact lies in the knowledge and institutional capacity it has built beyond its physical infrastructure. A key lesson is the importance of empowering national and subnational entities to design projects that drive transformative change towards sustainable mobility. The pilot initiative provided valuable insights into overcoming technical and logistical challenges, such as collecting cyclist demand data using digital tools, adapting international cycling infrastructure guidelines to Costa Rica's context, and managing political and administrative transitions. The project also highlighted the need for improved communication between local and national authorities, stronger regional coordination, and more effective governance structures involving both municipalities and citizens. Refining design and construction processes, enhancing documentation and knowledge sharing, and ensuring a gender-inclusive approach are critical aspects of future initiatives.

## Results and perspectives for scaling

### Replicability in the near future is ensured due to the assignment of both national and local resources to continue the cycling network expansion

Replicability in the future is expected to occur through a snowball effect. Efforts aimed at planning cycling infrastructure at the metropolitan level produced the Intermunicipal Territorial Plan for Active Mobility.

As the municipalities gain experience in implementing adequate cycling infrastructure and better coordinating with the national government, implementation of the rest of the cycling lanes is likely to occur. Curridabat's municipality is already financing the expansion of its cycling network. This situation enables the incremental improvement of the existing network in both the short and long term. The Council of Road Safety (COSEVI for its name in Spanish) will also contribute to installing bollards in zones where cars reach high speeds.

### Curridabat and Montes de Oca push cycling forward on the metropolitan policy agenda

With the launch of the RIMA, both Curridabat and Montes de Oca took the lead in continuing the implementation of the Intermunicipal Plan for Active Mobility, encouraging neighbouring municipalities to undertake actions to deploy walking and cycling infrastructure.

Stakeholders and project participants achieved coordination with the Costa Rican Railway Institute (INCOFER for its acronym in Spanish) to allow cyclists access to the train infrastructure. The model is replicable.

The municipalities approved budgets to expand cycling infrastructure. The Pilot Project also leveraged additional financial resources from the EU-funded MUEVE project to build part of the priority cycling corridors.

The success of the Project proves that sustainable mobility initiatives can thrive through strategic public-private partnerships and active citizen participation. Its execution model, adapted to Costa Rica's administrative framework, demonstrated efficiency, transparency, and agility, avoiding bureaucratic delays while ensuring high-quality implementation. This experience provides a replicable framework for other municipalities in the Greater Metropolitan Area, where similar interventions are needed. The project also serves as a platform for regional knowledge exchange, particularly within the Euroclima Community of Practice, fostering collaboration among like-minded stakeholders. While transforming Latin American cities requires time and substantial investment, this initiative has set a precedent, acting as a catalyst for change and paving the way for more human-centred, sustainable, and equitable urban environments.<sup>1</sup>

*Updated in December 2024*

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<sup>1</sup> To know more about the Project's results and outcomes, and about the Euroclima's Urban Mobility component at large, please visit <https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fi/6qxciz62nuijnb7i42kz/Movilidad-Urbana-Euroclima-Resultados-y-lecciones-2018-2024.pdf?rlkey=nhinf1r4n0by256rf1rp6u0d&e=1&dl=0>