

# A Better City

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## THROUGH MOBILITY

Medellín, Colombia

**F**rom its dark past of drugs and violence, Medellín today is Colombia's best example of remarkable recovery. The city's transformation in recent years has attracted global attention. The Urban Land Institute, City Group and *Wall Street Journal* declared Medellín "Innovative City of the Year" in 2013, and it received a LEE KUAN YEW WORLD CITY PRIZE "Special Mention" in 2014.



<sup>01</sup> Medellín's rugged geography left slums physically isolated and prone to many serious problems.



## The Challenge

The second half of the 20th century was paramount in shaping Medellín today. During this period, the city became the industrial capital of Colombia. Unfortunately, as a result of an economic and institutional crisis, Medellín during this time also experienced its darkest moments, ranking among the most violent cities of the world (381 homicides per 100,000 people in 1991) as a result of drug trafficking.

The problems of drug trafficking and violence, combined with the needs of the community and the traditional challenges pertaining to urban sustainability, posed huge hurdles to the government's efforts to provide better opportunities to the population in terms of living conditions, public utilities, health care, education and safety.

The poor then were living in slums ruled by drug lords and criminals, and isolated from the city centre. Cut off from areas of economic vitality, they faced problems such as low income, social exclusion and insecurity due to lack of state presence. Medellín understood it needed to improve social inclusion and social justice while ensuring modernisation and competitiveness. The aim was to boost development and avoid social gaps.





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## The Solution

During the mid-'90s, a project defined the transformation and resilience that the city has displayed since then: the Metro. Besides providing mass public transportation services, this company has also been making urban interventions since its inception. The idea was to enable easier and faster commuting, while building stations that would make their surroundings friendlier and safer. Hence, the Metro sparked the idea of raising the quality of life with urbanism. No wonder its corporate slogan states: "Metro: Quality of Life".

Mobility, for any government, always represents a challenge. However, the case of Medellín is special because mobility has provided the city with remarkable benefits that surpass mere transportation, particularly since 2004. Besides helping to modernise the city, the Metro has been pivotal in consolidating social inclusion as it allowed the once economically and socially disadvantaged a newfound mobility and freedom

to access jobs, amenities and opportunities across the city, beyond their slum neighbourhoods.

This is why Medellín today has a multi-modal ground mass transportation system which is constantly developing and improving. The different modes of transport that contribute to the city's environmental sustainability are: the Metro (electric train with two rail lines); Metrocable (electric gondolas with three lines in operation and two under construction); Metroplus (Bus Rapid Transit systems and integrated bases operated by gas with two active lines, 25 routes and the implementation of seven lines underway); and Tramway (electric trams under construction).

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01 Beyond mass transport, the Metro aimed to improve urban spaces around stations.

02 The Metro helped modernise the city and promote social inclusion.





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01 Footpaths, stairs and bridges were built in poor neighbourhoods like Juan Bobo.

03 Three Metrocable (electric gondolas) lines are in operation, with another two under construction.

Subsequently, Medellín has focused on making deep changes to its poorest neighborhoods, for example, by providing additional and improved public spaces where citizens can gather. These well-designed areas offer security and restore dignity to the people. They are also easily accessible – for those who have to walk long distances, given the city’s rugged geography.

Consequently, the hard-to-reach areas, mainly remote settlements, today have proper schemes for mobility by foot. The use of trails, bridges and staircases in optimum condition, meeting the most urgent needs of the populations and the geographic conditions of each area, and based on the aforementioned, adds to the remarkable model of social innovation of Medellín.

A good example of this is the world’s first mechanical stairs for public use. This solution helps about 10,000 people climb a steep mountain that is equivalent to a 15-storey building every day. In addition, the first public bicycle system of Colombia, known as EnCicla, will have 1,500 bicycles in service by 2015. Both of these systems complement our Mass Transportation Integrated System, contributing to modernising public space and environmental sustainability.





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## The Outcome

Medellín has managed to commission a clean, adaptable and modern integrated mass transportation model that solves its current needs and is suited to the city's geographic conditions.

Mobility has been paramount to the city's transformation given that it has improved social issues that seem unrelated, such as security. A study conducted by Universidad Autónoma Latinoamericana research group GINVECO in 2011 revealed that "97% of the population of Commune 1 – where the first Metrocable operates – perceive that their quality of life has improved with the system, while 86% state that the system increased the presence of the city's administration and hence, peace".

That same perception prevails in the rest of the city, given that the reputation indexes of the Metro have surpassed 92% since the year 2009. Likewise, in the past five years, users have gained savings in time of 30 hours per week and more than 90% of the users are from strata 1, 2 and 3 – the poorer segments of the population.

Lastly, it is worth noting the most recent mobility projects of Medellín. Metroplus mobilised 14.2 million passengers during its first year of operation in 2012 and the Tramway, currently being built, estimates an investment close to 610,000 million Colombian pesos (US\$315,263). Also, the pilot project of the EnCicla system represented an investment of 1.1 billion pesos (US\$569,497) to build a programme that offers 145 bicycles free of charge for the citizens registered to the system.

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01 The mechanical stairs, or escalators, provide access up steep mountainsides.