



IN CONVERSATION WITH  
**CLAUDIO ORREGO**

# Towards a More Inclusive and Sustainable Future for Santiago

**Claudio Orrego, Governor of Santiago Metropolitan Region,** tells us about the exciting transformation that the megalopolis is undergoing to be a city of the future.



Image: Government of Santiago

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**As cities continue to evolve, transform and grow in the face of climate change, ageing population and infrastructure, what are the biggest challenges facing Santiago and how is the city overcoming these challenges to advance the vision for a more sustainable and resilient city of the future?**

Santiago is a megalopolis almost twice the size of cities like Madrid and Barcelona. More than 8 million living in our city's 52 municipalities make up about 42% of the national population. Santiago's size and population density pose an enormous challenge to leadership and governance.

In addition, there are huge socio-economic disparities between the centre and the peripheries of Santiago. These differences have grown as a result of the Social Outbreak of 2019 (a series of protests known in Chile as the *Estallido Social*) and the COVID-19 pandemic.

Currently, about 8% of the population is below the national poverty line and we have seen a substantial increase in crime rates. While only about 8% of the population now comprises migrants, this proportion has increased exponentially in the last five years. Moreover, our indigenous population accounts for about 5% of our Santiago population.



Avenida Libertador General Bernardo O'Higgins, mostly known as La Alameda or Alameda del Libertador Bernardo O'Higgins, is the main avenue of the city of Santiago, the capital of Chile.  
Image: Government of Santiago

On top of that, the housing challenge that Santiago faces includes both a housing shortage and the need to improve the quality of its neighbourhoods. There are 35 communes with a concentration of 10% of Santiago's housing deficit. Recent studies detail that at the national level there is a housing deficit for 588,632 households, which represents 9% of the total number of households in the country. Furthermore, 44% of the deficit is located in the metropolitan region.

In addition, we have significant temperature differences between the various communes of the city. Territories with the most vulnerable population usually suffer temperatures up to 5 degrees higher than the territories with the highest incomes.

At the same time, our Mediterranean region has been greatly affected by climate change, with drought, extreme heat and forest fires being some of the main risks. In 2022, we had a 72% rainfall deficit that nearly led to mass water-rationing. Furthermore, in Santiago, we have to manage natural disasters ranging from earthquakes to floods and landslides.

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**Nueva Alameda Providencia is the most important urban transformation project in our region, covering eight km of public space and benefiting the thousands of people who use the avenue.**  
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Our government set up a Department of Environment, Climate Action and Biodiversity—the first such department established in Chile's subnational governments. This department, together with the regional council (parliament of the region), has designed and implemented numerous policies and projects:

- Emergency Declaration and Climate Action Plan
- Cleaning of illegal landfills
- Water Emergency Board
- Agreement with water sanitation services of rural communities
- Regional Recycling Plan
- Biodiversity Conservation Plan
- Responsible pet ownership programmes
- Regional Forestry Programme

**Santiago de Chile is known for its extensive smart city projects, and you won the Leadership award for the World Smart City Award 2023 recently. Please share your experience in advancing smart city projects in Santiago.**

Our regional government is investing in numerous projects with a smart city focus, mainly to renew the centre of the capital, strengthen the multi-sector and multi-level governance of the region and improve safety and security. A key project, which won us the leadership award at the Smart City Expo World Congress in Barcelona 2023, is *Nueva Alameda Providencia*.

It stands as the foremost urban transformation project in our region, spanning eight km of public space. The project is supported by the Metropolitan Regional Government of Santiago, in collaboration with various institutions of the central government of Chile, as well as the municipalities of Providencia, Santiago, Estación Central and Lo Prado. In addition, it has significant support from the business sector, civil society organisations and universities.



Along the Alameda flows the Mapocho, the main river of the capital. It rises in the El Plomo hill in the Andes mountain range and flows into the Maipo river.  
Image: Government of Santiago



The Alameda is home to some of the city's main buildings. The Palacio de La Moneda (Government House), located on the north side of the Alameda, is undoubtedly the main architectural landmark of the avenue.  
Image: Government of Santiago

The large Nueva Alameda Providencia project is made up of five parts:

1. Recovery and maintenance of facades and public space, with a special emphasis on heritage properties—the cleaning and maintenance of facades and sidewalks project continue over the next three years.
2. Renovation of Plaza Italia—nicknamed the “Heart of Santiago”, the square is one of the most common meeting and transit points in the entire capital, and when completed, will see the convergence of three parks around it to facilitate better passenger flow from the different transportation modes and pedestrian traffic. Work will begin in June 2024.
3. Construction of a Metropolitan Bikeway—a high-quality cycle path (that promises to be the longest in the capital and the country) will connect with 13 existing cycle paths and five planned paths, thus consolidating a 42-km cycling network. Construction of the project will begin in May 2024.
4. Renovation of the urban zone of Avenidas Pajaritos and Parque Santiago Bueras—this urban area where several of the main avenues of the city intersect, currently has illegal landfills and a design that does not meet the city's standards for mobility and urban aesthetics. The redesign of the Pajaritos road junction and Santiago Bueras Park will see the addition of new paths, trees and lights. Along with this, the development of an underground vehicular crossing is being considered to allow better flow of cars and people.
5. Conservation and improvement of the public space of Avenida Alameda—different initiatives led by the Santiago government aim to recover sidewalk space, add lights, surveillance cameras, bus stops, trees, roads and street furniture. This project is underway and includes approximately 140,000 m<sup>2</sup> of public space. The improvement works are estimated to benefit the nearly two million people who pass through the Alameda every day.
6. Another key project that seeks to improve the governance of our complex region is the Santiago Regional Integrated Management Centre. The centre harnesses technology to facilitate inter-institutional agreements to establish integrated procedures and protocols using geospatial information for better management of the region. This is expected to help us to quickly identify issues and problems for more efficient decision-making and follow-up action.

The centre has the following components:

- Metropolitan Data
- Integrated remote surveillance system
- Citizen Vision Consultation Channel
- Information Cores
- Work commute accidents
- Camera viewsheds
- Urban GINI, a metric used to evaluate inequality in the distribution of income and understand dynamics of inequality in urban areas
- CAPCA or 'Capacidad de Carga' (Load Capacity Monitor)—a software developed to analyse the relationship between demand and capacity for existing services within a given territory.

The installation project began on 17 October 2021 and has a budget of 3.3 billion pesos (US\$ 3.5 million) approved by the Regional Council.



Located just steps from the civic center of Santiago, Cerro Santa Lucía is a historical and cultural icon of the city and the Metropolitan Region.  
Image: Government of Santiago



San José Volcano and Cerro Catedral located in the commune of San José de Maipo in the Metropolitan Region of Chile.  
Image: Government of Santiago

### How do you ensure that the benefits of smart city projects are accessible to all citizens, including the socially vulnerable and marginalised communities?

|| We work for the 52 communes that compose the region, but with special attention to the most vulnerable territories, taking into account their socioeconomic and environmental variables.

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Firstly, our governance style is to promote citizen participation, presence on the ground, intersectoral action, public-private partnership and transparency. This style has allowed us to collectively define the priorities of the population in the various territories, as well as to design and implement efficient and effective solutions. Secondly, we focus resources on the most vulnerable territories, taking into account their socioeconomic and environmental variables.

For example, we are working on the improvement and expansion of two island hills, Cerro Chena and Cerro Renca, with socially vulnerable communities. We have begun the construction of the Ortuzano Intercommunal Park on land that until recently was an illegal dump.

In peripheral areas with low tree density that experience extreme temperatures, especially in summer, we are planting more than 30,000 trees. In addition, we are building plazas and pocket forests on unused sites. We are also implementing sustainable solutions for water provision, especially in vulnerable rural communities. Such solutions range from the creation of local water security strategies, improvement of drinking water systems to aid for municipalities and citizens to implement smart irrigation.

In the area of social development, we are implementing various initiatives in developing territories to promote economic autonomy for women and young people through courses on topics in high demand by employers, such as computer programming.

**How has the city leadership in Santiago leveraged on strategic partnerships with various sectors, e.g., public, private and people sector, to develop innovative solutions to meet complex urban challenges?**

All our projects have been designed and implemented through a complex network of alliances between the various levels and sectors of the state administration (ministries, vice-ministries, autonomous agencies, public security and law-enforcement institutions, and municipalities), civil society organisations, universities, companies and business unions. These alliances have been forged with very high standards of probity and transparency, through dialogue and consultation.

At the same time, we have established close ties with the various arms of international organisations like the United Nations (UN), and with international networks and philanthropic organisations, such as C40—

|| **Our intensive efforts to promote dialogue with stakeholders and our broad scope of improvement works will contribute to making Santiago safer, more inclusive and sustainable for all. We will recover the city for the people.**

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a global network of nearly 100 mayors of leading cities to confront the climate crisis, Vital Strategies—a global public health organisation, Bloomberg, and the Rockefeller Foundation.

In summary, our leadership and governance aims to improve the well-being of the people of our region through the forging of wide-ranging alliances and collaboration. Our intensive efforts to promote dialogue with stakeholders and our extensive scope of improvement works will help Santiago be safer, more inclusive and sustainable. 📍



Aerial view of the Civic Quarter of Santiago. The buildings it houses are, for the most part, government offices and buildings, both ministries and other public agencies.  
Image: Government of Santiago



We work with cities  
so that cities work  
for everyone



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