

## Results from the WCN-Workshop Car Free Day September 22

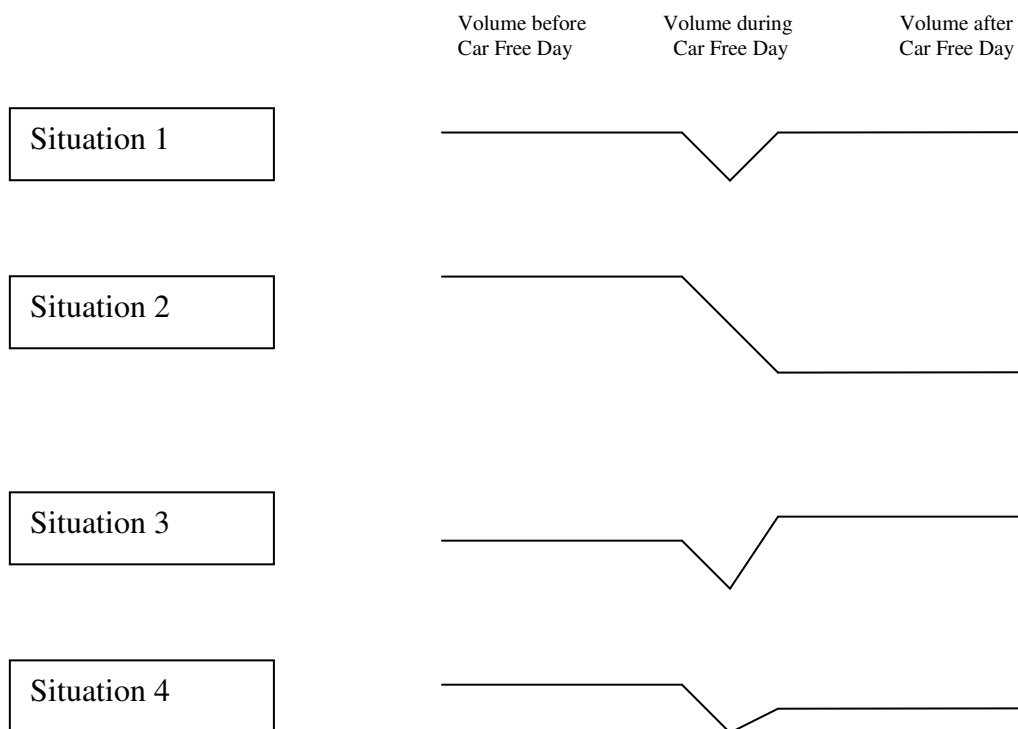
For many, Car Free Day is a fundamental tool to reduce car traffic step by step and to continually win over the hearts and minds of those who support our cause and those who continue to neglect the impact their usage of cars has on the environment and society.

In our workshop, we wanted to take a closer look at the philosophy behind Car Free Day, what to do, what to avoid and what obstacles you will come across whilst trying to make it happen.

So here are the conclusions:

### Be clear about your objectives!

These lines represent the different effects Car Free Day can have on traffic volume:



**Situation 1:** This is what most people believe happens on Car Free Day: It has no long term effect on traffic volume, is a fun day without just cause.

**Situation 2:** This is what many ideologists would like to believe: It has a long and permanent effect. All it needs for a person to permanently to stop using the car is a Car Free Day. Use this argument and you will run into problems, for the outcome is somewhat unrealistic.

**Situation 3:** This is what can actually happen if Car Free Day is held on a wide scale in your city but without catering for the needs of the citizens and without helping them adapt to the new situation. If things go wrong on Car Free Day, many people will get a bad impression and revert to using a car.

**Situation 4:** This is the situation that should be tried to be achieved. After experiencing Car Free Day in a positive manner some of the citizens will decide not to use their car in the city anymore and might even sell their car somewhere in the future and rely on other means of transportation.

## **Look out for your target groups!**

It is difficult to get one sole message across to everyone in your city. Many different do different things meaning they will have different needs and attitudes towards Car Free Day. It is more realistic to get the right message across to a specified target group, as you will be more able to relate to their needs.

Half of our group brainstormed and came up with the following target groups:

(not prioritised)

- Shoppers
- Shop owners and retailers
- Bike owners that don't use their bicycles
- Property owners
- Neighbourhood Clubs and Associations
- Tourists
- Business people
- Regular car users in general
- Authorities
- Families using their car for leisure
- Students
- Potential car purchasers
- Young "cool" car drivers (18-30)
- Media
- Parents
- Children
- Affiliate or other NGO's welcome to the cause

Of course, this list could be lengthened and then grouped at your will, however it does give a general impression about how far spread out your target groups may be. It is important that each target group gets treated differently and is shown the particular benefits that Car Free Day can provide, in short and long term.

This leads us on to the different themes that projects and actions on Car Free Day can address.

Therefore, the other half of the group brain-stormed on the different topics Car Free Day can cover:

- Safer Streets for Pedestrians and Cyclists
- Right of Space
- Personal Responsibility
- Quality of Life
- More Public Spaces and Increased Social Interactions
- Road Accidents
- Health
- Less Air, Noise and Visual Pollution
- More Attractive, Efficient and Accessible Public Transport
- Everyday Practical Exercise
- Car Free is Cost-Effective and Cheaper

Again, this list could be forever lengthened and grouped.

The important thing is that you link the right theme to the right target group and use a clearly positive message.

## **Positive vs. negative messages**

Depending on your theme and your target group it will be probably very important that you get a positive message across. Some people may feel that you would like to take their mobility away and will feel that you want to restrict their personal freedom. Of course this is not the situation you may want to achieve. So don't forget to highlight the benefits.

Naturally, your NGO or group may feel angered about the traffic situation so subversive actions and protest shouldn't be entirely excluded. Just the same, you wouldn't want to enrage too many people.

So think about your action before doing it, whether the message, theme and target group tie in well.

## **Opposition abounds**

Often, when wanting to introduce a project or even the very idea of Car Free Day, you will come across opposition trying to contradict or even obstruct your cause.

We looked at some of the reactions you might get from stakeholders and/or general public and/or authorities:

What's the point? It has no effect

This is just a leftwing green thing, you're trying to dictate your ideologies upon us

You'll create chaos if you proceed with this

Your efforts will fire back on you

You will be hurting economy if people can't get to work and to the shops to do shopping

Be prepared for this!

## **How to oppose Opposition**

Stay positive and focused on your message/theme/target group. For example, if the local retailers are opposed to having their street closed, it will be important that you give them good examples of past projects and that shoppers are more inspired to consume in a quieter and less dangerous surrounding. Ask them if their fear is based on facts or belief, and if on belief, why not try an experiment so that judgement can be made afterwards, not before.

Also point out that this is a really big day all around the world as so and so many cities participate. The international aspect gives you great power as some might not like to be left out of an international issue, even though they may be sceptical. How you argue might also depend on the level of general interest in your city (how high is the car free percentage of your city? Are there opinion polls on the traffic situation? Etc.)

## **Each City is specific**

The level of participation on behalf of the authorities is decisive when thinking up your strategy. There are basically 5 scenarios:

### **No. 1 The authorities of your city participate full heartedly on Car Free Day**

This is of course the most favourable of all scenarios. If this is the case, you would be best to join up with city authorities and coordinate any projects or actions your group would like to do.

### **No. 2 The authorities only half heartedly participate on Car Free Day**

In this case, your group may not be entirely convinced that your city is participating in an appropriate way. Instead of complaining, use best practises that have been used in other cities. It may be that your city can easily be lead to taking on some of your ideas. If the authorities are not prepared to listen first time round, you might want to try finding affiliate organisations that are of the same or similar opinion. Instead of confronting and alienating city authorities try a strategy of cooperation.

Should that strategy fail, your and affiliated groups can still confront authorities or just simply go it alone and become a role model.

### **No. 3 The authorities do not participate on Car Free Day, but are welcome and cooperative to any of your actions or projects**

In this situation, it is probably best to do any actions or projects under your own groups name rather than trying to talking the authorities into taking any action themselves, unless of course, your group would like to team up with other NGO's to form a coalition or committee. A good idea is to try to win the authorities over into becoming partners for your projects. This way, the credibility of the authorities can be used as a door opener to gain the confidence of the general public.

Explain to the authorities that your group is always open to any forms of cooperation, and that you seek benefits for all of the citizens of the city, so your cause is of general interest.

If you are persistent and continually show best practice in a capable, consistent, competent and credible way the chances that the authorities will jump on to the band wagon and become dependable partners will grow considerably.

### **No. 4 The authorities do not participate on Car Free Day, and are unwilling to be cooperative**

Unless your group generally has a lot of influence, you will probably not have much chance of success in this situation. It will take a lot of effort to come up with a creative project that isn't perceived as coming from an outcast group of society. So it will be probably crucial that the network yourselves and form the broadest coalition possible. It is usually a waste of time trying to convince the authorities that Car Free Day is good thing, so show them what can be done by going forward with your own projects. If your coalition is broad enough, you will probably gain enough public support to convince the authorities at a later stage of becoming partners or even participating on their own behalf.

### **No. 5 The authorities are opposed to Car Free Day and try to obstruct any projects or actions you take**

If this is the case, your group may have to operate with more protest orientated or subversive actions which are (non-violently!) directed at the city council or authorities. You will probably find that many people are supportive of your cause, because if the authorities take on such an attitude, this usually ties in with a general attitude about social places and sustainable mobility.

If the resources allow it, you may want to try petitions, critical mass or other forms of protest that involve larger parts of society.

## **The ingredients to make Car Free Day a success in your City**

So to sum it up, what does it really take to have a successful Car Free Day in your city that has the desired aftermath effect?

- **Broad public support**

To achieve broad public support it will need

- authorities officially participating either on their own or as partners
- well considered and balanced projects that have messages that correspond well with the themes and target groups
- a good communication strategy so that the citizens understand why and how Car Free Day is being implemented and they have time to mentally adapt to the situation (the better you are on this the more tolerant people will be if they have negative experiences on Car Free Day)
- a “safety net” for people and businesses that depend on a car so that they don’t feel their personal freedom is too infringed
- good alternatives to the car

- **Diversity of projects**

You will want to involve as many target groups as possible.

- **Support from stakeholders**

The vultures will be out there just waiting for things to go wrong, or will try to start a debate about pro contra cars rather than pro contra quality of life, good accessibility by sustainable modes of transport etc. The more support from stakeholders is available, the less the vultures will have to pick on.

- **Permanent effects**

Not only can minds and hearts be won over by trying to use good messages and common sense, but structural and infrastructural management should also be adapted to cater for the needs of a car free city. Car Free Day can be used to find out what changes need to be made and what permanent measures should be taken and implemented. This will influence the long term effects that Car Free Day can offer and is what will make Car Free Day a long lasting success.