


# **MORE SPACE FOR PEOPLE AND NATURE**



**How we learned to provide  
each other with more space,  
green space and breathable air.**

**Re**  **set**

**lessons from  
lockdown**

# MORE SPACE FOR PEOPLE AND NATURE

Even as the human world paused in the path of a pandemic it was obvious that people – whether in power or members of the public – were on a steep learning curve. Lessons abound – about past mistakes like allowing food and energy to be wasted and putting pollution before people in towns and cities – but also of humanity's extraordinary ability to work together and solve problems. This is one of three briefings that look at this extraordinary period of time when – despite the fear and personal tragedy for some – many people began to see and use the space around them differently, reconnect with others in new ways and appreciate having cleaner air to breathe.

These briefings seek to capture some of those lessons from lockdown – insights that might help to reset how societies organise themselves and build back better from the crisis. The pandemic hit at a time when chronic inequality and the climate emergency equally demand action. This briefing looks at how we took measures to make more space for people and nature, which seems increasingly important – given that ecological decline creates prime conditions for pandemics as our human activities push climate breakdown and encroach ever closer into the last wild spaces on earth. The other briefings look at the rapid introduction of many steps to look after each other better through protecting livelihoods and mutual aid, and at how better lives are possible with less 'stuff', and less wasteful ways of living.

## What are some of the lessons for more space?

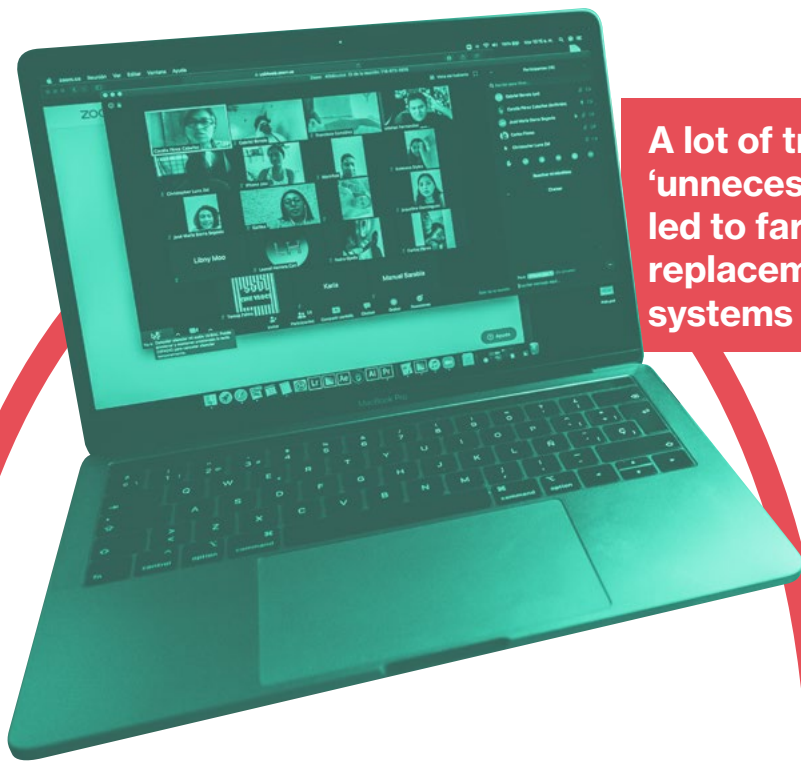


Tens of thousands more people now commute by bike, and in several countries local authorities are already trying to make this permanent by providing them with more space on streets.



People using public transport have got used to more space and less crush, and expect a better travelling experience.





A lot of travel turned out to be 'unnecessary'. Flexible working led to far less commuting, and the replacement by zoom and similar systems of international meetings.



Increased focus on the fragile food chain spurred greater interest in urban potential for growing food in gardens, allotments and spare public spaces.

Nobody wants to fly for work these days because of extreme discomfort, queues and uncertainty.



Greener towns and cities are healthier for people and better for nature, which can bounce back quickly when pressure is removed. People love and use natural places and green space even more than ever.



With fewer cars on our roads we can have both less noise and air pollution and safer streets for childrens' play.



# EVIDENCE-BASED HOPE

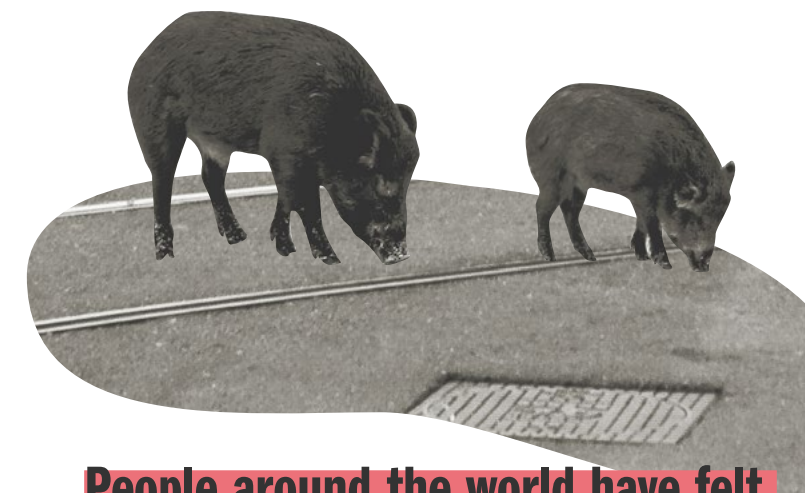
Communities have been through a wide range of trauma during the covid pandemic. It has been a time of insecurity, about incomes and access to food, as well as fear of infection and danger for the people we love. But there have been positive elements of the experience too. For those in the Global North in particular, most of whom are consuming well beyond current planetary limits, being shut inside has meant doing more with less. Millions have spent time at home with family or walking outside, grateful for the internet to enable communication but also returning to homemade activities.

Many have delighted in clear skies and clean air – even in cities – without planes and traffic jams, communities have emerged seemingly from nowhere to support each other with mutual aid groups, and the return of nature was startling in its speed and variety. There are many potential lessons that could be sifted from the tragedy about how we might run the world differently – with more kindness, less waste and a greater awareness of our place in the natural world.

After months of self-isolation, it became clear that – in moments of crisis – people can get a great deal more out of a simpler life than they might have expected. In particular, this briefing is about how:

- People around the world have felt the benefits of less traffic, cleaner air and the return of nature.
- Governments have responded by trying to encourage people to keep cycling, especially when they are commuting to work.
- Despite the fear and deprivation of the covid crisis, people have felt the benefits – even in the most crowded cities – of having more space.

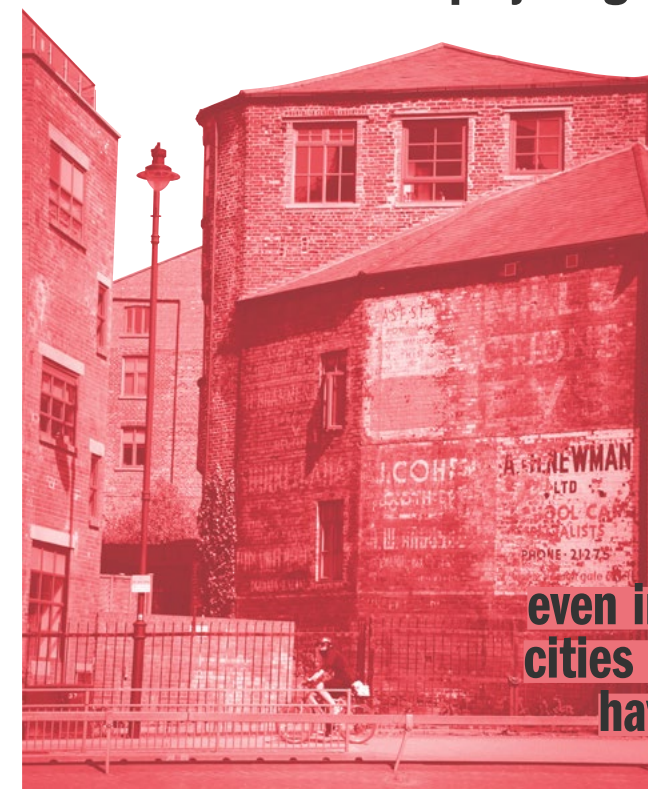
Later the briefing looks at possible policy responses that might make sure we can keep the benefits of the crisis once the virus itself is under control.



**People around the world have felt the benefits of less traffic, cleaner air and the return of nature.**



**Governments have responded by trying to encourage people to keep cycling**



**even in the most crowded cities people have enjoyed having more space**

## Tens of thousands of people now commute by bike, and local authorities are already trying to make this permanent by providing them with more space.

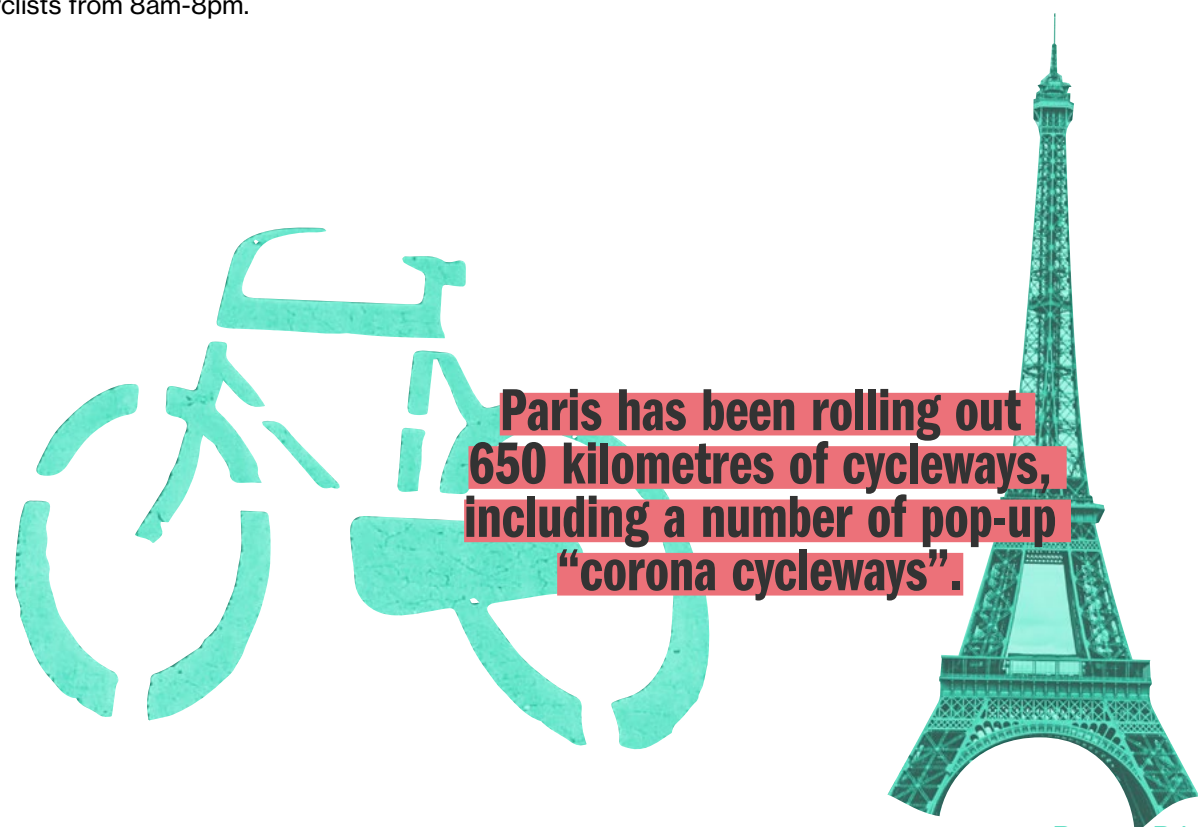
One of the reasons there was so much less traffic is that people have tried commuting to work by bike and they find they love it. Bicycle sales in America [rose by half](#)<sup>1</sup> during March early in the pandemic. In the UK alone where 67 percent of journeys are [no longer than 5 miles](#)<sup>2</sup> (8km), tens of thousands took to riding. On certain days during lockdown the number of cyclists [increased by 300 percent](#)<sup>3</sup>. A number of local authorities have been making permanent changes for cyclists as a way of reducing the load on public transport and retaining social distancing, but it is also a win for the environment and for our health. Many of these new cyclists started – or re-started – cycling because it felt safer on the roads with reduced traffic. In France, during the lockdown month of April, the number of people dying in traffic accidents [fell by half](#)<sup>4</sup>. The key has been to find ways in which people can keep hold of that feeling of safety as we return to a post-pandemic world:

- Paris has been rolling out 650 kilometres of cycleways, [including a number of pop-up “corona cycleways”](#)<sup>5</sup>.
- Some cities, [like Milan, are making the changes permanent](#)<sup>6</sup>. As much as 35 kms of streets are getting cycle lanes and more walking space.
- In Germany, expanded cycle lanes have been marked by removable tape and mobile signs.
- Brighton in the UK has [started opening part of the seafront, Madeira Drive](#)<sup>7</sup>, only to pedestrians and cyclists from 8am-8pm.

- In Barnes in London, businesses and residents have [coned off part of the road](#)<sup>8</sup> outside shopping parades to expand pedestrian space and help shoppers keep their distance from each other.
- [Dublin](#)<sup>9</sup> is suspending loading bays and parking spaces to increase space for social distancing, by using removable plastic separators.
- The Scottish government announced [£10m of funding for councils to provide temporary space on the roads this way](#)<sup>10</sup> – known as ‘pop-up travel infrastructure’ – and Cycling UK is [urging British ministers](#)<sup>11</sup> in Westminster to follow suit.
- The UK government announced £2 billion of investment in measures to promote walking and cycling in England over the next five years, with £250 million allocated for emergency interventions [to make cycling and walking safer](#)<sup>12</sup>. Unfortunately, it is also undermining its own efforts with a huge investment in more roads, which can only make poorer places even poorer and will drag in more traffic.

Community sites like [Widen My Path](#)<sup>13</sup> are looking to gather public opinion on places for specific cycle lanes, in response to government statements that we need more space for social distancing.

Leeds University teamed up with cycleway promoters Sustrans and the UK Department of Transport to develop their [Rapid Cycleway Prioritisation Tool](#)<sup>14</sup>. This is designed to help find and build cyclepaths, and to give the UK government confidence that their Emergency Active Travel Fund is going to the right places – like the new one outside a hospital in [Leicester](#)<sup>15</sup> put in for key workers during lockdown, taking advantage of reduced traffic.



**Paris has been rolling out 650 kilometres of cycleways, including a number of pop-up “corona cycleways”.**

## Encouraging a bike boom

Discomfort concerning formerly overcrowded public transport also helped a boom in cycle-to-work schemes. Schemes in the UK saw a [200 per cent increase](#)<sup>16</sup> in bicycle orders from people working for emergency services. Even where cycling is not an option for everyone, the more who take it up also free-up more space for those who choose to use public transport, or have no choice not to.

Demand for more mobility and exercise amid lifestyle changes impelled by the lockdown has boosted bike sales as mentioned above. Some bike stores have been battling to meet demand. Broadribb Cycles in Bicester, England normally dispatches 20-30 bikes a week, but

**In South Korea, investment in public transport, biking and railways after 2008 created about 138,000 jobs**

**People using mass transport systems have got used to more space and less crush, and expect a better travelling experience.**

Those who had to use the Paris Metro, which had a reputation for poor cleanliness, during lockdown, found that they could only use every other seat. A huge clean-up effort shifted things to a point where the system “feels rather safe”, said [the New Statesman](#)<sup>19</sup>. “Passengers can find some comfort in seeing that public health guidance is being taken seriously.” Changes are being made across mass transit systems globally to find ways of moving people without breaking the social distancing rules. This is challenging, but by thinking creatively, a range of options have emerged that may become the norm. [A report](#)<sup>20</sup> by the consultancy McKinsey suggests that practices such as staggering shifts to move demand away from peak times will not only enable physical distancing but also make riding public transit more pleasant. Some parts of Israel are opening schools in shifts to reduce transport congestion and crowds around the sites at pick up and put down times. Similarly, some schools and universities in the Netherlands have spread start times over the day. Meanwhile, in France, only trips to and from work and school are allowed during peak periods. Some transit operators have also created extra waiting capacity at busy hubs, which makes queuing easier and less stressful.

manager Stuart Taylor said the shop was selling 50 bikes every day – and seeing a commensurate rise in demand for servicing. “It’s just gone crazy,” he told the BBC. “People are dragging bikes out of sheds and garages and finding they need new tyres and cables.” The boom has extended into electric bicycles, which offer a more long-distance vehicle for those without the ability to cycle unaided – and a nudge for those for whom cycling feels or seems hard work and less convenient. Electric bike stores in Germany reported a sudden burst of sales, [according to bike-eu](#)<sup>17</sup>, with e-bikes outpacing regular bikes as people move from leisure-only buying to daily use. In the US, retail sales of e-bikes in the first quarter of 2019 grew [90 percent year-on-year](#)<sup>18</sup>.



The Danish rail operator DSB has added advance-booking capabilities, which have helped keep trains from getting full. They also introduced [an app](#)<sup>21</sup> showing which services and carriages have the most space for physical distance, which helped increase transit ridership by 6 percent during the first week of lockdown easing. Taiwan has instituted a strict reservations policy on suburban and intercity rail to limit occupancy and put safe physical distance between passengers. Other operators concentrate on guiding travellers toward spare capacity. Some cities, such as Paris, have suspended access to certain stations or reopened lines at different rates. Other cities have limited the number of possible stops at rush-hour choke points, including at major intersections. This encourages passengers to walk more or take alternative routes with more space and fewer choke points.



**A lot of travel turned out to be ‘unnecessary’. Flexible working led to far less commuting, and the replacement by zoom and similar systems of international meetings.**

Data from [Moovit](#)<sup>22</sup>, an American urban mobility app with 750 million users, showed that passengers on all kinds of mass transit – including buses, trains, subways, light-rail and bike shares – plunged more than 80 percent in big US and European cities, including Madrid, Milan and San Francisco. According to [Bloomberg](#)<sup>23</sup>, most of the world plans to wait at least six months after the end of the crisis before they fly again.

It is widely agreed that this will mean less travel by people and certainly less travel by air by business travellers, who have realised that it is mostly unnecessary, often uncomfortable and tiring, and is cheaper and saves time to connect online instead. It could require greener, more comfortable and spacious trains and buses to encourage passengers back to regular public transport. Helpfully, there could be a double win. It turns out that [studies](#)<sup>24</sup> after the last big economic stimulus in the USA in 2008 showed that public transport investments generated [31 per cent more jobs](#)<sup>25</sup> per dollar than new construction of roads and bridges. In South Korea, investment in public transport, biking and railways after 2008 created about [138,000 jobs](#)<sup>26</sup>.

So what have business travellers been doing instead? The answer has often been zoom: the California based app now has [300 million users](#)<sup>27</sup> every day – despite official concerns about privacy issues – and in the UK, usage rose 20 times over.

It seems unlikely that all these people will routinely return to flying to meetings any time soon.

See the companion briefing to this one, on less waste, about the transformative effects of working from home. Even motoring lobby organisations like the AA now predict a permanent, long term decline in car commuting. There are pros and cons to working from home and it is not possible for everyone, but the increased experience of this during lockdown has already changed attitudes toward the practice. Some work – much of which is lower paid manual work such as caring, cleaning and maintenance/construction – just can’t be done from home. For those whose work can be done remotely, there may be drawbacks for their mental health if they become too isolated and part-time working from home may be preferable. Lockdown has also highlighted those areas where broadband infrastructure is simply not up to the job and shown why it needs to be rolled out more widely in rural areas. Some villages in the UK have given up waiting for help from government; in Norfolk and Gwent, they simply dig a trench and [install their own](#)<sup>28</sup>.

**Nobody wants to fly for work these days because of discomfort, queues and uncertainty.**

The airline industry has been busily mothballing their planes as a result, and have been particularly badly hit in the USA where they have been instructed to keep flying, even if no passengers showed up. During the lockdown, the number of [passengers arriving at US airports](#)<sup>29</sup> collapsed from about 2.3 million each day to about 95,000. Travel bookings were down by 98 percent from last year’s levels and the average domestic flight fell eventually to just ten. The same situation has been happening everywhere; in [India](#)<sup>30</sup> people report no longer wanting to fly other than for emergencies. For most, the additional time taken for flights when you need to reach the airport earlier than usual, present yourself for thermal scanning at arrival and departure, stand only at designated areas at every place from check-in counters to food and beverage outlets, not carry food onto a plane, and have no access to airplane food or to the lavatory, makes air travel a much more difficult process and removes any sense of enjoyment or excitement.

In early May 2020, the normally bullish financier Warren Buffett announced that his company Berkshire Hathaway was selling all of its substantial holdings in the four major airlines: American, Delta, United, and Southwest. A few days earlier, British Airways said that it was laying off some 12,000 employees, nearly one-third of its entire staff. BA have also now abandoned their fleet of 747s, four years early. Another lesson applicable to the climate crisis is that vulnerable, high carbon industries urgently need plans to convert to other purposes.

Pilot [Patrick Smith](#)<sup>31</sup> wrote: “Last Monday night I flew a 767 into New York. Was that the last commercial flight I will ever pilot? It is not inconceivable. Enough of me was convinced of it that I asked the captain if I could fly the leg and make the landing.”



**BA have also now abandoned their fleet of 747s, four years early.**



**people in hospital even get better faster if they can see trees out of the window**



**Greener towns and cities are healthier for people. People love and use natural places and green space even more than ever.**

[Use of parks rose](#)<sup>32</sup> around the world, both in response to lockdowns easing and also where arrangements weren’t changing. The importance of green spaces led to 71 percent of people in a UK survey to [call for their enhancement](#)<sup>33</sup>, over half also said they appreciated such spaces more since the pandemic began. Those who have to use public transport have got more used to less crush, and people have fallen in love with natural places and are discovering green space near their homes that they didn’t know existed.

We don’t just need more space and safer streets for children to play in – according to recent research, there is [good evidence](#)<sup>34</sup> of a positive relationship between levels of neighbourhood greenspace and mental health and well-being. Research showed as early as 1984 that people in hospital even get better faster if they can see trees out of the window than they do if they can’t. This was backed up in 1993 by [Swedish research](#)<sup>35</sup> showing a reduction in stress and pain for people recovering from operations with views of nature. During the pandemic, people restricted to their homes or to short periods of exercise without transport have reported finding solace in being outside in local parks and their own gardens.

Greening cities not only supports human health but comes with a wide range of other benefits: it is [economical](#)<sup>36</sup>, helps reduce the [heat island effect](#)<sup>37</sup> in a time of increasingly extreme temperatures and [improves air quality](#)<sup>38</sup>. Areas covered in plantlife can also contribute to flood risk reduction, by allowing more water to infiltrate the soil and reducing the amount of excess surface water that needs to escape during heavy rainstorms. Finally, urban green space can create new habitats for [plant and animal species](#)<sup>39</sup> to maintain the biodiversity we badly need.



**Wildlife can bounce back astonishingly quickly when pressure is removed but only if species and their habitats still exist. Making space for nature is essential for human health and for the survival of our planet.**

The rest of the natural world has also appreciated the quiet and relative safety of a traffic-reduced world. [Jake Fiennes](#)<sup>40</sup>, conservation manager of Holkham national nature reserve in the UK, has “noticed more sparrowhawks, stoats and deer on once heavily walked tracks”. Social media filled with images of sheep and deer roaming through streets, bringing surprise and joy to many who rarely see wildlife in such abundance. Many people have been woken early by the sheer exuberance of the dawn chorus and even in cities, the speed with which wildlife returned seemed remarkable. It was a stark reminder of the depleted world we now inhabit and how easily we might replenish it if humans were to make more space for nature.

This return of nature is not just an attractive and enjoyable spectacle for humanity; it is needed for our world to [continue to function](#)<sup>41</sup>. It is important to remember that scientists believe the growth in disease transfer from other creatures to humans is because of our ever-expanding human settlements and land-clearing for agriculture. This leads to species from different habitats mixing and interacting with each other in new ways, providing new opportunities for [diseases like coronavirus to jump between species](#)<sup>42</sup>. This has been made worse by the global trend of biodiversity loss.

**Many people have been woken early by the sheer exuberance of the dawn chorus**



High biodiversity can [reduce the risk](#)<sup>43</sup> to human health by what is called “the dilution effect”. The more diverse nature is, the lower the density of both animals that serve as the natural reservoir for a particular pathogen and the animals that transmit it to humans. This means that fewer encounters are likely between transmitters and the animals they infect with the disease – and less likelihood that it will reach humans.

[Scientific estimates](#)<sup>44</sup> of the amount of space needed to safeguard biodiversity and preserve ecosystem benefits suggest that a wide range of between 25 to 75% of major ecosystems must be protected. Current levels of protection do not even come close – only 3.6% of the oceans and 14.7% of land are formally protected. But even many of these are “paper parks,” meaning they are not effectively managed, and one-third of the terrestrial protected lands remain under intense human pressure. The current Aichi Targets agreed globally in 2010 state that by 2020, at least 17% of the terrestrial and inland water and 10% of coastal and marine areas, should be conserved. Current scientific evidence suggests that far more is needed and scientists are calling on governments to set minimum targets of 30% of the oceans and land protected by 2030, with a focus on areas of high biodiversity and/or productivity, and to aim to secure 50% by 2050. We have a long way to go but now is the time; our new understanding of the dangers of falling biodiversity to human health could be the nudge we need to take this as seriously as we have taken the coronavirus.



**Thousands of households in Wales joined the ‘home growing revolution’.**

**Increased focus on the fragile global food chain spurred greater interest in making urban green space more productive – growing food in gardens, allotments and public land.**

Even before the pandemic made many people more acutely aware of the importance of access to food, broader health and environmental concerns were driving [a dynamic new movement](#)<sup>45</sup> for urban farming and gardening. Fears of shortages due to supply problems, controlled access to shops and rationing on some goods then drove a wave of [renewed interest in people growing their own food](#)<sup>46</sup>. Thousands of households in Wales joined the ‘[home growing revolution](#)’<sup>47</sup>. Supermarkets sold-out of toilet paper grabbed the headlines, but in Australia there was also a [run on the items](#)<sup>48</sup> needed to practice [more self-sufficient gardening](#)<sup>49</sup>. One small permaculture outfit in the city of Hobart saw its instructional [vegetable growing video](#)<sup>50</sup> viewed nearly 100,000 times. What was happening in Australia was part of a [global phenomenon](#)<sup>51</sup>. One American seed company sold more seed in March 2020 than at any other time in its 144 year history. In India there was a revival reported of interest in food grown locally using positive ecological techniques by [small scale farmers](#)<sup>52</sup>.

**With fewer cars on our roads we can have both less noise and air pollution and safer streets for childrens’ play.**

Air pollution seems to have played a role in exacerbating the effects of the coronavirus. Researchers from Harvard University’s T.H. Chan School of Public Health found that places averaging just one microgram per cubic meter more PM2.5 in the air had a covid death rate that was 15 percent higher. In California, stay-at-home rules have also reduced vehicle collisions by roughly half and migrating wildlife are better able to move about without dicing with death.

New York City mayor Bill de Blasio announced that he would be closing 100 miles of streets to traffic during the pandemic period, as part of their [Open Streets Initiative](#)<sup>53</sup> (see our film). That plan in turn links to their Open Restaurants Initiative, which involves eating places extending their tables into the road. At the time of writing, he has managed to close 67 miles so far. One of our Lessons from Lockdown [films](#)<sup>54</sup> comes from a closed road in New York City.

Cycling can have a beneficial financial effect for most people too. Travelling by bike is much cheaper than either driving or commuting by public transport, which means that people who are lower-paid get to keep more of their money from work. The poorer you are, the more this matters. Transport researchers at Leeds University have also carried out a [study](#)<sup>55</sup> into increasing cycling in low income countries, and what kind of shifts might be possible in which places.



# WE ALL NEED SPACE. WHAT NEXT?

1

## Using videoconferencing

Given the choice by employers, few people will want to return to previous levels of business travel for fear of infection and because they have seen that many jobs can be done quite effectively remotely. The truth is that many people have experienced a few months of the future of work, and discovered for themselves that it really does seem possible. Working from home for at least part of every week, and videoconferencing rather than being at most meetings in person is largely a good idea – better for people and the planet too. This will only be possible for some kinds of work and we will have to ensure that those who travel to work are not penalised for this financially; the danger is that well paid jobs can be done from home and poorly paid work means travel costs – in money and time – as well as a lower wage.

The IT giant Cisco has said that, in China, their video conferencing software has been seeing 22 times as much traffic as it did before the outbreak. For many businesses, remote working will be good, but we will have to ensure that companies do not shift the cost of offices onto their employees, and that face to face working still continues. Human interaction is vital for most of us to maintain our mental health and it is also important for creativity and productivity. A carefully thought out way of enabling more remote working will mean less air pollution and fewer cars on the streets – and more space for people.

So how can we ensure that people can continue to breathe clean air after the pandemic, without letting the traffic take over and pollution levels rise again to previous norms? How do we make sure that people have the space they need to thrive, physically and mentally? The solutions will have to include better, greener public transport, and redesigning streets to reduce our focus on motorised traffic and to prioritise pedestrians and cyclists wherever possible. It will mean making urban design greener, placing biodiversity, clean air and water as the top priority. These are big changes but they are all possible.





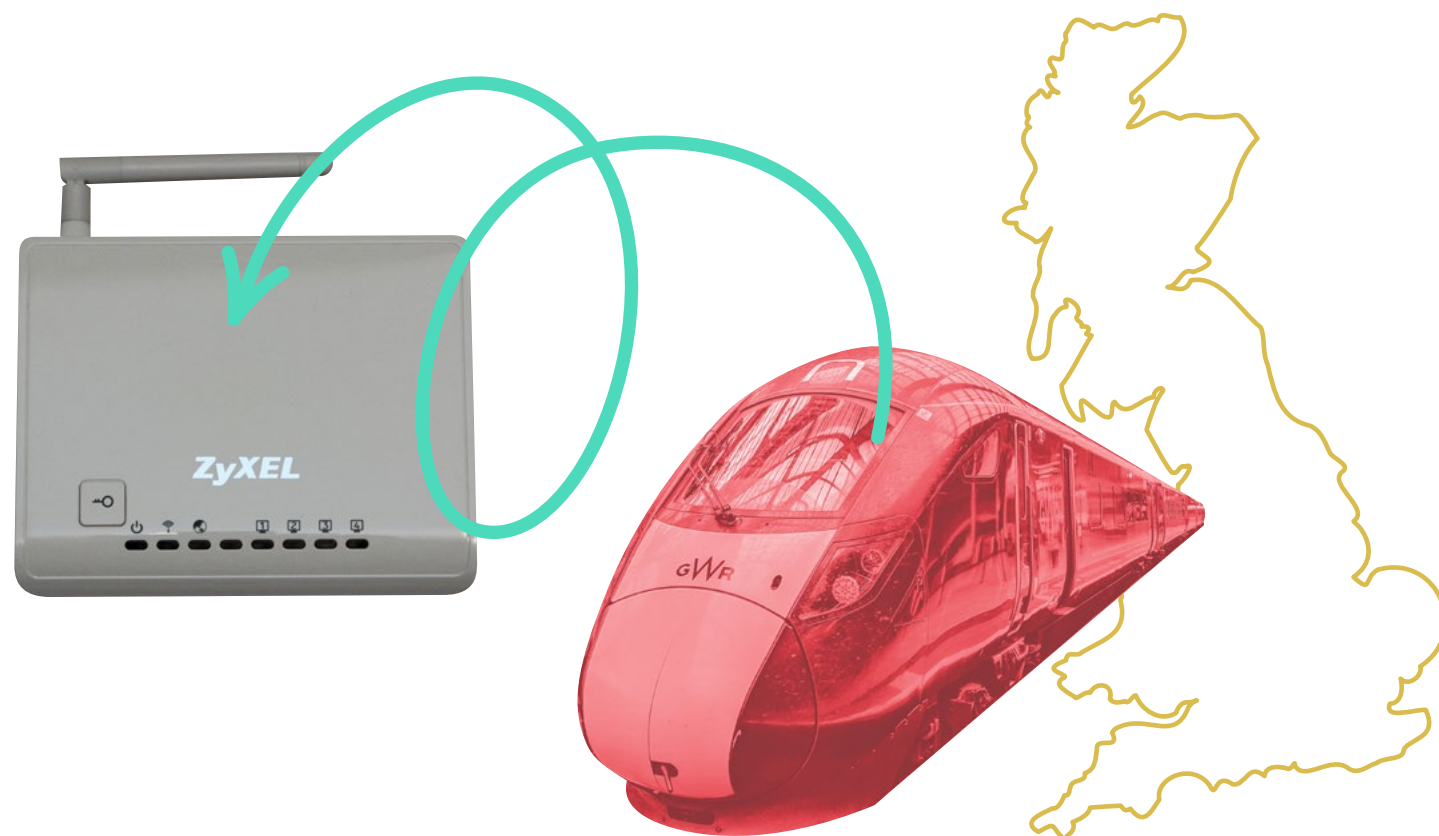
## 2

### Reducing traffic

Reducing the volume of traffic on the roads has been a priority for many years and various cities have taken different routes to achieve this. [Pontevedra](#)<sup>56</sup> in Northern Spain, is one example of the local transformation that pedestrianisation can bring. The city pedestrianised its entire 300,000 square metre city centre in 1999, bringing a wide range of economic, social and health benefits to its residents. Other cities such as Oslo and Helsinki are following suit.

Post Covid, jurisdictions have a window of opportunity to implement some changes to their priorities. The Australian Road Research Board describes the covid shutdown as “a critical opportunity for Victoria to understand and deal with its transport issues before life eventually returns to normal,” according to chief executive Michael Caltabiano. To avoid a scenario where Victorians will get back into their cars and spend hours on congested roads, he suggested implementing work from home on one or two days a week.

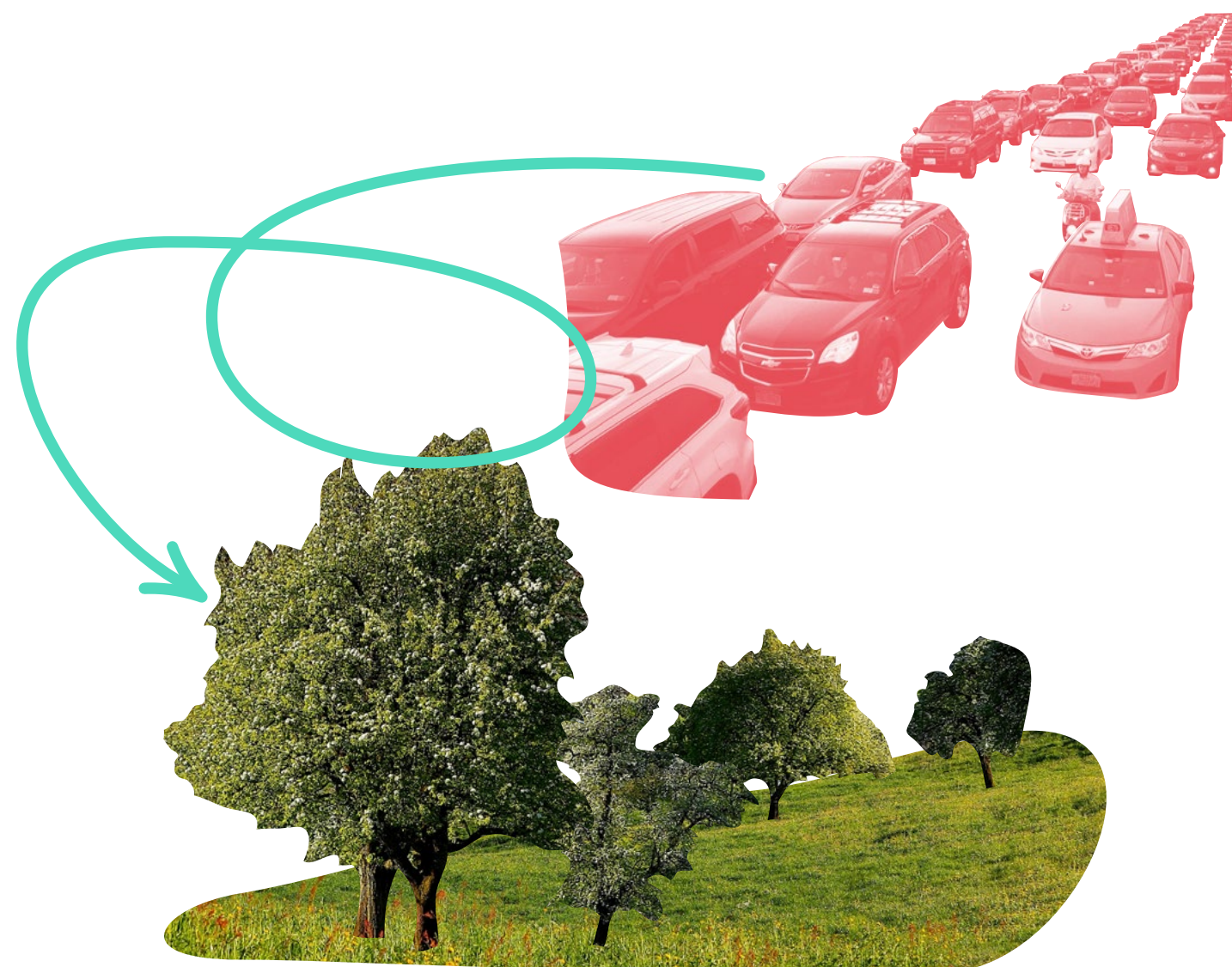
In the UK, despite funding for cycling, the government also plans to spend £27bn on road building and £100bn on a highly contentious high-speed north-south rail link, HS2, which is threatening unique landscapes along its route. But if demand falls as predicted, there is still time for the spending plan to be fundamentally changed to invest in better local, rural and regional public transport. Support for this came from unexpected sources, as the pro-car Automobile Association president, Edmund King, suggested the government might fare better putting more money into broadband instead of bolstering infrastructure funds in this way.



## 3

### Reducing space for cars

Today presents a real opportunity to put into practice the proven principle of the Downs-Thomson Paradox – that [less space for cars](#)<sup>57</sup> means fewer cars, not more traffic jams. This is not to underestimate the dominance of the car and its infrastructure, but attitudes may be more open to alternative options than they were before the pandemic. When people get back into their cars – and once the air is choked with exhaust fumes again – city authorities will need to find some solutions. Some still fear the risk of reducing the space for cars, but in cases where cities have reduced road and parking space, drivers tend to avoid busy areas, finding new routes and often shifting to other modes of transport. This process can be the prompt many need to get on their bike or take the bus instead. In India, the Mumbai city administration is using data from lockdown transport patterns to imagine a possible future with fewer people commuting and fewer vehicles. The same will probably be true of most of the world's far-sighted cities.





4



## Designing more productive urban green space

[Greening towns and cities](#)<sup>58</sup> with more of both aesthetic and productive planting has benefits for human health and wellbeing. It is also good for nature, and it introduces a buffer for food supplies, as well making urban spaces more resilient and pleasant places to live, in a world of increasing weather extremes linked to climate change.

For decades now, research has been emerging that emphasises the vital importance to people's health of green spaces and trees – particularly, but not exclusively, for people's mental health (see above). However, despite the existence of [Garden Cities](#)<sup>59</sup> in many countries and London's innovative [National Park City](#)<sup>60</sup> project, urban design often places green areas as secondary to housing or industrial space.

This is particularly the case in areas and developments inhabited by the poorest city dwellers, who often live in the highest density tower blocks surrounded if they are lucky with scrubby grass or a concrete desert. Some [residents](#)<sup>61</sup> take it upon themselves to show how green such areas can be, given some good design, and some thoughtful effort. But

tackling the problem at scale for those who have no choice means revising our planning regulations to make sure that everyone lives within walking distance of green space where they are allowed to walk or to play. It also means more community spaces, gardens and allotments for growing food (see our briefing on [Less Waste](#)). Designing in productive spaces means that less food needs to be brought into the city on short, polluting trips by truck, a case argued in the proposal for [National Gardening Leave](#)<sup>62</sup>. These places also offer some respite from life's stresses and strains – as seen during the pandemic crisis, as people retreated to their gardens and allotments to plant vegetables and grow food. There is already huge demand for allotment space to grow your own, with [40-year waiting lists](#)<sup>63</sup> for example in some parts of London. People who grow food on allotments can save almost £1,000 a year on groceries, according to one [estimate](#)<sup>64</sup>.

Even the bleakest, concrete cities can provide shared productive spaces where people can grow vegetables, flowers and fruit. The companion briefing to this one, which is about how we might produce less waste, includes more information about the productive capacity of allotments and urban green space when it comes to producing food for the urban population.

5

## Provide more green space for people to enjoy and where children can play

The coronavirus outbreak saw motor vehicle travel plummeting by as much as 73 per cent, according to two [transport experts](#)<sup>65</sup>, who want 'local authorities to allow changes to residential streets, including introducing speed limits, widening sidewalks, and giving priority to pedestrians, especially children and young people. The ensuing reduction in noise in these areas has been noticeable, allowing the natural sounds to emerge such as birdsong, people talking and the wind in the leaves. Being denied access to the outside reminded people of how much they took for granted their need for green space. In the USA, there were [increased online searches](#)<sup>66</sup> for 'cycling', 'fishing' and 'beaches' in the USA for March 2020, more than in the previous summer.

Noise levels in many urban areas are high and become normal until we notice them. "I think that demand for quiet goes hand in glove with demand for simplicity – and that's an idea shaping a lot of people's thinking now," said the chief executive of the [UK Noise Abatement Society](#)<sup>67</sup>, Gloria Elliot. The effect of our noise levels on the planet go even deeper: the Royal Observatory of Belgium reported a [reduction in seismic noise](#)<sup>68</sup> – the ambient hum of vibrations that travel through the planet's crust – as a result of reduced human activity.



This briefing has demonstrated some of the ways in which people around the world have looked for, appreciated and made the most of space in response to a global pandemic, quickly and sometimes with minimal resources. The way in which individuals, organisations and governments respond now to the opportunities that have presented themselves could point the way toward a world where providing more and better space for people and the rest of nature could be the new norm. It also suggests a number of policy shifts that would help to keep this element going as the world returns to health.

Rapid Transition Alliance  
September 2020



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# Re→set

## lessons from lockdown

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