

SUSTAINABLE TRAVEL

CARGO BIKES



Re  **set**
lessons from
lockdown

CARGO BIKES



The push to cut pollution
on the 'last mile' delivery
in lockdown

The pandemic, and the lockdowns that sought to halt its spread, caused huge disruption to global supply chains. As the world was told to stay at home, people had to turn to the world of e-commerce to provide them with many of the necessities they needed while lockdown lasted, from food to medical supplies.

The apparent convenience of e-commerce often hides the complex and far-reaching distribution chains that make it possible. And, more importantly, it overlooks the environmental and social costs of the logistical operations behind them, that create traffic congestion, take up space and have a big impact due to their carbon emissions and air pollution. The impacts of the so-called 'last mile' that takes goods to people's front doors also delivers these costs to the heart of communities. As the value of the global e-commerce market rose **to \$27.7 trillion during the pandemic,**¹ the demand **for last mile, on demand delivery also skyrocketed.**²

Fortunately, many companies and local governments saw this pandemic-induced growth as an opportunity to break with the past. The terrain for these last mile logistics changed: many cities and local governments used the lockdowns as an opportunity to reimagine the streetscape, giving over more space to bicycles and pedestrians, or banning cars from certain streets altogether. Many polluting delivery vans could no longer glide through cities unimpeded – they had to find a new way of getting from A to B.



On cue, the cargo bike arrived – in both its electrically assisted and purely pedal powered versions – to clean up and decarbonise last mile logistics. Of course, carrying cargo on bikes used to be **the norm**³ in many countries before the rise of motorised transport, and still is in many. It has always been widely used in parts of the world where owning cars and trucks is less common. But cargo bikes today with new users are regaining space and starting to displace polluting vehicles on our streets.

The Canadian city of Montreal used the pandemic as an opportunity **to expand its urban delivery initiative**.⁴ Local merchants throughout the city were given access to cargo bike deliveries, as part of a project developed by the City of Montreal, the Montreal Commercial Development Companies (SDC), Coop Carbone and Jalon Montreal. They could organise and track deliveries through a secure platform and at the height of the pandemic, **the cargo bike scheme was supporting neighbourhood bookstores, hardware shops, bakeries and fruit sellers**.⁵ This scheme moved within the first year from being a temporary fix to being a permanent part of the city's infrastructure. In London, the **Bikeworks delivery service shifted its focus during the pandemic to ensuring critical deliveries for vulnerable residents and businesses**,⁶ many of which would not be able to be reached in time using traditional logistics. Due to the significant demand for their service, they had to expand their cargo bike fleet.

Cargo bikes are delivering serious environmental savings and making streets more people-friendly. An electric cargo bike in London **can deliver 60% faster than vans in busy urban centres, achieving higher average speeds, and successfully and safely delivering ten parcels in an hour**⁷ to a polluting van's six. When compared to a diesel delivery van, an e-cargo bike **cuts emissions by 90%**.⁸ A similar study in the city of Toronto found that replacing a van with a cargo bike **saved 1.9 tonnes of CO₂ every year**.⁹ If a wholesale swap between vans and cargo bikes took place in urban centres, the emissions savings would be vast.

“As home deliveries have skyrocketed since the Covid lockdowns, we urgently need to put on the brakes and reevaluate how goods move through our cities. E-cargo bikes are one solution that we can all get behind. They're often faster than cars or vans, can improve our mental and physical health and reduce our carbon footprint.”

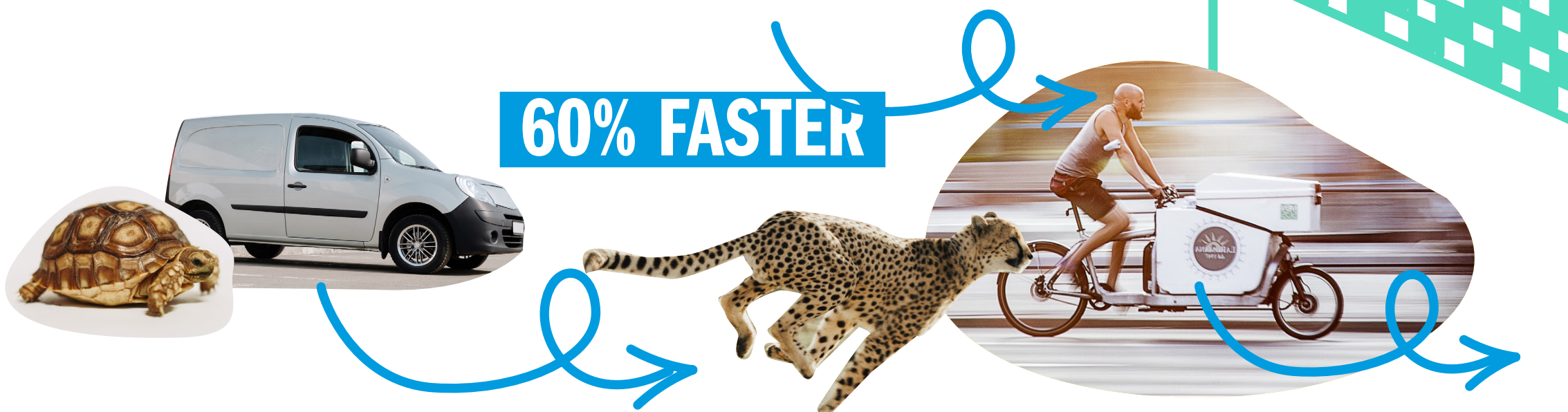
Hirra Khan Adeogun, Car Free Cities

Alongside the environmental benefits are the financial gains. Cargo bikes' ability to use both roads and cycling infrastructure means that journey times **can be cut by between 25% to 50%**.¹⁰ And this is without taking into account the traffic caused by collisions and roadworks, so cargo bikes can offer businesses greater reliability than vans. As they are smaller and more agile, cargo bikes can also get closer to their destinations and into areas that are completely cut-off from cars so that no business's customer is beyond reach. Some estimates of the financial benefits to businesses range from **70% to 90% cost savings**¹¹ when compared to a reliance on delivery vans, but this would obviously depend on the type of business and the degree to which they adopt cargo bikes.



The financial benefits for businesses also come in the form of happier, healthier employees. **A carpentry business in Oslo**¹² decided to ditch their diesel vans over fears of rising costs and replaced them with cargo bikes. The business quickly noticed that this **move improved the health and fitness of their employees and contributed to a decline in the time taken off with illness**.¹³ Another **study found that the health benefits of cycling are 11 times larger than the risks**¹⁴ and the societal benefits are even larger due to the reduction in air pollution and traffic accidents.

As the streetscape has changed in response to the global pandemic, and the way in which we move around has been transformed, **the cargo bike offers businesses a post-pandemic win-win**.¹⁵ They save money, improve the health of their employees, and they cut emissions and air pollution. The pandemic has provided the incentive to pivot away from the van and towards the cargo bike; but we need to build on these trends to ensure that the cargo bike is here to stay.



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