

Recebido
Received
Recibido
14 jun. 2025
Jun 14, 2025
14 jun. 2025

Aceito
Accepted
Aceptado
15 nov. 2025
Nov 15, 2025
15 nov. 2025

Publicado
Published
Publicado
05 jan. 2026
Jan 05, 2026
05 jan. 2026

<https://git.fateczl.edu.br>

e_ISSN
2965-3339

DOI
10.5281/zenodo.20214074

São Paulo

v. 4 | n. 2
v. 4 | i. 2

e42005

Janeiro/Março
January/March
Enero/Marzo

2026



The Strategies of the São Paulo City Hall to Achieve 4% Bicycle Participation in Urban Mobility

As Estratégias da Prefeitura de São Paulo para Alcançar 4% de Participação da Bicicleta na Mobilidade Urbana
Las Estrategias de la Ciudad de São Paulo para Lograr un 4% de Participación Ciclista en la Movilidad Urbana

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Abstract:

Active mobility has emerged as a sustainable and efficient alternative for urban commuting, promoting health, environmental benefits, and social cohesion. Amid challenges such as motor vehicle dependence, pollution, and unequal access to transportation, the city of São Paulo has adopted public strategies to encourage the regular use of bicycles. This article aims to analyze the actions implemented by the São Paulo City Hall, with emphasis on the Climate Action Plan (PlanClimaSP) and the Bicycle Travel Monitoring Plan, which aim to increase the share of bicycle use in urban trips from 0.8% to 4% by 2030. Based on official documents, statistical data, and the guidelines of the United Nations 2030 Agenda, the study identifies significant progress, such as the expansion of cycling infrastructure, educational actions, and the integration of environmental and public health policies. However, achieving this goal still depends on the continuity of public policies, broader social participation, and the overcoming of physical, cultural, and institutional barriers that hinder equitable access to active mobility. The research shows that the use of bicycles, in addition to promoting environmental sustainability, is a strategic tool for building a more inclusive, safe, and resilient city.

Keywords: Active mobility; Urban mobility; Sustainability; Cyclomobility, São Paulo.

Resumo:

A mobilidade ativa tem ganhado destaque como uma alternativa sustentável e eficiente para os deslocamentos urbanos, promovendo benefícios à saúde, ao meio ambiente e à coesão social. Em meio a desafios como a dependência de veículos motorizados, poluição e desigualdade no acesso ao transporte, a cidade de São Paulo tem adotado estratégias públicas para fomentar o uso da bicicleta como meio de transporte regular. Este artigo tem como objetivo analisar as ações implementadas

pela Prefeitura de São Paulo, com destaque para o Plano de Ação Climática (PlanClimaSP) e o Plano de Monitoramento de Viagens em Bicicleta, que visam elevar a participação da bicicleta nas viagens urbanas de 0,8% para 4% até 2030. Com base em documentos oficiais, dados estatísticos e diretrizes da Agenda 2030 da ONU, identificam-se avanços importantes, como a expansão da infraestrutura ciclovária, ações educativas e integração entre políticas ambientais e de saúde. Contudo, o alcance dessa meta ainda depende da continuidade das políticas públicas, da ampliação da participação social e do enfrentamento das barreiras físicas, culturais e institucionais que dificultam o acesso equitativo à mobilidade ativa. A pesquisa aponta que o uso da bicicleta, além de promover a sustentabilidade ambiental, é uma ferramenta estratégica para tornar a cidade mais inclusiva, segura e resiliente.

Palavras-chave: Mobilidade ativa; Mobilidade urbana; Sustentabilidade; Ciclomobilidade; São Paulo.

Resumen:

La movilidad activa ha ganado protagonismo como una alternativa sostenible y eficiente para el desplazamiento urbano, promoviendo beneficios para la salud, el medio ambiente y la cohesión social. En medio de desafíos como la dependencia de los vehículos motorizados, la contaminación y la desigualdad en el acceso al transporte, la ciudad de São Paulo ha adoptado estrategias públicas para fomentar el uso de bicicletas como medio de transporte regular. Este artículo pretende analizar las acciones implementadas por la ciudad de São Paulo, con énfasis en el Plan de Acción Climática (PlanClimaSP) y el Plan de Seguimiento de Viajes en Bicicleta, que buscan aumentar la proporción de bicicletas en los desplazamientos urbanos del 0,8% al 4% para 2030. A partir de documentos oficiales, datos estadísticos y directrices de la Agenda 2030 de la ONU, se identifican avances importantes, como la ampliación de la infraestructura ciclista, acciones educativas e integración entre las políticas medioambientales y sanitarias. Sin embargo, el logro de este objetivo sigue dependiendo de la continuidad de las políticas públicas, la expansión de la participación social y el enfrentamiento de barreras físicas, culturales e institucionales que dificultan el acceso equitativo a la movilidad activa. La investigación señala que el uso de bicicletas, además de promover la sostenibilidad ambiental, es una herramienta estratégica para hacer que la ciudad sea más inclusiva, segura y resiliente.

Palabras clave: Movilidad activa; Movilidad urbana; Sostenibilidad; Movilidad ciclista; São Paulo.

1. INTRODUCTION

Active mobility, which includes walking and cycling, is an essential strategy for cities seeking to reduce carbon emissions and improve quality of life for their population. In addition to promoting physical and mental health and reducing the incidence of chronic diseases such as obesity and type 2 diabetes (Souza et al., 2022; *World Health Organization*, 2016), active mobility also contributes to the reduction of air and noise pollution, promoting more sustainable and pleasant urban environments (UN, 2015).

In dense urban contexts like São Paulo, these benefits become even more relevant given the high dependence on motorized vehicles and inequality in access to transportation. The promotion of active mobility, therefore, emerges as a strategic and inclusive alternative in the face of the climate crisis and the challenges of contemporary urban mobility (Thaisi, 2024). According to Silva (2025), while high-income countries are moving toward more active and healthy urban systems, Brazil still faces structural and cultural barriers that limit the population's adoption of non-motorized mobility. National data indicate a decline in walking and cycling among adults, especially in capital cities, limiting health benefits and increasing dependence on motorized modes (Florindo et al., 2025).

This reality highlights the importance of formulating public policies based on reliable and disaggregated data that consider the specificities of each active transportation mode. In response, the city of São Paulo has adopted a series of measures to promote active mobility, notably the Climate Action Plan (PlanClimaSP), which sets clear emission-reduction targets by 2050 (São Paulo, 2021). Among PlanClimaSP's 43 priority actions is expanding cycling infrastructure and promoting bicycle use for daily transportation. The specific goal of increasing the share of bicycles in urban trips from 0.8% to 4% by 2030 reflects not only an environmental commitment but also a strategic direction towards a more equitable and resilient city (São Paulo City Hall, 2024).

To support these strategies, the Bicycle Trip Monitoring Plan was created, an innovative system that allows municipal management to monitor bicycle travel patterns with greater precision and frequency. Data collection is carried out biannually at 110 fixed points in the city, enabling evidence-based management (São Paulo City Hall, 2024).

Institutional strengthening is also essential for achieving the proposed goals. Collaboration among public authorities, civil society, international networks, and universities has strengthened governance and legitimized active mobility policies (UN, 2015). This collaborative governance is aligned with the principles of the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals.

Active mobility should not be viewed in isolation, but integrated into urban planning and housing policy, as foreseen in Law No. 12.587/2012, which establishes the National Urban Mobility Policy (Brazil, 2012). Promoting bicycle use requires investments in safe infrastructure, such as bike lanes, bicycle parking facilities, bicycle racks, and adequate signage, in addition to educational campaigns. Strategies should also consider the most vulnerable groups, such as women, young people, and low-income workers. In these cases, bicycle use

represents not only an environmental choice but also an economic and social necessity. Including these groups is essential for active mobility to fulfill its role as a promoter of equity.

As Brazil's main urban and economic center, São Paulo has the capacity and responsibility to lead this transformation. With a high human development index and complex infrastructure, the municipality can become a national reference in promoting active mobility and building a more just and sustainable city (IBGE, 2022).

Thus, this research aims to analyze the strategies adopted by the City of São Paulo to increase bicycle participation in urban mobility to 4% by 2030. By reviewing public policies, action plans, and monitoring data, it seeks to understand progress, challenges, and perspectives for a more inclusive, active city aligned with urban sustainability.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Urban Mobility

Urban mobility refers to the movement of people within a city to carry out activities such as studying, working, leisure, and accessing services, as well as the means of transport they use to reach their destinations. These movements occur via private or public transport or human propulsion, and municipalities are responsible for public policies that support infrastructure such as roads, streets, sidewalks, and bike paths (Henrique, 2016).

Urban mobility is directly linked to environmental impacts, including reduced green areas and carbon dioxide emissions from vehicles. The disorderly growth of cities means people's commutes are affected by congestion, overcrowding on public transport, and the added problem of insecurity. These problems stem from a lack of studies by municipalities in developing public projects and works, as in large urban centers such as the city of São Paulo, where peripheral communities are most affected (Raymundo and Reis, 2018).

The lack of in-depth study of how municipalities develop public projects and works directly affects the efficiency of people's movement, causing congestion, unsafe conditions, and overcrowding in public transport.

The United Nations (UN) proposal for the 2030 Agenda envisions a more sustainable and inclusive urban environment that prioritizes mass public and active transportation, such as buses, trains, bicycles, scooters, and walking (UN, 2015).

With the aim of improving the quality of mobility for the population in Brazilian cities with more than 20,000 inhabitants, the Federal Government created Law 12,587 of 2012 - the National Urban Mobility Policy- which obliges municipalities to implement policies focused on urban mobility, with an emphasis on sustainability, encouraging the use of public transport, walking and cycling (Brazil, 2012).

2.2 Active Mobility

Active mobility is the movement of people through physical effort (human propulsion), such as walking, skating, and cycling (Pucher and Buehler, 2010). Promoting this mode of locomotion aligns with UN objectives, as it reduces greenhouse gas emissions and improves the health and quality of life of the urban population (UN, 2015).

This non-motorized transportation model has become strategic in large urban centers, and its applicability is directly linked to factors such as infrastructure, security, culture, social behavior, and incentive policies (Ewing and Cerveró, 2010).

According to the UN (2015), active transportation by bicycle is one of the population's main choices because it supports sustainability, is accessible to most low-income populations, and has no age limitations for acquisition and use. Bicycles and walking are effective strategies for promoting health and preventing disease in urban environments. Epidemiological evidence demonstrates that individuals who use active modes of transportation have a lower risk of developing obesity and chronic non-communicable diseases, such as type 2 diabetes and cardiovascular diseases (Souza, 2024). Furthermore, it reduces air pollution, dependence on motorized vehicles, and greenhouse gas emissions while promoting social cohesion and decreasing physical inactivity and sedentary behavior (Souza, 2024).

This concept, which encompasses bicycles, walking, and other human-powered transportation, is valued not only as an environmental solution but also as a promoter of public health, social inclusion, and equity. The São Paulo Climate Action Plan, PlanClimaSP, launched in 2021 in line with C40 network guidelines and the Paris Agreement, sets ambitious goals to neutralize greenhouse gas emissions by 2050. Among the 43 priority actions organized into five major strategies, promoting active mobility, with an emphasis on bicycle use, appears as one of the main solutions to reduce carbon emissions in the city (São Paulo, 2021).

2.3 Sustainability

Sustainability, according to the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED), is based on meeting the needs of the present without compromising the needs of future generations (WCED, 1987).

Sustainability encompasses the three pillars of a system – environmental, social, and economic. By definition, we have:

2.3.1 - Environmental sustainability - focuses its efforts on protecting the environment and natural resources. It seeks to minimize negative impacts and promote and conserve biodiversity, respecting ecosystem cycles and avoiding the predatory degradation of their resources (Ignacy). (Sach, 2002).

2.3.2 - Social sustainability - focuses on the well-being of people and communities, encompassing aspects of equal opportunities, health, education,

social justice and human rights (Dempsey et al., 2011).

2.3.3 - Economic sustainability - promotes efficiency in the use of natural resources in a way that does not deplete them. Sustainable companies must, in addition to generating profits, protect the environment and create social value (Elkington, 1999).

The three pillars of sustainability encourage companies to manage environmental, social, and financial values, seeking balance and interdependence among them, ensuring the continuity of natural processes and people's well-being (Elkington, 2018).

2.4 Agenda 2030

In 2015, at a meeting promoted by the United Nations (UN), 193 countries agreed on measures and goals to eradicate poverty and promote a stronger, more sustainable future: the 2030 Agenda. The 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) include 169 targets to be achieved. These goals aim to address the main issues affecting humanity and the planet, such as combating hunger, health, education, innovation, infrastructure, sustainable cities, decent work, industry and partnerships for development, among others (UN, 2015).

To achieve the goals set out in the 2030 Agenda, the UN (2015) and its international partners understand that engagement and collaboration across all levels of operation are necessary: governments, philanthropic entities, communities, businesses, universities and other institutions. It is a mutual effort for the benefit of humanity and sustainable development.

2.5 Sustainable Cities

Sustainable cities are a term coined by international organizations that defines a new model for city development that prioritizes balanced urban development, efficient use of natural resources, reduced environmental impacts, and social inclusion. It focuses on quality of life and environmental preservation and aims to meet present needs without compromising future generations' needs (Acselrad; Lynch, 2001, pp. 105-106).

On the path to developing smart cities, one of the goals defined by the UN (2015) in the 2030 Agenda is to encourage walking and cycling for people's commutes. Active transportation practices promote public health and well-being while reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Federal Law No. 12,587 of 2012 mandates that municipalities with more than twenty thousand inhabitants promote and implement public policies to encourage active transportation practices, and include them in their Master Plans (Brazil, 2012).

2.6 Master Plan

Cities. In São Paulo, the Strategic Master Plan was developed in 2014 and projects through 2030. Its laws provide for actions to ensure the city's development

occurs in a planned manner and meets the needs of the population. It applies to both public and private spaces, ensuring the city grows in a productive, balanced, modern, and inclusive way. Its main objective is to provide and improve people's quality of life. The Master Plan is periodically reviewed, always with the aim of meeting and improving the city's needs for the benefit of its people (Strategic Master Plan of the Municipality of São Paulo, 2014).

2.7 City of São Paulo

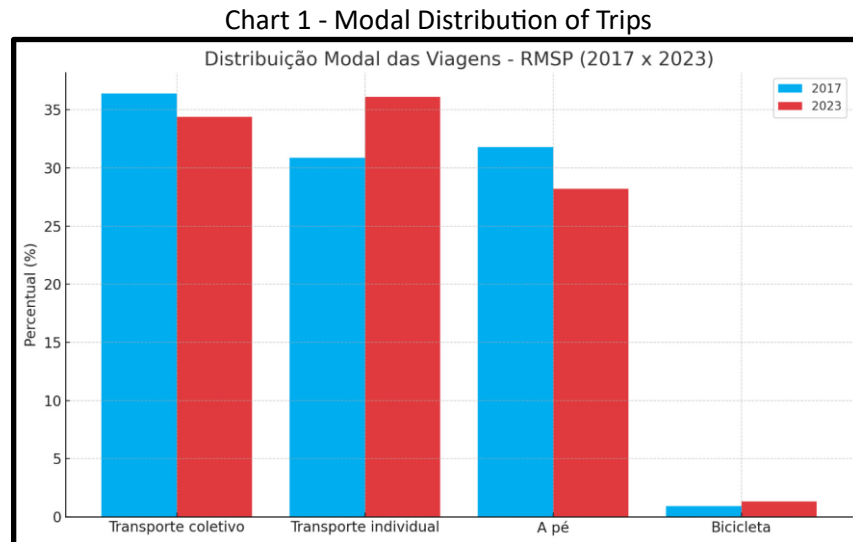
São Paulo stands out as Brazil's main urban, economic, and cultural center. According to data from the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE), the municipality covers 1,521.202 km² and, according to the 2022 Demographic Census, is home to 11,451,999 inhabitants, resulting in a population density of 7,528.26 inhabitants per km². The city has a Municipal Human Development Index (HDI) of 0.805, classified as very high, reflecting high levels of education and a potentially high quality of life.

Economically, São Paulo leads among Brazilian municipalities. In 2021, the city's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita was R\$66,872.84, placing it among the highest in the country. The city is a hub for financial, industrial, and technological services, housing the headquarters of B3, the main stock exchange in Latin America. Furthermore, the city is recognized for its cultural diversity, a result of intense migratory and immigration flows, consolidating itself as a global metropolis with significant national and international influence (IBGE).

In a megacity like São Paulo, urban mobility challenges are increasing, driven by dependence on motorized vehicles, congestion, pollution, and inequality in access to transportation. In this context, public policies that encourage active mobility, such as cycling and walking, emerge as a sustainable and inclusive alternative (Knebel, 2024).

In this large capital city, the right to urban mobility is unequal and frequently violated, especially among residents of peripheral areas. Knebel (2024) analyzes this problem through the lens of bicycle use, a mode of transport that, although promising for health and sustainability, faces physical, social, and institutional barriers to widespread adoption. Marked by a history of predominance of individual motorized transport, active modes of transport have gained space in public debate and municipal policies in recent decades (Florindo et al., 2025).

According to the 2023 Origin and Destination (OD) Survey, conducted by the São Paulo Metro, the São Paulo Metropolitan Region (RMSP) recorded an average of 35.6 million daily trips, representing a reduction of approximately 15% compared to the 42 million daily trips recorded in the 2017 edition, as shown in the graph below (São Paulo Metropolitan Company, 2023). The survey was implemented early to assess the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on population travel patterns, in a context marked by the growing adoption of remote and hybrid work, as well as a greater preference for private automobiles.



Source: Prepared by the authors based on Companhia Metropolitana de São Paulo (2023)

The city of São Paulo has taken an important step in managing active mobility by launching the Bicycle Trip Monitoring Plan, developed by Ciclocidade in partnership with SMT, CET, and the *Partnership for Healthy Cities*. This public policy is innovative because it establishes its own continuous municipal data collection system, allowing monitoring of the evolution of bicycle use much more frequently and accurately than the traditional Origin and Destination Survey, conducted at intervals of 5 to 10 years. The initiative plans biannual counts at 110 fixed points, the largest data collection ever carried out in the city on cyclists, enabling the public administration to manage based on updated, local evidence. (São Paulo City Hall, 2024).

The system also aligns directly with environmental and public health goals established in the Climate Action Plan (PlanClimaSP), which aims to increase the share of bicycles in urban trips from 0.8% to 4% by 2030. The connection between active mobility, climate change mitigation, and health promotion reflects a new paradigm of integrated urban planning. Furthermore, the plan was built collectively, with active participation from organized civil society and support from international networks such as the *Partnership for Healthy Living*. Cities reinforce their legitimacy and effectiveness. It is an innovative public policy, both for its collaborative governance and for creating a permanent technical mechanism for urban planning. (São Paulo City Hall, 2024).

Faced with the contemporary challenges of urban mobility, the city of São Paulo has been consolidating efforts to transform the bicycle into a safe and accessible means of daily transportation. In this context, the goal is to significantly increase bicycle use, aiming for it to account for 4% of all trips made in the city by 2030—a significant leap from the current 0.8%. This goal is directly linked to an urban agenda that emphasizes environmental sustainability, social inclusion, and public health. This transition requires not only investments in cycling infrastructure but also cultural changes, institutional strengthening, and integration with other modes of transportation (São Paulo City Hall, 2024; Knebel, 2024).

The effectiveness of this process will depend on the continuity of public policies based on reliable data, such as the Bicycle Trip Monitoring Plan, and on expanding social participation in urban planning. Bicycles, in addition to being a low-environmental-impact mode of transport, contribute to the democratization of urban space and the right to the city, especially in a context marked by inequalities in access to transportation. Thus, the 4% target represents more than just a statistic: it is a symbolic and strategic milestone towards a more equitable, resilient city aligned with the principles of sustainable mobility (PlanClimaSP).

3. METHOD

To prepare this article, we conducted a systematic literature review, including publications in Portuguese and English. The search for materials was carried out on the academic platforms Google Scholar, *Scientific Electronic Library Online (SciELO)*, *Scopus*, and *Web of Science*, and master's theses were selected for their relevance and scope in interdisciplinary studies. The study also consulted books, specialized electronic journals, and official institutional sources, with an emphasis on data made available by public bodies and research institutions.

The research corpus was constructed using Boolean operators applied to the following descriptors: active mobility, urban mobility, sustainability, bicycles, and São Paulo. The selection of materials was based on their relevance to the topic and their contribution to understanding public policies aimed at sustainable mobility in São Paulo's urban context.

The investigation focused on identifying, analyzing, and discussing evidence supporting the projects and guidelines foreseen in the Strategic Master Plan of the city of São Paulo, to understand how these instruments have been used to foster a more sustainable and resilient city. The research was also guided by the concern to address initiatives that promote well-being, public health, and equity in access to urban mobility.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

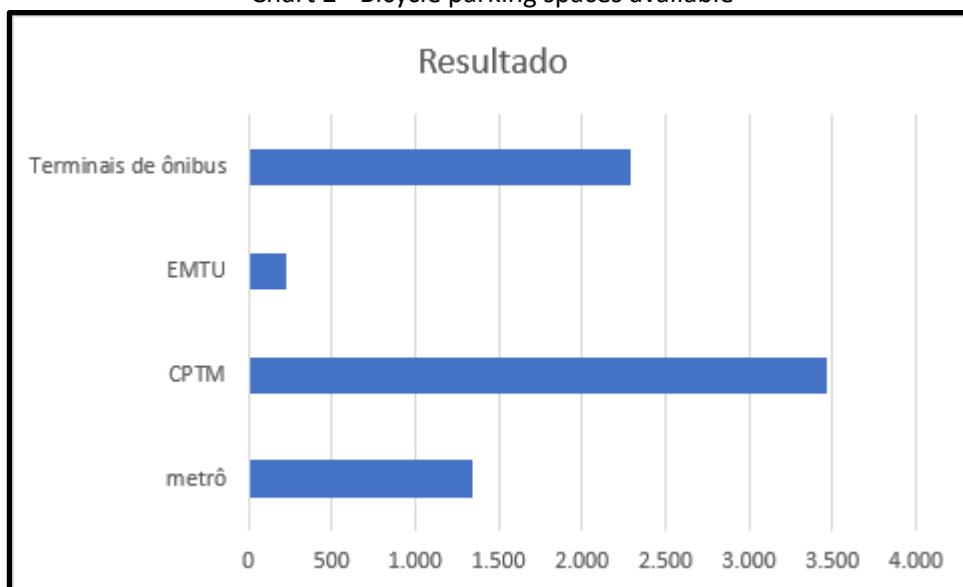
Based on the goals established in the São Paulo Municipality's Climate Action Plan (PlanClimaSP), the municipal administration has consistently promoted the use of bicycles as a regular means of transportation. One of the main instruments supporting these strategies is the systematic counting of cyclists carried out by the Traffic Engineering Company (CET), which in 2023 reached the highest number of points ever monitored in the city: 210 distinct locations. Of these, 110 points are monitored biannually (55 per year), allowing continuous data collection and enabling the identification of travel patterns and priority areas for investment.

To meet the goals proposed in PlanClimaSP (São Paulo Municipality Climate Action Plan 2020-2050), a schedule of steps was created so that a new evaluation could be carried out each year. One action proposed to achieve zero carbon emissions by 2050 is promoting bicycle use as a common means of transportation

through expanding existing infrastructure and using awareness and communication strategies to encourage it. This promotion should consider the specificities and demands of each region, with an inclusive approach that guarantees safety and accessibility for all, but especially women, young people, and the most vulnerable population.

The proposed actions were the expansion of bike lanes throughout the city of São Paulo, implementation of bicycle parking facilities at all bus terminals (municipal and metropolitan), installation of bicycle racks in all municipal buildings, expansion of the bike-sharing system coverage, implementation of communication, education and social mobilization campaigns to promote bicycle use and improvement of signage. The proposed actions have a 2032 implementation deadline. Graph 1 represents the number of bicycle parking spaces available in 2022, showing that 1,337 spaces were made available at metro stations, in 17 terminals; 3,466 spaces on the CPTM (commuter rail), in 18 locations; 225 at EMTU (urban transport company), in 1 bicycle parking facility; and 2,295 spaces at SPTrans (São Paulo Transport Company) terminals, in 11 municipal and intermunicipal terminals.

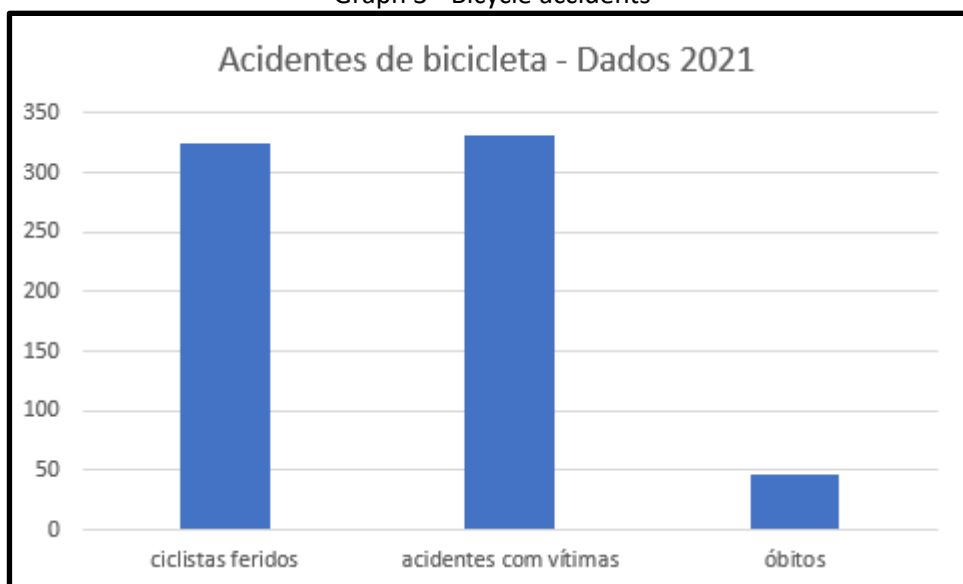
Chart 2 - Bicycle parking spaces available



Source: Prepared by the authors based on the PlanclimSP Report (2022)

PlanclimSP report also details the number of accidents that occurred in 2021, with 325 cyclists injured, 332 accidents with victims, and 47 deaths involving bicycles, as shown in graph 2.

Graph 3 - Bicycle accidents



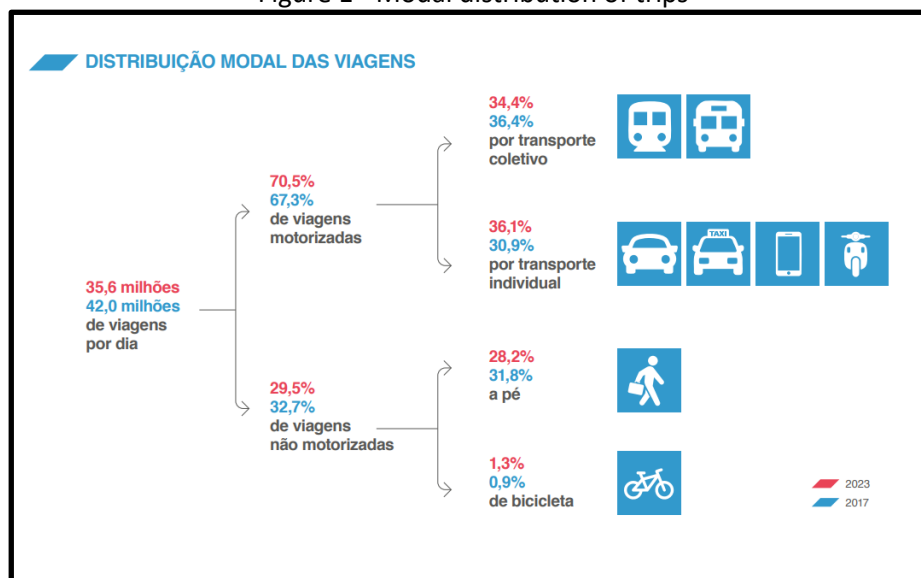
Source: prepared by the authors based on the PlanClimaSP Report (2021)

To improve the safety of users, pedestrians and cyclists, CET implemented Area 40, which reduces speeds in areas with a high concentration of vulnerable users.

As part of its educational initiatives, the Municipality of São Paulo held an international workshop on business models for equipment to support cyclists, promoting active mobility, bicycle delivery, and the installation of bicycle parking facilities; it also launched educational campaigns aimed at promoting bicycle use, such as "Mobility Week," "Yellow May," and the "Cycling Safely" course.

According to the 2023 Origin-Destination survey of the São Paulo Metro, 29.5% of trips were made by non-motorized means (bicycle and on foot). Bicycle trips increased by 25%, but despite this growth, they represent only 1.3% of total trips.

Figure 1 - Modal distribution of trips



Source: Origin-Destination Survey 2023 – Metro

Given this, the expanded cyclist count and the data collected become fundamental tools not only for measuring progress towards the 4% target, but also for improving urban planning with a focus on sustainable mobility. Continuing these initiatives, combined with participatory governance and intersectoral commitment, will be crucial to consolidating the bicycle as a viable alternative for urban mobility in São Paulo.

5. FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

São Paulo has stood out in implementing public policies aimed at active mobility, focusing on promoting the use of bicycles as a means of urban transport. Considering the goal set by the Climate Action Plan (PlanClimaSP), which aims to increase the share of bicycles in city trips from 0.8% to 4% by 2030, the municipal government has significantly mobilized to develop planning, infrastructure, and monitoring instruments.

One key action was implementing the Bicycle Trip Monitoring Plan, which enables regular, accurate tracking of bicycle use in the city. According to updated data from the Municipal Transportation Secretariat (SMT), in 2023 systematic counts of cyclists were carried out at 218 points in the city, expanding the capacity for analysis and evidence-based decision-making.

These counts help identify usage trends, regional demands, and the main cyclist flows, supporting the implementation of bike lanes, bicycle parking facilities, bicycle racks, and other support structures. Data collection is also fundamental for measuring the effectiveness of education and awareness campaigns promoted by the public authorities, such as Mobility Week and the "Cycling Safely" and "Yellow May" programs.

Despite progress, achieving the 4% target by 2030 still faces structural and cultural challenges. Overcoming these barriers requires political continuity, investment in safe and inclusive infrastructure, and ongoing engagement with civil society and international organizations. Strengthening collaborative governance is essential to ensure the legitimacy and effectiveness of the measures adopted.

The use of bicycles, more than an alternative, represents a paradigmatic transformation in how cities are conceived. It values clean, accessible transportation that promotes health and equity. Thus, the São Paulo experience offers a relevant model for other Brazilian cities that aspire to a more sustainable and just urban future.

Therefore, it can be concluded that São Paulo's strategies to achieve the goal of 4% bicycle participation in urban trips are advanced but require continuity, constant evaluation, and increased public participation. Monitoring 218 points demonstrates the seriousness of the approach and the capacity for data-driven management. Maintaining institutional commitment and social dialogue is now necessary to consolidate the bicycle as a pillar of urban mobility in São Paulo.

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