

# La Chaux-de-Fonds, Switzerland: “Dramatically reducing car traffic in the city centre”

## Interview with

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## *La Santé en action: Which urban planning projects have you implemented with population health in mind?*

*Philippe Carrard:* In our city of 37,000 inhabitants, the biggest project of the last few years was drafting and approving a new urban mobility plan [1] that pays particular attention to pedestrians and cyclists. On top of this, we defined supporting measures [2] around a future city-centre bypass, which will drastically reduce traffic, thereby freeing up public space for people, reducing environmental damage and making our city more attractive.

The first strand of our cycling plan focused on developing existing cycle routes by either marking out or installing cycle lanes across 5–6 km of urban landscape over the past four years, to supplement the existing network. For this project, it was not just a question of using road markings: sometimes we narrowed the space for vehicles or removed a traffic lane in favour of bicycles. The second strand of the plan involves devoting more space to bicycles whenever a public space is reviewed for renewal. The third strand consists of building cycle paths dedicated to bicycles. We currently have a vast project underway called the “Chemin des Rencontres”: it consists of a 5-km mixed-use track for pedestrians and bicycles that will run along the bottom of the entire valley, eventually connecting the stations of the towns La Chaux-de-Fonds and Le Locle. By summer 2022, between 2 and 3 km will have been completed at our end. In roughly ten years’ time, this cross-border greenway will link La Chaux-de-Fonds to Morteau in France. For pedestrians, we are developing new pedestrian-only zones and mixed-use zones with a 20 km/h speed limit where pedestrians have priority; five of these have been completed to date. We are also creating zones that are limited to 30 km/h in all residential areas, which moderates the traffic and improves safety for all users, especially pedestrians and cyclists. To date, around twenty “30-zones” have been developed. All of these installations have been planned or delivered in the past



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five years as part of a policy approved by the legislative authority in November 2017. It looks as though the programme to establish “30-zones” will continue until 2024.

## *S. A.: How can car traffic be reduced in the city centre?*

*P.C.:* The main objective, in the longer term, is to close the city centre to car traffic. Motorists will have to use the bypass road, and this will free up lots of spaces that we can reclaim for pedestrians and bicycles, for planting trees, etc. However, the whole project depends on the completion of the road, which is scheduled for 2027. The public voted to approve borrowing 186-million Swiss francs; the cost is high because a major part of the bypass will be a tunnel. In the shorter term, we will continue creating 30 km/h zones in the city centre. Above all, there are public spaces that we can already redevelop as pedestrian zones, without waiting for the bypass road to be ready. This is the case with the Place du Marché. The square – currently classified as a mixed-use area including 70 parking spaces – will become fully pedestrian by 2024 with the whole space paved and planted with trees. The car park will be moved to a larger location 400 m outside of the town centre.

## *S. A.: How did you involve the public in the urban planning work?*

*P.C.:* Everything was done using a process of public participation. For example, for the Place du Marché, we sketched out an initial proposal that provided a basis of discussion for approaching different publics, those with a stake in the square such as restaurant owners and other traders. A commission oversees the

participation process. It is made up of representatives from each political party, interest groups and local associations for independent businesses, market gardeners, motorists, etc. – all the people who are directly concerned. The public are not part of the commission, but we involved them in earlier consultations and the commission considered feedback from residents about their expectations. At a later date, once we have settled on one of the three potential scenarios, we will present the project to the public again and gather their opinions through meetings, exhibitions and public exchanges. These exchanges are set to start in May 2022. ■

**Interview by Yves Géry, editor-in-chief.**

## REFERENCES

[1] Huguenin-Élie T., Clerc C. *Objectifs “La Chaux-de-Fonds 2030” et plan directeur communal des mobilités [Objectives of the new municipal transport plan « La Chaux Fonds 2030 »]*. [Report to the general council of La Chaux-de-Fonds], municipal council of Chaux-de-Fonds, 8 November 2017: 52 p.

[2] Bregnard T., Schwaar D. *Plan directeur partiel des mobilités (PDPM) lié au projet de contournement est par la route principale suisse [Partial mobility plan in connection with the bypass project via the main Swiss road]*. [Report to the general council of La Chaux-de-Fonds], municipal council of La Chaux-de-Fonds, 6 November 2019.

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