Planning cities and towns without automobiles
(Wenn's das Auto kaum mehr braucht)

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Electric cars are not the magic solution to climate change. When powered by sustainably generated electricity they are better than fuel burning cars, but they don't stop the negative cycle of road building, sprawl, and congestion that ultimately fuels climate change.

Solving climate change means breaking this cycle by building cities and towns where people can live without driving.

Let's start with strategies for rural areas.

- First, driving will always be necessary in rural areas, so focus electric vehicle efforts here. Build charging infrastructure. Develop specialised vehicles (e.g., for farming).

- Rebuild town centres as several Austrian cities have already done successfully. Subsidize new businesses in empty shops. Create pedestrian zones. Put parking on the edges. Add apartments. Bring small towns back to life.

- Provide public transport designed especially for rural areas. Operate service frequently, every day, all day long, with common ticketing and timed transfers to other services. Vorarlberg is a great model, Switzerland the ultimate example.

- Build safe cycle paths. E-bikes so dramatically extend cycling range that cycling is now a good option for many rural trips, but no one will cycle if they don't feel safe. Cycling infrastructure is a great tourist attraction too.

- Guide development towards town centres and away from productive agricultural or natural land. Building here increases driving and reduces the land's ability to protect us from flooding and other impacts of climate change.

Fighting climate change with these strategies will also make rural areas better places to live, helping stem depopulation.

Cities must start by recognising that the economic value of cities lies in agglomeration, bringing people together to share ideas, create and sell products. Private automobiles simply use too much space that could be better used for these activities, for other – more efficient – forms of moving people, and for moving goods.

Strategies cities can use to fight climate change must therefore reduce private automobile use. Proven strategies include:

- Vastly increase public transport. Even Vienna could increase service in outlying districts and improve quality by better implementing well-known strategies like public transport priority.

- Create attractive mixed-use neighbourhoods like Vienna's Sonnenviertel and Nordbahnareal. These projects clearly demonstrate the unlimited demand for well-designed districts where people can live without driving.

- Prioritize walking and cycling. Build "network creating" projects like Seville (cycling up over 450%). People want to cycle in cities – but are afraid. Making it easier to cycle also frees roads for goods movement and those who must drive.

- Introduce innovative parking programs like "SFPark" to ensure that deliveries, craftspeople and those who must drive always have a parking space easily available.

- Revise planning laws to reduce driving by, e.g., eliminating parking requirements for new apartments. This will also reduce housing costs.

As this list shows fighting climate change can make cities better. Today's most attractive cities, including Paris, Copenhagen and Amsterdam are building protected cycling networks and 15-minute cities, not freeways and suburban sprawl. Vienna should join them by rejecting the Lobau Freeway and focusing instead on the alternative strategies listed above.

Finally, there are no magic technical solutions for making our cities, towns and rural areas fit for a future of climate change. Nor will there ever be. Fighting climate change is a social problem because we will need to make major changes to the way we live and work. Making these changes will improve our lives, but change is always hard. Success will require great courage and imagination from elected leaders along with great patience and understanding from residents. It is the challenge of our lifetimes.