

Paris : Yes, the Traffic around the Quays of the Seine is improving!

Jila Varoquier and Benoit Hasse, 18 February 2018.



Last Thursday at 5pm, on the upper quay of the Right Bank at la Concorde (8th arrondissement). The traffic was running freely. LP / B.H.

According to the Paris City Hall, car traffic has begun to decline on the "alternative routes" where traffic jams had increased following after the pedestrianisation of the banks of the Seine.

The mayor of Paris had predicted at the end of 2016, during the highly contested pedestrianisation of the (lower quay of the) Right Bank: there would be "disappearing traffic" (i.e. a shift away from car travel by some former users of the closed road). According to the elected representatives of the majority, this is now happening. According to the figures provided by the City of Paris Highways Department, the traffic has indeed begun to fall on the alternative routes.

Les chiffres de la mairie de Paris



Technicians counting the traffic during morning (8 am-9am) and evening rush hours (6 pm-7pm) on the upper quays of the Right Bank, Left Bank, and boulevard Saint-Germain compared the data (volume of traffic per hour) from January 2018 to January 2017. The result: widespread reductions ranging from -5% to -28%! On the upper quay of the Right Bank, where the difficulties are concentrated, the number of vehicles fell from 2,140 in January 2017 to 1901 in January 2018 during the morning rush hours.

"These figures show that our forecasts were on the right lines," says Christophe Najdovski, deputy mayor of Paris in charge of traffic. He attributes these good results to a "conjunction of several factors" amongst which the recent reform of parking was important. "With better enforcement, we are witnessing changes in behaviour," he said, recalling that the number of cars moving in the capital has decreased by 5% since the beginning of the year.

"Nevertheless, we still have high levels of traffic on the alternative routes," says Cristophe Najdovski, recognizing that there is still some way to go before volumes reach the levels seen before pedestrianisation. "That's why the challenge is to further reduce traffic, on the upper lanes of the Right Bank in particular, where we will continue to pursue alternative arrangements such as a new bus rapid transit route."

Not enough to reassure the Region, who have drawn very different conclusions to the City of Paris from the traffic figures. "Counting the number of vehicles per hour in no way indicates 'disappearing traffic'. When Paris is a vast traffic jam, everyone is stopped. This limits the number of cars in

circulation but does not reduce pollution” said a source close to Valerie Pécresse (President of Ile de France Region).

Just three months ago, in its latest report on the Quays, the Region's evaluation committee (one of the four bodies set up to measure the impact of pedestrianisation) concluded: “No phenomenon of disappearing traffic (shift away from car travel) could be observed or established more than one year after the closure of the road”.

We tested: Concorde to Bastille in 20 minutes flat

The end of horn concerts at rush hour and quays turned into a car park with queues at a standstill? To make sure of this, we did a "test run", on the upper quays of the Right Bank from la Concorde (8th arrondissement) to the port of Arsenal (4th arrondissement) - above the 3.3 km of the lower quays now prohibited to cars – on a Thursday (a day of heavy traffic), in rainy weather (synonymous with slowdowns), at 5pm at the beginning of the evening rush hour. And the test did not turn into a nightmare. On the contrary.

Once past the crossroads (always complicated) with the bridge of la Concorde, the traffic turned out to be surprisingly free-running until rue de la Louvre. A slowdown (almost) forces us to stop in the middle of the crossroads and then the flow of vehicles pulls away again. It takes us 10 minutes to arrive at Pont-Neuf, 15 minutes to pass City Hall and finally 20 minutes 30, stopwatch in hand, to reach the end of Quai Henri IV. Just after the pedestrianisation of the banks, this same journey could take up to 50 minutes. Proof that traffic has “evaporated”, some will say. A stroke of luck for others...

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Translated by Steve Melia, March 6th 2018