



# Gustavo de Araújo Barros



Gustavo is from Recife, Brazil, and studies Architecture and Urbanism at the Federal University of Pernambuco (UFPE), where he developed a research project focused on the Cycling Master Plan of the Metropolitan Region of Recife (PDC/RMR). He works in urban mobility and road safety as a coordination and engagement assistant at Instituto Cordial, contributing to the Brazilian Mobility Panel (PBM) and actively participating in the PBM Cities Network. In Recife, he is a member of the Metropolitan Cyclists Association (Ameciclo), where he previously served in the general coordination and currently leads the political advocacy working group. He also represents Ameciclo as the Civil Society Coordinator in the Governance Body of the Recife's Historic Center Department (Recentro) and as an alternate member of the City Council. Additionally, he has experience as a field researcher in cycling-focused studies and is trained as a creative tourism guide. Gustavo is passionate about building safer, more inclusive, and sustainable cities through mobility.



Recife, Brazil







### Transport systems can be considered inclusive only if...

First and foremost, I believe that a socially just transportation system is only possible if it is also a Safe System. Traffic deaths are the most vile aspect of an urban mobility model shaped by economic processes that devalue the lives of the majority to benefit a small elite. Reaching zero traffic deaths is a basic human condition we must achieve before we can even begin to envision socially just mobility. I draw on the slogan of a civil society movement in Brazil to define when we can consider mobility to be socially just: Triple Zero Mobility – Zero Deaths, Zero Fares, and Zero Emissions.

Mobility will be socially just when no one dies in traffic; when no one is prevented from traveling because they cannot afford public transportation; and when we have a high-quality, fare-free, state-run public transport system, under democratic and popular control. This means prioritizing transit in street design, investing in clean technologies, and ensuring an inclusive and extensive fleet that serves all. A socially just mobility system must also be part of a broader economic and social process that reduces—not accelerates—the climate collapse we are living through. That is

only possible through a political movement to reduce the number and the symbolic dominance of cars in our cities. Justice in mobility is inseparable from social and environmental justice.

### If I was in power of our transport systems, the first thing I would do is...

I would work to change the Brazilian Traffic Code to reduce speed limits on urban roads from 60 km/h to 50 km/h, as recommended by the World Health Organization. I would also support implementing average speed enforcement systems. These are proposals from a social movement that became a bill in the Brazilian National Congress (PL2789/2023).

Another key agenda would be a national process to bring public transport under state ownership, with strong federal support for cities to fund and improve their systems. In Recife, my first local actions—beyond reducing speed limits across the city—would include expanding automated speed enforcement to operate 24/7, which is not currently the case. This would be essential for reducing dangerous driving behavior at night and on weekends. Next, I would prioritize building protected bike lanes along all major avenues. Ten of these roads—

about 70 km or 3% of Recife's street network—account for one-third of the city's traffic deaths, yet only one currently has a bike lane. Tackling this would address the urgent need for safer infrastructure for everyone in Recife, not just cyclists.

### How does the current situation of marginalized groups in your city influence your work?

"Build a city for children, the elderly, and women, and you build a city for everyone" is a common phrase that shows how prioritizing socially vulnerable groups leads to better quality of life for the entire population. In Recife and across Brazil, the majority lives in poverty, with a significant portion in extreme poverty. Black women are disproportionately affected — a socially stigmatized group that, especially in old age, often faces social isolation due to lack of access to public transport. Fare costs and poor service quality are major barriers to basic rights like healthcare, education, and leisure, restricting many to work-related trips only. This issue also affects low-income people with disabilities. Additionally, Recife's public transportation system is built around a

radial logic focused on home–work commutes, typically male patterns. It fails to serve women's more fragmented trips (dropping kids at school, going to work, shopping, etc.), even though most public transport users in Recife are women. As a young white middle-class man, I recognize how harsh and complex the Brazilian reality is. No matter how much we study European or American experiences, our challenges go far beyond transportation, they are about racial, class, and gender justice.

### What's the main challenge that you face in your daily work?

I believe the biggest challenge for road safety is the same as in all areas of urban mobility: car culture. This is a political process that promotes a commercial product at the expense of cities that could prioritize housing, parks, schools, and hospitals instead of devoting so much space to transport. A truly safe and just city is one where everyone can move freely, without financial or physical barriers, and without the risk of death. In Brazil, car culture destroys cities, kills thousands, and pollutes our air—rooted in a colonial dynamic of Global North exploitation over the Global South.

### My work aligns with the Hamburg Charter Principles!

I ground my work in mobility on the core principle shared by Vision Zero and Safe System approaches: No death or serious injury in traffic is acceptable. I refuse to normalize these tragedies, which continue to rise in my city and country year after year. Beyond technical solutions, achieving this vision requires dismantling the social, economic, and spatial privileges of car users, while reclaiming space to strengthen active and public transport.

The Hamburg Charter Principles align with a future – one we already have the means to build – in which investing in zero-carbon mobility is key, but decarbonization starts with a modal shift toward walking, cycling, and public transit—not just electrification. Above all, this vision demands more than citizen participation: it calls for popular control over public transport and urban planning.

Urban mobility must also serve as a tool for empowering historically marginalized communities. Ensuring their right to the city through accessible and inclusive mobility is a step toward overdue social and historical justice. That's why public transport must be free of financial and physical barriers — Zero Fare is a revolutionary proposal. Technology, too, should support emancipatory processes, not deepen inequality.



Today, the biggest road safety challenge in Brazil is the rapid rise of motorcycle use. This comes from pushing low-income populations to distant suburbs, neglecting and privatizing public transport, worsening working conditions, and creating urban environments unsafe for active mobility. For many, motorcycles are the only way to access the city—leading to more deaths and serious injuries, especially among Black communities. Motorcycles are also often the only source of income, raising concerns about tech companies that exploit delivery workers through moto-taxi and moto-freight services. These platforms offer poor pay, no labor rights, and promote risky behaviors, worsening both transport safety and public systems.

### Why is it important to listen to young people?

I understand that each passing year brings increasingly precarious living conditions for the younger population, especially in Global South countries like Brazil. Young people are facing worsening working conditions, the impacts of climate change, and a decline in public services such as transportation. In Brazil, the youth are enduring public transport with rising fares and longer travel times, while their incomes fail to keep up. Therefore, I believe it is more necessary than ever to understand the precarious situation in which new generations are entering the job market—and how urban mobility plays a role in the ongoing deterioration of quality of life.

### What would you tell other young people working in the transport field?

I believe that young people must understand that, as a society, we now more than ever have the material and technological means to build a reality where collectivity prevails — and that what separates us from this reality is our political and economic organization. In this reality, I believe mobility must be established as a universal human right, since “urban mobility is the right that grants access to all other rights.” Therefore, mobility must be addressed in conjunction with the broader urban context

and city planning, but especially through the lens of the political and economic processes that shape our lives, always aiming to eliminate social, class, racial, and gender injustices. However, I must emphasize that traffic deaths are the most vile consequence of the urban mobility model we currently live in, and that above all, we must build a Safe System of Mobility. Cities are not places where people should die, and our streets are the largest part of our public space. It is essential to understand that the way they are designed and managed clearly reflects the political priorities of our society.

