



# Medellín bets on green recovery

by Andrew Thompson

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## What happened?

Medellín, Colombia's number 2 city with a population of 2.5mn, says it will make big investments to spark a "green recovery" after the coronavirus.

## The details

Amid a health pandemic, a global recession and historically low oil prices some argue that the drive for cleaner and more sustainable economic activity should wait until better times return. Medellín mayor Daniel Quintero, elected as an independent last year, disagrees. In a recent interview he has outlined an aggressive green investment policy. Bike lanes are to be doubled to 145kms in three years, and there will be 50,000 electric bicycles for rent. All public transport will be electric by 2030. A vehicle charging network will be built. There will be investments in education. Medellín will cut its carbon emissions by 20% in 2015–2030.

There is an element of showmanship in the mayor's approach. He refers to Medellín's ability to re-invent itself as a green and high-tech city after being at the mercy of Pablo Escobar and other crime bosses in the 1980s and 1990s. The city he says is now an "example to the world". Certainly, his approach to COVID-19 has been unconventional, locking down early and persuading informal workers to register through an app so as to qualify for food aid or two limited emergency payments of 100,000



pesos (US\$28) each. To register they must also provide information designed to allow tracking and tracing to limit the spread of the virus.

Not everyone is convinced. While mortality is lower in Medellin than in other Colombian cities, some say the number of tests is still very low and accuse the mayor of using “bogus maths”. Others say the app raises unanswered questions about privacy and data protection.

## What does it mean?

Investing in a climate friendly “green recovery” is a positive response to the crisis, but Quintero will need to step beyond setting targets to demonstrate he can find the funding and the project management skills to make it work.

### About the Author

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As well as being a Canning House Associate Fellow, Andrew is a former foreign correspondent (Buenos Aires, Mexico City, Rio de Janeiro) and a broadcaster for the BBC’s Latin American Service. Working through La Rambla Research Ltd., he writes about economics, political risk, and business in Latin America.

