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The city of the future. It's got to be more bike-friendly, more walkable, and just plain nicer. No fear of getting run over. Getting around becomes a pleasure.

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Hello On The Way listeners, I'm Benoît Tholence. I'm 35, and I'm diving into the world of entrepreneurship. It's been kind of a serendipitous journey for me. I guess it's something that's been brewing inside me for a while now. Yeah, totally stumbled into it, but hey, here I am. I think that's the essence of it, the overarching plan.

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So, what's driving me today? It's sort of looking back and realising it's a natural fit that just makes sense. Once you dip your toes into entrepreneurship, going back is tough. Sure, you can sometimes grab onto lifelines and claw your way out of the entrepreneurial abyss. But overall, it's what fuels my dreams, you know? It's an incredible way to make a mark in this world.

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So, I'm someone who dreams big and takes action. I see entrepreneurship as a blend of both. It's about shaking things up to chase your dreams. My awakening to environmental issues—it's kind of a wake-up call, you know? I use that term because I still feel like I'm a bit asleep. I've been stirring for about six or seven years now, but I still feel like I'm not fully awake yet. It's like I'm slowly emerging from a nightmare.

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I say this because the deeper I dive into the subject, the more I uncover. It's like waking up from a bad dream, trying to piece together what happened during that night. Looking back on my 35 years of life, I realise I've been pretty clueless about a lot of things, and I probably still am to some extent.

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So here I am, still lying in bed, slowly waking up to the realities around me. For instance, not too long ago, I used to jet off to Bali for three weeks, thinking it was no big deal because, well, I hardly bought anything new otherwise.

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I just didn't have a sense of the scale. So, in terms of scale, it's like hauling around two tons, maybe even more for a trip to Bali—like 2.5 or even three tons round trip by plane. Meanwhile, my daily consumption of goods was probably less than a ton without any fuss,

more like 500 kilos, and so forth. So, in terms of reducing my carbon footprint, skipping Bali might have made a bigger dent than dramatically cutting down my consumption.

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It's not about picking one or the other. Ideally, we should do both. But let's not kid ourselves. What's really crucial, I think, is realising that just because we're doing something good in one area of our lives doesn't give us a pass to be less mindful in another. Looking back, Sanka is kind of a natural fit for me, really, since it's like the intersection of three things that are important to me.

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First off, there's my drive to keep on with entrepreneurship. Like I mentioned earlier, once you're in it, it's tough to get out. Then there's my passion for contributing to the ecological transition. And lastly, there's my geekiness about mobility. By 'geek,' I mean a fervour that might seem a bit quirky from the outside. Back when there were all those scooter-sharing services, I was pretty geeked out about it, I think.

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In any case, it was one of my goals, to have all those apps on my phone. So eventually, I stopped using those services and started cycling more. But back then, I had, I think, around a dozen apps, which pretty much matched the number of services available in Paris, and also in other big cities.

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So, these three things, the desire to venture into entrepreneurship ultimately for environmental reasons, and my passion, my obsession with mobility, led to Sanka. That's why I felt compelled to start a business and why I wanted to kick off this project. Just the other day, I came across the ad for the new Renault 5 that's just been announced.

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At the time of recording, there's this really cool electric car that also brings back some good memories for some of us. At the end of the ad, just like in other car commercials, you see this car all alone on the road. It's kind of a lie that's been ingrained in us, making us think that a car equals freedom.

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Sure, a car does enable a lot of things, like the ability to travel far whenever we want, as long as there's no traffic or congestion. But overall, it does offer that sense of freedom, that's true. However, nowadays, especially in cities, it still imposes a lot of constraints on us.

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Personally, I'm lucky enough to currently live in a big city, so I haven't felt the need to buy a car. Earlier, I mentioned that I'm kind of a mobility geek, and another one of my quirks, which could've been a third example,

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is my interest in collecting car-sharing apps. This time around, I'm not just doing it for fun, but also because I find various practical uses for them. There are plenty of options when it comes to car-sharing. You've got peer-to-peer, you've got companies facilitating it, and you've got companies providing the service.

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Then there's the free-floating concept, where you can pick up and drop off cars wherever. There are national services, regional ones, even hyper-local ones. And then there are services where you can pick up a car from a pre-paid parking spot and return it there. So, depending on what I need,

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I'll choose a different service. Sometimes, for instance, it allows me to grab a van when I'm moving. And sure, that's something people are accustomed to, but it can also mean I can snag a nine-seater van for a trip with eight friends. Yeah, it's happened to me several times, even with eight colleagues.

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So, in the end, that's what freedom means to me: it's about not being tied down as a car owner, stuck with just one vehicle. I want to clarify, though, that I don't have anything against cars. They offer plenty of benefits, and overall, I enjoy driving. And because I enjoy driving, I appreciate the variety and the chance to drive different cars, each suited to my needs, ensuring that my usage matches my requirements.

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Here's an example: When there are nine of us, it's always better to take one nine-seater vehicle, like a minibus, rather than splitting into two or three cars. There might still be multiple opportunities for an entrepreneur, but overall, what we've found is that there are a ton of options available—from public transportation to car rental services, bikes, sometimes scooters if they're still allowed, and car-sharing services.

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Of course, these options might not always be widely known or well-developed. If we're talking about public transportation, there could still be issues with frequency and such,

but that's something we believe the authorities could work on, improving these alternatives to cars. But outside of major cities, in small towns, rural areas, even the countryside—places with really low population density—the alternatives to cars aren't non-existent, but they're certainly much less significant, much less common.

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That's the challenge we aimed to tackle with Sanka. We don't want to offer a one-size-fits-all mobility solution to replace cars. Let's not kid ourselves about that. Initially, we're rolling out a biking solution. So, bikes are for those short daily trips. It would be a stretch to claim we'll cover 30-kilometre distances on a bike.

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That's not to say people don't do it. But for those short jaunts, our mission and goal are to provide a biking solution that works, especially where cars dominate, particularly outside major cities, where alternatives are scarce, and where local authorities have less room to manoeuvre than in densely populated urban areas.

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We're talking about alternatives to owning a second car. Again, let's not fool ourselves about this. Today's cars are built for their peak usage, meaning most models come with five or at least four seats and spacious trunks. When we talk about peak usage, we're talking about just 5% of the time—the occasions when we're off on vacation or heading out for a weekend with the whole family.

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And our aim was to do just that with a bike solution perfectly sized for everyday needs. When we talk about daily use, we're really referring to the second vehicle because, let's face it, even if we have a first car, we still want it to be able to handle weekend getaways or vacations.

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But that second car? Well, it's a prime candidate for replacement by a bike. No one takes their second car on vacation. And usually, when I bring this up, households with more than two cars know exactly which one is the first, the second, and maybe even the third. We've named the bike Bob. Bob has several inspirations, including Sanka, one of the heroes from the movie *Cool Runnings*.

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I absolutely love this film; it's timeless, funny, and with a great message. So, for those unfamiliar with "Cool Runnings," it's about the Jamaican team that enters the bobsleigh

event at the Winter Olympics. I'm not sure if they ultimately win—I have my doubts about that.

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But regardless, it shows that anything is possible. And as we're shaping the future, I think it's a fitting reference. So Sanka represents hope, the hope for a slightly greener world. And Bob, well, Bob pays homage to the bobsleigh. This alternative to cars, which is a bike, specifically a cargo quadricycle bike, gives you an idea of what your ride could look like.

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Let's break down what a cargo bike is, as it might not be widely known. Currently, there are generally three types of cargo bikes out there. First up is what we call a longtail. It's basically a bike that's been elongated, hence the name. It's because at the back, we've expanded the rear rack.

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This means you can seat an adult there, or even squeeze in two or three kids. Now, onto the second category: the two-wheel Long John cargo bike. Typically, the cargo box is situated at the front of this model. It's a bike with a box up front. While there are bikes with boxes at the back, they're pretty rare, like 0.1% of the market.

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In fact, I've never come across one myself. So if you ever spot one, give me a shout. Finally, we have the last category, which is essentially the big kahuna of bikes—the three-wheel. So, we've got the longtail, the two-wheel Long John, and then the three-wheel cargo bike. This time around, the cargo box is usually at the front, making it ideal for ferrying people and maybe even some small cargo, especially for individual use.

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Now, what's often seen in bustling cities are three-wheel bikes with the cargo at the back, mainly for deliveries, handling that crucial last mile. So, what we're rolling out is a quadricycle. Yes, you heard that right—four wheels! We like to think of it as a bike with a hint of car vibes, especially with its four wheels.

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The protective shell surrounding the rider gives it a car-like feel. However, at its core, it's still very much a bike. To give you a sense of its size, picture a tiny compact car. For the sake of comparison, it's like a Smart car, but half as wide. And let's talk batteries. To cover distances of around 50 to 60 kilometres, we only need a battery about 50 times smaller than what powers a Zoe.

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For those not familiar, the Zoe is Renault's compact electric car, requiring around 50 kilowatt-hours of battery. In comparison, we're looking at just one kilowatt-hour, making it a mere fraction of the size. It's a bike that's not only more comfortable but also safer.

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So, picture this: a bike with a comfy backrest and a robust electric boost, for total comfort. And for those rainy days, we've got you covered—literally—with a retractable hood. We're borrowing a few cues from cars, but don't worry, we're not turning it into a convertible. It's usually open, but when the rain starts pouring, just pop up the hood for some shelter. When it comes to safety, especially on roads or areas lacking proper bike lanes,

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being more imposing on the road is key. It might sound strange, but having a wider bike actually makes it more noticeable on the road. And that extra width encourages motor vehicles to pass with a safe distance, sticking to the one-meter rule in the city and 1.5 meters outside.

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So, we've already got about fifty folks who've put down a symbolic payment for the first month of rental. I've had a chance to chat with almost all of them, so I've got a pretty good sense of who they are, how they live, and where they're based. This was all part of our hands-on market research—to really connect and converse with them.

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Now, to paint a broader picture, we often dub them "neorurals," not necessarily because they're recent country dwellers, but because they share a mindset of getting back to nature and being mindful of environmental issues. Personally, I'm inclined to believe that it's not environmental consciousness that drives people to make purchases; rather, it's environmental consciousness that deters them from buying certain products.

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And that's where our offering comes into play. We're giving folks the option to rent these bikes instead of buying them outright. It's a shift away from the traditional ownership model, which often comes under scrutiny in ecological debates. When we consider the various aspects from this perspective, long-term rentals serve a multitude of purposes.

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As manufacturers, we'll sell these bikes, of course, but to local authorities. And we're already pitching them to local governments as part of a long-term rental service. There

are plenty of perks to this approach. For starters, individuals pay a fraction of the upfront cost compared to buying outright—a cost that's often comparable to that of a used car.

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And yet, I start from the premise that when someone sets out to buy a bike, they might end up purchasing a car instead. Nonetheless, we still weigh our options. So, having a bike solution priced on par with a used car isn't feasible for probably 99% of folks. Hence, renting initially slashes this purchase cost and nudges the transition towards biking.

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That's the primary benefit. The second, what I dub our "durability pledge," is that by offering bikes for rent, we're also committing to the quality of our offerings. After all, we have a direct economic stake in ensuring the bike's longevity. So, in essence, it's our way of saying, "We offer these bikes for rent because we've ensured they're built to last."

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Other perks include my belief that rented bikes might see fewer thefts simply because they lack resale value. It might sound a bit simplistic or maybe even idealistic on my part, given that thefts will still occur. However, overall, I reckon it at least takes the shine off such illicit activities.

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So, just to clarify, this bike isn't on the market yet. Right now, the fifty or so folks I mentioned earlier have essentially signed up for the first month of rental based solely on a computer-generated image. As of now, the bike is rolling off our production line. Hopefully, by the end of March, we'll be pedalling it for the first time. I'm really excited about that.

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So, these initial customers, or potential customers, are people looking for a new way to get around. They're hesitant about switching to biking because of various concerns—maybe they're unsure if biking suits their routes, or they don't feel safe cycling along their usual paths.

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That's where we come in. Even before they commit to renting or buying this bike, we'll be there to assist them. We'll help them visualise their potential routes and inspire them to consider biking. Typically, a bike route outside major cities covers less than ten kilometres. Contrary to common belief, there are many daily routes under ten kilometres, even outside major cities.

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In reality, and somewhat surprisingly, people living around major cities, in suburban areas, often cover more kilometres on average than those in rural regions. These are individuals eager to embrace cycling but lacking a suitable solution tailored to their environment. And that solution is precisely a more comfortable and safer bike.

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But it also hinges on the route itself. Currently, a four-wheeled bike theoretically isn't allowed on bike lanes. It's permitted on greenways but not on bike lanes. Hence the name. Because, according to the traffic code, we're classified as a bike even with our four wheels, but further down the line, we're defined as prohibited from bike lanes because they're only authorized for bikes with two or three wheels.

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So, if we think these things will change, being an entrepreneur is also about dreaming, about envisioning the future and finding it hard to imagine banning bikes from bike lanes. That's why we continue to move forward on these issues. In fact, we also co-founded an association called Aveli, standing for the *Association des acteurs des véhicules légers et intermédiaires*, in English the association of stakeholders in light and intermediate vehicles.

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So, this association also has a role in lobbying to update traffic regulations, and it's about more than just promoting cycling solutions. Intermediate vehicles, basically, fill the gap between a beefed-up bicycle and a compact car. These fall under different L categories, from L1 to L7, covering anything that's not quite a car yet.

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The goal often revolves around creating more modest vehicles. Either we've boosted bicycle usage to replace cars, or we've crafted much smaller, more eco-friendly cars. By supporting lobbying efforts to simplify certain regulations, quirky rules in the traffic code, we're steering towards a more eco-conscious mobility. Essentially, we're downsizing our vehicles overall or enabling more folks to opt for cycling.

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Beyond the environmental perks of swapping your car for a bike for daily commutes—like cutting down on greenhouse gas emissions, both during use and manufacturing, reducing materials and resource extraction for production, lessening pollutants, from air pollution to often-overlooked noise pollution—we're also moving away from sedentary lifestyles by embracing cycling.



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I like to illustrate this with a simple image: our world seems to be getting a bit too comfortable, at least from what I've observed. It's a narrow view, of course. But think about the escalator—not the one going up, but the one going down—and notice how many people just let it do all the work.

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This paints a vivid picture of what I'm increasingly labelling as a world leaning towards laziness. However, the aim isn't to get everyone back on bikes again. It really hinges on the distance people need to travel. Yet, I firmly believe that rediscovering movement, reimagining your daily commute, that's the beauty of cycling. So, while we are indeed offering bikes directly to end-users, we're doing it in partnership with local governments. These municipalities—

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let me tell you, there are a plethora of acronyms involved, from PETRs to CAs with intermunicipal communities, and beyond. But the crux of the matter is this: these entities are essentially amalgamations of several smaller municipalities. And that's where the magic happens. Individual towns, especially in rural settings, are often too limited in scope for our purposes.

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However, intercommunality, as it's dubbed, presents a far more promising scale for rolling out long-term rental services, like bike rentals. The municipalities eager for the Bob solution are precisely those that have already dabbled in long-term bike rentals and are keen to broaden their horizons.

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They've already rolled out long-term bike rental services, finding that it significantly replaces car trips. Unlike in cities, where bikes may replace subway rides—though, from a greenhouse gas perspective, it isn't necessarily positive—the subway boasts a better carbon footprint over its lifecycle. However, in areas lacking subways,

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the focus shifts towards replacing cars. Introducing cycling options in such areas is beneficial. The allure of a bike like Bob lies in its ability to cater to a broader audience, those hesitant to try cycling via traditional means. Now, to make cycling solutions relevant, infrastructure is key.

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Sometimes, there are greenways or bike lanes that are pleasant to use. But more often than not, cyclists must venture off the beaten path— onto secondary roads or trails. For the average driver who hasn't considered cycling,

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these routes may be unfamiliar. Our goal, beyond offering bikes, is to showcase cyclist-friendly routes that may even be less favourable for cars. I tend to think that the worst car route is the best bike route, and vice versa. When plotting a typical route, the first step is to consider the distance and then examine the itinerary. Outside major cities,

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one can use specialised bike GPS systems, like Géo Vélo. While there are GPS devices primarily designed for cars, they're typically adapted for biking as well. Yet, they might not offer the best experience for cyclists. That's where specialised GPS systems like Géo Vélo come into play—they're explicitly crafted for cyclists.

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These GPS devices offer different options, like choosing the shortest route, the most scenic path, or even a tourist route for leisurely rides. While it might be great for weekend adventures, it may not be the most practical for daily commutes—although, who knows! Basically, you have a range of choices to explore.

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Furthermore, these GPS units are much better at understanding cycling routes compared to standard car GPS systems. For example, a car GPS might not recognise certain trails or paths since they're not suitable for cars. While cars might struggle with uneven terrain, resulting in a bumpy ride, cyclists have a different experience—especially

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when riding a bike designed to tackle off-road paths. Bob is tailor-made for what we call daily commutes, primarily geared towards getting to work. However, it's versatile enough to handle other tasks, such as dropping off or picking up a child along the way.

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We might have to run errands or pick up a few things, perhaps on our way to work or back home. Our aim is to create a bike that can handle all these tasks. So, we can sometimes load it with one or two grocery or shopping bags. It's not for doing a full week's worth of shopping, just for smaller, occasional trips. And it can even accommodate up to two children.

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We can also fit another adult on the back of the bike to explore various configurations. This could be for dropping someone off at the train station, for instance. But generally, about 95% of the time, we'll be riding solo on this bike. The remaining 5% might be for dropping a child off at school. When I talk about percentages, I mean in terms of distance covered. For instance, we might drop a child off a kilometre away and then cover the remaining five or six kilometres to get to work.

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And on the way back, perhaps we won't need to look after the kids, so we can use the opportunity to pick up some groceries. So, there are two ways to view this four-wheel cargo bike: either as a bike or as a car. And the idea is to also make it easy to park, just like a bike.

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Now, it's a hefty bike, and finding parking spots for cargo bikes can be tricky, especially in urban areas. Out in the suburbs, it might not pose much of a problem since we can often park on the sidewalk. Yet, there are areas without sidewalks.

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In any case, it's not a deal-breaker. What's crucial is to keep in mind the bike's role in a car-dominated landscape. We can still treat it somewhat like a car, finding a parking space and securing it properly. Alternatively, we can approach it as a bike and park it at a bike rack, provided there's enough room to fit and lock it securely.

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At the moment, we're in discussions with several local authorities, around ten of them, who are eager to collaborate on experimental projects with us. Currently, we have just one bike available. Selling a single bike on its own wouldn't make much business sense. Instead, we're offering these experimental partnerships. Thus, our goal is to conduct these trials alongside these local authorities, who will eventually become our valued customers.

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So, the plan is to kick off this year, starting from April and May, by conducting trials and letting residents test this bike. We'll be hitting the road, maybe not covering all of France, but certainly focusing on the Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes region where we've already got some interested local authorities, and also in Burgundy. The idea is to visit these communities with our lone bike in tow.

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For 2024, the goal is to allow people to get hands-on experience with this bike, knowing that our aim is to return the following year to these same communities that trusted us and took a chance on experimenting with this new form of mobility. In 2025, we plan to come back with four or five bikes, focusing more on the rental service I mentioned earlier.

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We started with a dream, and I'd like to end with one too. Firstly, our dream is that Bobs will be seen as a transitional bike. We're not aiming to sell Bobs everywhere and make it the new standard bike. Not at all. The bike has been around longer than the car, and it's fine just the way it is.

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So, we understand that just relying on bikes isn't enough for many needs, and our goal is to broaden their appeal, to get more folks excited about cycling and actually wanting to do it. That's the first dream I could entertain. And then, because we're entrepreneurs, we're also dreamers, I suppose.

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Sometimes, I also get to thinking that, say, bike lanes might end up disappearing. Why do I say that? Well, because to me, the infrastructure in major cities is mainly about separating motorised traffic from bikes. So, theoretically, if we manage to offer enough alternatives to cars, those cars will become a minority. And because they'll be a minority, coexisting with them will become much easier than it is today.

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The city of the future has got to be more bike-friendly, more walkable, and just plain nicer. We won't have to worry about crossing streets or getting hit; getting around will become a pleasure, I reckon. I'm deeply convinced that if people had the choice, they wouldn't opt for cars; they'd choose walking.

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I absolutely believe they'd pick cycling too. But I think if you asked any driver here, "What if we removed all the hassles associated with cars?" I bet folks would prefer walking. So, more walking, more cycling in a city—that could be something pretty great for the future, don't you think?

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For anyone who hasn't considered biking as an option yet, I'd like to encourage you to give it some thought. To take a practical approach, try mapping out your bike route, but skip Google Maps or Waze, which are tailored for cars. You might be surprised to find that the distance is shorter than you think.

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Simply taking the ring road, for example, often reveals longer distances. This applies to those living in big cities, as well as small ones. Trust me: you'd be surprised how much shorter many of the routes actually are. Next, take a virtual stroll using Google Street View. You might discover paths or trails

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that Google Cars haven't explored. It's like peeking into what lies ahead on your potential biking route. And then comes the fun part: actually getting on a bike. If you have one, time to dig it out of the garage and dust it off, or you can borrow one from a neighbour. Go for a ride along the proposed route.

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Not to please me, but to experience biking first-hand. Do it on a Saturday or Sunday without the pressure of being late, without the pressure of arriving sweaty or having a flat tire. Whatever apprehensions you might have, do it on a sunny day, on a day when you don't have to work. It's a great way to explore what your daily mobility could be like on two wheels.