

DEMOGRAPHIA



MEXICO CITY #2: EAST SIDE, WEST SIDE

SUMMARY STATISTICS		Similar To
Metropolitan (Labor Market) Population	19,100,000	New York, Mumbai, Sao Paulo
Urbanized Area* Population	17,40,000	New York, Mumbai, Sao Paulo
Urbanized Land Area: Square Miles	690	Montreal, Milan, Cincinnati
Urbanized Land Area: Square Kilometers	1,790	
Population per Square Mile	25,200	Busan, Montevideo, Singapore
Population per Square Kilometer	9,700	
Capital of Mexico		
4 th largest urbanized area in the world		
Data updated at 12 September 2004		
Urbanized Area Atlas: <i>Guía Roji Ciudad de Mexico</i> , purchase at Sanford's (154 maps)		
*Continuously built up area		

12 September 2004

Note:

*This is the 2nd "Rental Car Tour" of Mexico City.
The first is "Mexico City: Largest City Not to Be,"
available at www.rentalcartours.net*

Mexico City is the first urban area for which a second rental car tour has been published. There are good reasons for this. The first is that the original Mexico City rental car tour (*Mexico City: Largest City Not to Be*) has been the most successful of the series. In the first year of *Urban Tours by Rental Car*, volume has exceeded 125,000 downloads. And by far the most popular rental car tour has been *Mexico City*, with over 10,000 downloads, 1,000 more than *Rio de Janeiro* and *Sao Paulo* and 4,000 more than fourth ranking *Hong Kong-Shenzhen*.



Another reason is the new perspectives gained in a more recent trip. Finally, there is Mexico City's sheer size. It is one of the world's greatest metropolitan areas --- one of seven with approximately 20,000,000 residents or more, (the others being Tokyo, Seoul, New York, Jakarta, Mumbai and Sao Paulo).

One of the great drives of the world is Periferico. It is not like Peripherique in Paris, that in good traffic can be driven in little more than one-half hour. First of all,



Periferico is not all freeway, and secondly, it rings the city far further way from the core than Periferique. But, a trip around Periferico gives a good sense of the relative social standing of the neighborhoods of this great metropolis.

The favored quarter of Mexico City is definitely on the west side. Lying to the west of the great sinking Cathedral will be found the skyscrapers of Reforma, leading further to the Zona Rosa with its international hotels and night life. Even further to the west is Chapultepec Park, with the western side of Periferico

on the western fringe. Further to the west are the high income residential neighborhoods of Lomas Reforma, which stretches into the suburban state of Mexico. Eventually, this extension of Reforma leads to the peripheral business center of Santa Fe.

In a sense, Mexico City seems to be developing in a way strikingly similar to that of Sao Paulo. Centro is no longer the dominant business center. In fact, Centro never developed nearly to the extent in Mexico City that it did in Sao Paulo. While Sao Paulo has its newer business center, to the west, on Paulista Avenue, Mexico City's newer business center, to the west, is along Reforma.

But Sao Paulo is moving further west, to the linear business center of Louis Berrini, set at an angle that will make it nearly impossible to effectively served when and if the city's metro is extended there. In Mexico City, the definite trend is also further west, to Santa Fe, well beyond the reach of the metro. The construction at Santa Fe is particularly impressive. While Paulista and Reforma are linear business centers, Louis Berrini and Santa Fe are genuine edge cities. They are strongly automobile oriented, with large distances between what may be most of the urban area's tallest building. Santa Fe is anchored by a large enclosed shopping center, with Liverpool and Fabrique en France department stores. The best view of Santa Fe is from the short tunnel that is presently the edge of urban development on the road from Toluca. As one emerges from the tunnel, the immediate view is of a line of tall, new structures that looks like something out of the future. Re grettably, when I drove the route, it was late in the day and a good picture would have been nearly impossible (not to mention the fact that the camera was not easily accessible at the, shall we say, the high speed at which the car had chosen to travel).



Periferico is a full freeway for the northern section of its western portion. Here one experiences the reality of Mexico City traffic, something that makes Los Angeles or even European traffic seem comparatively uncongested. The road heads north toward Queratero. Commercial enterprises line the highway, including at least three Wal-Mart supercenters. Here, the road resembles the broad Avenida Brasil from the northern suburbs to central Rio de Janeiro. In the Estado de Mexico magasuburbs of Naucalpan (835,000) and Tlalnepantla (715,000), the roadway includes six



central or express lanes and four lanes of frontage road. Unlike the Avenida Brasil, however, there is no exclusive bus lane.

The evening I drove the route, to where the outer beltway reaches Federal Route 57-D, it took at least five times as long as would have been the case in uncongested traffic conditions. But this is not the worst. Traveling along Reforma from Zona Rosa toward Santa Fe took six times. If these two trips represent a valid sample (which of course, they probably do not), the Texas Transportation Institute would give Mexico City a travel time index of 5.50, indicative of delays six times what would be expected, on average, in Los Angeles.

The north Periferico turns off the main road, following an alignment eastbound to the south of

the Sierra de Guadalupe, which appears as a black monolith surrounded by the city lights on evening landings at Benito Juarez International Airport.

To the southwest, Periferico is a completely different matter. A new connector has been built between near where the road is met by the Viaducto Miguel Alamen. The new the Distribudor Vial San Antonio is so impressive the that latest Guia Roji street atlas devotes two pages to a detailed schematic. The high level double deck structure connects Periferico with the Avenida San Antonio and Viaducto.

But that is just the beginning. It used to be that Periferico deteriorated into a signalized arterial in the comparatively prosperous southwest. Not for long. For a few miles, beginning at the Distibudor, a full double deck roadway is under construction, which will increase the number of through lanes to 12.

About where the construction ends, the road rings just to the west of the University, famous for its muraled building, and the location of the Olympic Stadium where my USC track team friend Tommie Smith (and others) made his statement in 1968. The longest street in the metropolitan area Insurgentes, runs through the campus, continuing north to Reforma, and later becomes the principal arterial/freeway leading out of the city to the north from the central area.



On the sough side, Periferico has shopping centers, other commercial enterprises and office structures, this time on either side of a full freeway, at least as far as the Tlalpan Viaduct. Then, all of a sudden, the freeway ends, the potholes begin, and signage becomes so bad that it took at least three mid course corrections to get back onto the route.

The surroundings of Periferico are much more modest on the east side, as would be expected. As the road passes to the east of Benito Juarez International Airport, it ventures into non-urbanized territory, where it crosses the tollway from Texcoco. Where there is urbanization, it is small businesses that would offend the eyes of new urbanists, and housing that is largely self-built, as so much of the housing is in the northern and eastern suburbs of Mexico City.

Somewhat north of the airport, Periferico takes a hard turn to the left (west). Here the road is nearly as under capacity and in disrepair as on the east side. But there is also a barrier on the North Periferico. At Insurgentes, the road is interrupted. It is impossible to continue across Insurgentes without turning right and attempting to use the convenient “Retornos” that occur so frequently on Mexican highways. Regrettably, they are in short supply on Insurgentes.

But where Mexico City is going can be best seen along what might be called the outer Periferico. Starting on the west side, south of the Toluca highway and west of Santa Fe is the a new tollway that meets the Queretaro highway (57-D) at the large Perinorte Shopping Center, an enclosed mall that would be home in any American or Canadian suburb. The beginnings of major development can be seen along this tollway, well to the west of current development. At Perinorte, another road continues the outer loop toward the Pyramids at Teotihuacán, to the north of Sierra de Guadalupe, then toward Texcoco on the east, eventually meeting with the Puebla highway (190).

On the north, considerable new development is underway. The *Economist* magazine reports that one suburb (Tecamac) will add 500,000 residents in barely a decade, the result of the housing development boom. This community is at the urban fringe and its growth will expand the geographical area covered by the urbanized area. There are also extensive new housing developments along the 190-D as it leaves the Valley of Mexico, in the suburb of Netzahualcoyotl (“Neza”). These are a good signs. The North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and the more economically liberal home building policies of the Vicente Fox government are helping. As Mexico becomes more prosperous, perhaps the differences between the more affluent west and south and the less affluent north and east will become less pronounced.

By Wendell Cox

www.rentalcartours.net

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East Periferico



East Periferico



East Periferico



East Periferico



West Periferico



Reforma at West Periferico



South Periferico



North Periferico