

World cities turn their streets over to walkers and cyclists

Level 2 • Upper intermediate

1 Warmer

Which countries are these cities in?

1. Vancouver _____
2. Berlin _____
3. Minneapolis _____
4. Budapest _____
5. Adelaide _____
6. Bogotá _____

2 Key words

Fill the gaps in the sentences using these key words from the text. The paragraph numbers are given to help you.

vulnerable
pedestrian

lockdown
residential

rat-running
exhaust

congestion
lane

crammed
expand

1. _____ is when people are not allowed to leave their homes. (para 1)
2. The _____ on a vehicle is the pipe that carries gases out of the engine. (para 2)
3. A _____ is someone who is walking, especially in a town or city, instead of driving or riding. (para 2)
4. If a place is _____, it is completely filled with people or things. (para 2)
5. In a _____ street, most of the buildings are houses where people live. (para 2)
6. _____ is when people drive along small roads at busy times of the day to avoid traffic on main roads. (para 2)
7. If you _____ something, you make it larger in size and fill more space. (para 2)
8. A _____ is one of the parts that a wide road or motorway is divided into and intended for one line of traffic. (para 3)
9. _____ is when a place is crowded with people or vehicles so that it is difficult to move around. (para 4)
10. A _____ person is weak or easy to hurt physically or mentally. (para 10)

3 Find the information

Find the following information in the text as quickly as possible.

1. Which city is planning to close 74 miles of roads?
2. Which city has seen a 40% increase in the number of people using parks?
3. By what percentage has bus use fallen in Budapest during the lockdown?
4. Which city has proposed 130km of temporary bike lanes?
5. By what percentage has traffic on main roads fallen in London during the lockdown?
6. How many people are believed to die each year in the UK because of air pollution?

World cities turn their streets over to walkers and cyclists

Level 2 • Upper intermediate

World cities turn their streets over to walkers and cyclists

Laura Laker

11 April, 2020

- 1 A number of cities around the world are temporarily taking roads from cars and giving them to people on foot and on bikes. They are doing this to allow key workers to travel easily to work and to keep residents in coronavirus lockdown healthy and active while socially distancing. City parks are under increasing pressure – many are closed to prevent the spread of coronavirus, and this is limiting people's access to outdoor space. While traffic has dropped around the world, and with it nitrogen dioxide levels, there has been a worrying increase in speeding drivers endangering people walking and cycling.
- 2 Evidence suggests air pollution, including from car exhausts, significantly harms the survival chances of those with Covid-19. With pedestrians crammed onto narrow pavements and miles of empty roads, lower speed limits, closing residential streets to prevent rat-running, introducing emergency cycleways and expanding footpaths are some possible solutions.
- 3 In Philadelphia, they closed 4.7 miles of Martin Luther King Jr Drive, a wide riverside boulevard, to cars on 20 March, after leisure trails became full of residents looking for their daily exercise. Minneapolis has closed part of its riverfront parkways to cars. Denver has introduced pop-up cycling and walking lanes on 16th and 11th Avenues to help people socially distance while exercising. Oakland is planning to close 74 miles of roads – 10% of the city's total – to cars.
- 4 In Canada, Vancouver has announced that Stanley Park is now cycling and walking only to prevent congestion and stop visitors arriving by car and parking dangerously, after a 40% increase in park users. In Winnipeg, four streets are restricted to cycling and walking from 8am to 8pm daily, and in Calgary, traffic lanes are now for cyclists only.
- 5 Like many cities, Budapest has experienced a drop in bus use by almost 90%, with a 50% decrease in road traffic. City officials have now planned a cycling network on main roads. Sydney, Perth and Adelaide in Australia, Chapel Hill in the US and Calgary in Canada are some of the cities that have made pedestrian crossings automatic in some districts so that people do not have to press a button.
- 6 In Berlin, several streets have new, wide bike lanes instead of some car lanes. Bogotá has replaced 35km of traffic lanes with new emergency bike lanes as an alternative to people using public transport. In late March, 130km of temporary bike lanes were proposed in Mexico City. In the meantime, a 1.7km temporary lane, running from 8am to 7pm, has been installed on a major road.
- 7 In the UK, however, it is a very different picture. In London, where traffic has dropped by 63% on main roads, walking and cycling commissioner Will Norman says emergency bike routes on the city's main roads would not protect cyclists without complex junction improvements. This would require construction workers to travel during lockdown. However, Cycling UK's Policy Director, Roger Geffen, has suggested junctions could be redesigned while roads are quieter.
- 8 Hackney Council in east London is the first UK local authority openly planning to temporarily close some of its streets while maintaining access for emergency vehicles and residents.
- 9 Councillor Jon Burke said pedestrians stepping into the road to socially distance from one another are in danger from speeding drivers, whose number appears to be increasing during the lockdown. He says construction workers can operate while socially distancing, and it is one sector with excess capacity during the pandemic.
- 10 "We are running around making sure vulnerable people have enough food, but we aren't doing something about the 40,000 people that are dying each year because of air pollution," he says. "We haven't got weeks to deliver it. We need to deliver it now because this crisis is happening now."
- 11 Dr Rachel Aldred, of the University of Westminster, says the UK could learn from other countries. "It feels like they are treating cycling like a proper mode of transport and we are just fumbling around. There's no guidance from the government. I think if they can manage it in Bogotá, which is a very complicated city with a lot of problems, you could imagine London doing something similar," she said.

World cities turn their streets over to walkers and cyclists

Level 2 • Upper intermediate

12 Transport engineer Brian Deegan says 20mph streets, bikes for key workers and emergency cycle routes would help essential staff cycle, while extending pedestrian space using traffic cones would help those on foot. The London Cycling Campaign has also suggested

short-, medium- and long-term ideas for improving active travel in the capital during the crisis.

© Guardian News and Media 2020

First published in *The Guardian*, 11/04/20

4 Comprehension check

Are these statements true (T) or false (F) according to the text?

1. There has been an increase in the number of drivers speeding during the lockdown, and this is dangerous for walkers and cyclists.
2. Some streets in Winnipeg are only for walkers and cyclists from 8pm to 8am each day.
3. Mexico City plans to install 230km of temporary cycle lanes.
4. In Calgary, some crossings are now automatic, so pedestrians don't have to push buttons to cross streets.
5. Emergency bike lanes on main roads in London would require complex work on junctions, and this would mean construction workers travelling during lockdown.
6. Dr Rachel Aldred believes other countries could learn from the UK.

5 Find the word

Find the following words in the text.

1. an adverb *meaning only for a limited period of time* (para 1)
2. a noun meaning *a wide road in a town or city, often with trees along it* (para 3)
3. a noun meaning *something you can choose instead of something else* (para 6)
4. a noun meaning *an important official in a government, especially someone who is in charge of a particular department* (para 7)
5. an adjective meaning *more than is usual or necessary* (para 9)
6. a two-word phrasal verb meaning *do something in a way that is not skilful or effective* (para 11)
7. a noun meaning *advice about what you should do or how you should behave* (para 11)
8. an adjective meaning *something that is difficult to deal with or understand because it involves a lot of different aspects* (para 11)

World cities turn their streets over to walkers and cyclists

Level 2 • Upper intermediate

6 Two-word phrases

Match the words in the left-hand column with those in the right-hand column to make expressions from the text.

- | | |
|---------------|---------------|
| 1. socially | a. crossing |
| 2. car | b. people |
| 3. emergency | c. exhaust |
| 4. pedestrian | d. pollution |
| 5. vulnerable | e. distancing |
| 6. air | f. vehicle |

7 Expressions with prepositions

Fill the gaps in the phrases from the text using these prepositions.

to by under to on during

- _____ pressure
- restricted _____ cycling and walking
- as an alternative _____ public transport
- _____ foot
- _____ the lockdown
- arriving _____ car

8 Discussion

Discuss the statements.

- All city centres should be traffic-free.
- Air pollution is a bigger danger to public health than Covid-19.
- Every cloud has a silver lining, and some good may come of this terrible situation.