# low-impact transport



## what is it?

It's moving people and freight in ways that don't damage nature, communities and people to the extent that the current system does – from carbon and pollution emissions to covering the countryside in asphalt and concrete and making communities unhealthy, ugly and dangerous. The main culprits are the car, aviation and oil industries, and their impact can be reduced by:

**Reducing the need for transport:** it would be good to build the economy around communities, where people can walk or cycle for work, shopping or leisure, rather than have specialised zones that people have to drive between (think Milton Keynes). Other aspects of reducing need are living closer to where we work, working from home and low-impact tourism, without flights.

**Fuel efficiency:** only works to reduce overall fuel use in a stable economy, due to the Jevons Paradox – money saved is spent on other things, that may require more energy overall; plus GDP growth means that total consumption increases.

**Alternative fuels:** e.g. (renewable) electricity; wood gas; biodiesel (from waste cooking oil); wind; muscle power (walking, cycling, animals).

**Sharing vehicles:** ranges from sharing our private vehicles (car sharing or hitch-hiking) to sharing public vehicles (trains, buses etc.).

**Freight / moving goods:** narrowboats / trains use c. 6% / 9% of the energy per tonne/km compared to trucks, and 2.3% / 3% compared to air freight, and sail cargo is making a comeback for international freight. Again, localisation is key, rather than goods being transported to remote locations to be processed (often in other countries) before being transported back for sale; or exporting and importing similar amounts of the same product between countries. Exports are seen as a good thing in this crazy system, rather than each country producing for its home market. Even more locally, cycle courier co-ops are springing up everywhere, which we think is great.



*This is low-impact transport ...*

## what are the benefits?

**Environmental:** reduces roadkill; fossil fuel consumption (transport produces more carbon emissions than any other sector in Western countries); and the need for new or widened roads, which destroys habitats and makes the countryside uglier and noisier. We could allow motorway or dual carriageway lanes, or entire roads, to return to nature and become wildlife corridors. This has a precedent – the Saxons had no need for the Roman road network that allowed soldiers to move around the empire, and booty to be transported to Rome. They based their economy on local markets, and the old roads became overgrown.

**Community / individual:**
- Reduces accidents, congestion and noise (and fewer giant articulated trucks trundling through your town or village).
- Fewer front gardens paved for parking.
- Improves safety, and allows children to play in the street; 3000+ people per year die in traffic accidents in the UK (over 30,000 in the US).
- Improves health and fitness via improved air quailty and more cycling and walking; fewer cars means more space for cyclists, which means fewer cars, and so on in a virtuous spiral. Also, buses don't go very fast, and their doors don't open outwards, like car doors – so buses and bikes complement each other well.
- You can read or work on public transport.
- no car means no repayments / initial cost, MOT, service & repairs, fuel, oil, breakdown service, spares, insurance, parking fees, road tax, fines, tolls and congestion charges – you'll have more money and fewer headaches.

**Democracy:** fewer cars sold and fewer flights means less money for car, aviation and oil corporations and so less wealth concentration, which corrupts democracy.



*… and this isn't.*

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## what can I do?

If we want a sustainable transport system, the private car has to take the brunt. But then it should be cheaper and easier for four people (let alone one) to travel by public transport rather than by car – and we're a long way from that. So we have to accept that car use should be a bit more expensive / inconvenient to allow public transport, walking and cycling to become cheaper / more convenient. Starting with the assumption that you have a car, these are the things you can do, in order of effectiveness (some of you will start further down this list than others):

**Fuel efficiency:** search for driving tips to save fuel, but don't rush to buy a new fuel-efficient car: any fuel efficiency benefits are likely to be dwarfed by the extremely large amount of energy needed to manufacture it. And of course don't have a 4×4 unless you live on a farm.

**Changing your fuel:** see lowimpact.org for ideas on driving on biodiesel or wood-gas, or make your next vehicle electric / hybrid.

**Sharing your car:** car-share for one-off or regular journeys, including picking up hitchhikers.

**Phasing out your car:** with global population heading towards 10 billion, there's no real way to have cars sustainably (unless you think that only privileged people should have them). In a world without cars, we'd have to reorganise ourselves so that most of what we need to do is within walking and cycling distance. Bearing in mind the above benefits, do you think that a carless world would be better or worse than this one? If you think it would be better, you can use your car less, or bin it altogether by (in order of difficulty):

- Using teleconferencing / video meetings – they're getting easier and more popular (meet.coop is a co-operative option);
- Using public transport more;
- Walking and cycling; Including with your kids to school rather than the car run, or join a walking bus group (or organise one if there isn't one);
- Car sharing in someone else's car;
- Working from home;
- Moving closer to work / working closer to home;
- Having a go at hitchhiking.

Hire a car or get taxis (we don't recommend Über – but there are co-operative options now – just search for coop taxis and the name of your town),

when you need to. But people are wary of giving up their car, especially in rural areas, when public transport can be unreliable, so…

**Campaigning:** help campaign for more sustainable transport generally – see the Campaign for Better Transport or Sustrans – e.g. subsidising public transport, stopping bus and train route closures, cycle lanes, coach lanes on motorways, pedestrianisation etc.

**Not flying:** reduce your air miles, or better still, give up flying altogether. Again, with a population of 10 billion, everyone flying 'only' once a year would be suicidal; but if only a small percentage of the world are able to do it, that's really elitist. We have to stop burning fossil fuels, so a sustainable society can't really contain an aviation industry.
Here's a suggestion – See the world when you're young – overland. You could even do it by going WWOOFing, and you can hitchhike oceans too. After that you can take flightless holidays and help build a thriving, safe, fun, unique, interesting and beautiful community where you live. Let's make all the places we live desirable places to be.

**Freight:** buy local, downshift and/or find goods brought from overseas via sailing boats.

## resources

- see lowimpact.org/low-impact-transport for more info, links and books, including:
- Grant & Semlyen, *Cutting Your Car Use*
- Sian Berry, *50 Ways to Greener Travel*
- Mark Smith, *the Man in Seat 61*
- bettertransport.org.uk – campaign group
- carfree.com – removing cars from cities
- sustrans.org.uk – campaigning, cycle paths



*Greenhouse gas emissions from aviation are set to rise from 7% now to 25% by 2050; but aviation fuel is tax-exempt.*