

Before you read

1. Have you ever suffered from traffic jam or air pollution? Tell your story.
2. What are the other types of pollution that you have known or experienced?

(Suggested answers: land pollution, water pollution, noise pollution, light pollution, etc.)

A. Read the text and answer the questions:

1. Why is crossing the streets almost an adventure in Ho Chi Minh city?
2. What has the local government done to deal with the traffic problems?
3. What does Akira Hosomi mean saying that ‘A metro can be provided, but if people keep using private vehicles, it could be difficult...’?

Motorbikes and Air pollution in Ho Chi Minh City

By Le Vo and Dieu-Chi Nguyen

A. Like many other countries in Asia, Vietnam is growing faster than it can handle. The majority of people are driving private vehicles which results in a significant air pollution problem in the cities. The Vietnamese government aims to implement a plan to alleviate traffic and pollution problems. In Ho Chi Minh city, the second biggest city of Vietnam, the pollution issue has become a major concern. Crossing the streets is almost an adventure in Ho Chi Minh city. It is the first thing tourists notice when they arrive here. Most streets in the city are always busy with many motorbikes. There are approximately 4.7 million motorbikes registered in the city and each year there are about 350.000 more motorbikes registered. No matter what time of the day, the traffic never seems to subside. The city dwellers struggle to find spaces in the city where they can walk or exercise without having to breathe the poor quality of its polluted air.

B. The city’s local government has tried some new ideas to alleviate traffic problems such as building more places where people can walk and encouraging people to buy electric vehicles. There are plans for the drivers of polluting vehicles to pay a fee to drive downtown in Ho Chi Minh City. Proposals for working and school hours to be staggered are also being considered. The idea is that if people commute at different points of time, then rush hour will not result in severe congestion and severe pollution. In addition, a metro line is under construction in Ho Chi Minh City with support from Japan. ‘A metro can be provided, but if people keep using private vehicles, it could be difficult. We need a kind of control of private vehicles to encourage people to use more public transport’, Akira Hosomi, Japan International Consultant for Transportation says. It is hoped that with less pollution, people will be more likely to ride bicycles or walk.

C. Presenting her opinion on this issue, Thu, a student from Ho Chi Minh transport university, said that she used to use her bicycle a lot for exercise and for getting to school during the first year after arriving in Ho Chi Minh City to study. However, she started to suffer from respiratory problems because of the level of air pollution in the city. She decided to buy a motorbike to use for transportation instead to avoid long periods of exposure to the pollution. Tung, a student from the University of Economics Ho Chi Minh city said that he and his friends suffer from the pollution caused by traffic, especially at rush hours when people go to work or go home after work. These students believe that using public transport rather than private vehicles could help to reduce the number of motorbikes in the city. Public transport, such as buses, can be more fuel efficient vehicles and help to reduce air pollution. However, students in general have not been very keen to change their behaviour and adopt buses as their means of transport because of the quality and inconvenience of this service.

D. Not only students but many other people in this city have experienced its daily traffic congestion that contributes hugely to the very poor air quality in the city. Such daily traffic congestion has had even worse consequences – the fatal accidents that were reported in <https://vietnamnet.vn> listing tragic cases in Ho Chi Minh city and other areas. In October 2012, on Nguyễn Cửu Phú street in Bình Chánh district, Mr. Hà Quốc Tuấn (born in 1964 in Hải Dương province) –was startled by the ear-splitting honk of a lorry behind him. He lost control of his motorbike which rushed into a bog and flipped horizontally. A car then ran over the man, and he died immediately. At the police station, the lorry driver confessed that he had honked out of his impatience with the traffic jam, without being aware of the startling volume.

E. Another case is that of Ms. Phan Thị Thanh, a 44-year-old woman who was startled by the steam whistle of a dump truck behind, lost control of her bike and fell. Tragically the truck then ran over her. The accident happened at Vũng Tàu crossroad, in November 2014. On April 20, 2017, this type of tragedy was repeated at Tân Vạn road junction – and the precious life of a 40-year-old woman was taken away. The most pitiful traffic accident could be that of two female pupils of Sao Vàng Elementary School in Thanh Hóa province. On April 8, 2013, they were riding their bicycles home after school time on the crowded road when a car driver pressed his horn loudly behind them. The 10-year-old girls were nervous and hurriedly pulled over. They stumbled over a pile of sand on a construction site on the side of the street. Both fell, and the lorry ran over them.

F. It has been difficult for the Vietnamese government to solve its traffic problems. Lots of questions and suggestions have been raised. Is it safer for people especially the elderly and

children to use public transport than private vehicles? Should the young and healthy men and women limit their use of private vehicles to lessen traffic jams and their harmful effects? There are possible solutions, but whether they are effective or not and what each citizen should do to help make their environment cleaner and the air fresher are still big issues.

B. Decide whether the following sentences are true (T) or false (F).

1. Private vehicles are less used than public ones in HCM City.
2. It is easy for people there to find pure spaces for walking and exercising.
3. One of the proposals to lessen traffic jams and pollution is that people commute to work or schools at different points of time.
4. Students, in general, support and practice using public transport such as buses.
5. City-dwellers often suffer from ear-splitting noise coming from whistles or horns of the cars, trucks, and lorries in the streets.
6. Severe congestion has caused drivers' impatience which partly leads to tragically fatal accidents.
7. There have been not many effective solutions to alleviate problems of traffic and pollution in big cities of Vietnam.

Answers:

1.F. 2. F 3. T 4. F 5. T 6. T. 7. T

C. Find words/phrases in the passage which mean:

1. to make something bad (such as pain or problems) _____
2. the introduction of harmful materials into the environment (paragraph A) _____
3. a situation in which a place is too blocked or crowded, causing difficulties (paragraph B) _____
4. related to breathing (paragraph C) _____
5. causing death (paragraph D) _____
6. extremely loud (paragraph D) _____
7. in a way that is parallel to the ground or to the bottom or top edge of something (paragraph D) _____
8. to step awkwardly while walking or running and fall (paragraph E) _____
9. in a way that is very sad, and ofeten involving death and suffering (paragraph E) _____

Answers:

1. to alleviate 2. pollution 3. congestion 4. respiratory
5. fatal 6. ear-splitting 7. horizontally 8. to stumble 9. tragically

D. Understanding expressions

Choose the best explanation for each phrase from the article.

1. Crossing the streets is almost an adventure in Ho Chi Minh city (paragraph A)
 - a. Crossing the streets in Ho Chi Minh city is interesting
 - b. Crossing the streets in Ho Chi Minh city is difficult
2., the traffic never seems to subside (paragraph A)
 - a. the traffic is always heavy
 - b. the traffic is quite light
3.people will be more likely to ride bicycles or walk (paragraph B)
 - a. people will like to ride bicycles or walk
 - b. people will probably ride bicycles or walk more.

1. b, 2.a, 3. b

E. Linking words

Use appropriate linking words for the following sentences

1. The idea is that if people commute at different points of time, _____ rush hour will not result in severe congestion.
2. Public transport, _____ buses, can be more fuel efficient vehicles and help to reduce air pollution.
3. Nguyen used to use her bicycle a lot for exercise and for getting to school during her first year in Ho Chi Minh City. _____, she started to suffer from respiratory problems because of the level of air pollution in the city.

1. then, 2. such as, 3. however

F. Discussion

Who do you think should be blamed for the death of the two little pupils: their parents for not picking them up from and to school, the lorry driver for pressing his horn irresponsibly, or the construction site for occupying the street side? Why/Why not?

G. Into Action

As a highly educated citizen, what have you done to help solve the conundrums of pollution and traffic congestion of HCMC?

Write about 120 words for your answer. Include practical examples to support your point.