
BBC LEARNING ENGLISH

6 Minute English

Pedestrianisation – is it good for cities and towns?

NB: This is not a word-for-word transcript

Rob

Hello, I'm Rob, and welcome to 6 Minute English, where today we're chatting about a pedestrian topic and six items of related vocabulary.

Neil

Hello, I'm Neil. A **pedestrian** is someone who walks around rather than travelling by car or bus. But in Rob's sentence he used the adjective, and in this context it means dull or uninteresting!

Rob

And of course I was making a pun, Neil. Because of course the show is going to be extremely interesting! It's about safety on the streets – and whether pedestrianisation is a good thing or not.

Neil

Pedestrianisation means changing a street into an area that can only be used by pedestrians.

Rob

Well, it sounds like a good idea – no traffic, less noise and air pollution. And no chance of getting knocked down by a car or a bus!

Neil

There are plans to pedestrianise Oxford Street, which is one of the busiest shopping streets in London.

Rob

That's right. The Mayor of London wants to **tackle** – or make an effort to deal with – air pollution in this very busy spot – where the amount of traffic is definitely a problem! In fact, can you tell me, Neil, what's the average speed of a bus travelling along Oxford Street? Is it:

- a) 4.6 miles per hour,
- b) 14.6 miles per hour or

c) 46 miles per hour?

Neil

And I think it's 14.6 miles per hour – a) sounds too slow and c) sounds too fast!

Rob

OK, we'll find out the answer later on. The problem is – the traffic doesn't just disappear. You ban it from one area – and it gets rerouted somewhere else.

Neil

Ban means to say officially that something can't be done. And **reroute** means to change the direction you're travelling in, in order to reach a particular destination. That's true, Rob. It must be a big headache for city planners.

Rob

Well, let's listen now to Joe Urvin, Chief Executive of Living Streets. He's going to talk some more about why traffic is causing problems in our towns and cities.

INSERT

Joe Urvin, Chief Executive of Living Streets

In 1970 we had 20 million cars in this country. Now we have over 30 million cars in such a short period. So that creates three big problems. One is space – because we've still got the same street structures in our towns and cities, causing congestion. It causes pollution, which people are concerned about more and more. And actually, it's kind of engineering walking out of our lives. So we're actually not getting enough exercise, which is a cause of a health crisis. Smart cities are looking at pedestrianisation – in Glasgow, in Birmingham, in London for example, Manchester – as a way of not only making their places, cities better and more attractive, actually, building their local economy.

Neil

So Neil Urvin identifies three problems – the first is that our city streets have stayed the same while the number of cars on the roads has increased dramatically.

Rob

That's right – and this has led to congestion on our roads. **Congestion** means too much traffic, making it hard to move.

Neil

The second problem is pollution – which we mentioned earlier.

Rob

Pollution is damage to the environment caused by releasing waste substances such as carbon dioxide into the air.

Neil

And the third problem is that by travelling around on buses or in our cars we aren't getting enough exercise. And we all know that's a bad thing! Would pedestrianisation engineer walking back into our lives do you think?

Rob

I'm not sure, Neil. It would be great if we could go shopping or walk to work without breathing in fumes or worrying about getting knocked down by a car. But banning all motorised traffic from town centres might make life difficult for people to get around.

Neil

Well, I'm not a town planner – and I don't have the answers. But I would like to know if I got the answer right to the question you asked me earlier!

Rob

OK, well I asked you: What's the average speed of a bus travelling along Oxford Street? Is it... a) 4.6mph, b) 14.6mph or c) 46mph?

Neil

And I said 14.6mph.

Rob

And that's not slow enough, Neil, I'm afraid. The answer is actually 4.6mph. And we pedestrians walk at an average speed of 3.1mph apparently!

Neil

Good to know. OK – shall we go over the words we learned today, Rob?

Rob

Sure – the first one is 'pedestrian' – a person who is walking, usually in an area where there's traffic. 'Sorry – you can't ride your bike here. This path is for pedestrians only.'

Neil

The adjective – 'This book is full of very pedestrian ideas. I wouldn't read it if I were you.'

Rob

I've crossed it off my list, Neil. Thank you. OK – number two is 'to tackle' something, which means to make an effort to deal with a difficult problem. For example, 'The government isn't really tackling the problem of air pollution. It needs to do much more.'

Neil

Very true. OK, 'ban' means to officially say that something can't be done. 'The UK government will ban the sale of diesel and petrol cars from 2040.'

Rob

And number four is 'reroute' which means to change the direction you're travelling in.

Neil

'The council has rerouted all buses to avoid the town centre.'

Rob

'Congestion' is number five – too much traffic, making it difficult to move.

Neil

'Road congestion always gets better in the summer when a lot of car drivers are on holiday.'

Rob

That's true, isn't it? London always seems emptier in July and August.

Neil

Except for all the tourists walking around – congesting the streets!

Rob

Very funny! And finally, number six is 'pollution' – which is damage to the environment caused by releasing waste substances such as carbon dioxide into the air, or plastic into the sea.

Neil

'You can help reduce air pollution by walking to work every day instead of driving.'

Rob

Are you talking to me, Neil? I always walk to work!

Neil

I know you do, Rob – you're an example to us all!

Rob

OK, that's all we have time for today.

Neil

But please don't forget to visit us via our Twitter, Facebook and YouTube pages! Goodbye!

Rob

Bye bye!