



Left: Commuter traffic in Bristol. Imagine the scene if all these drivers were on bikes – or even on a bus
Below: It's not just a UK problem. This is Trieste in Italy, whose streets are rammed with cars and mopeds

The noise, fumes, inconvenience and intimidation caused by too much traffic are only conspicuous when they're absent. They've become part of the urban background – except in towns and cities that have decided to do things differently

This summer I was in Ljubljana, the capital of Slovenia. It's an amazing city. I was there on an Interrailing trip through Europe with my family. A huge area of the old city is pedestrianised, and it was being enjoyed by thousands of people taking in the sights, buying from market stalls and food vendors, and relaxing in on-street café seating. It felt safe and welcoming enough to allow our teenage boys to go off exploring for themselves and sample the local patisserie.

We waved farewell to the traffic-free spaces of Ljubljana and jumped on another train headed for Trieste on Italy's Adriatic coast, arriving on a hot and sticky afternoon. Trieste is only 60 miles from Ljubljana. It felt a world away, with noisy, bustling streets, narrow pavements, traffic fumes, and cars and mopeds speeding by or clogging the streets. The place felt overwhelmed by vehicles.

I was aware that I was experiencing each city and town we visited as a first-time tourist, seeing only a snapshot of life and forming first impressions. For someone visiting my city of Glasgow for the first time, negotiating the traffic weaving its way through the city centre may also leave a bad taste in the mouth – literally – even though I'm used to it.

The increase in traffic is a good



example of the slow creep of change over decades that we don't realise, get accustomed to and often put up with in our day-to-day lives – even if we are stuck in a traffic jam. In reality, though, the change has been huge since the middle of the last century, with the number of motor vehicles in the UK quadrupling to more than 33 million and the number of miles driven yearly in Great Britain increasing tenfold.

PEDAL FOR THE PLANET

As a society we have to do something to halt this growth in traffic and car use, not least for the health of our planet. Transport is the largest contributor of climate emissions of any sector of the UK's economy, and cars are the biggest source from transport. But the government ►

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