



Environmental Case Study

Traveling Light

Every day, all over western Europe, millions of people travel to work or school, go shopping, or visit friends. Some people walk to where they are going. Others bike. Some hop on a bus, streetcar, or train. What many of these people will *not* do is get into a car and drive.

Make no mistake—Europeans do use cars, but they depend on them much less than Americans do. Public transit is used for 10 to 20 percent of all urban trips in Europe, compared to just 2 percent in the United States.

Sustainable Traditions Western Europe has a strong history of **sustainable transportation**—transportation that does not harm the environment for future generations. Cars are not sustainable. They take a big toll on the environment, consuming fossil fuels and polluting the air with greenhouse gases. In addition, laying pavement for roads destroys **habitats**—the ecosystems in which animals live. Loss of habitat is a major cause of species extinction.

Public transit is better for the environment because buses, streetcars, and trains can move more people using less energy and fewer roads. Bicycles and pedestrians are even more gentle on the earth. They do not add to the roar of traffic, pollute the air, or clog roads.

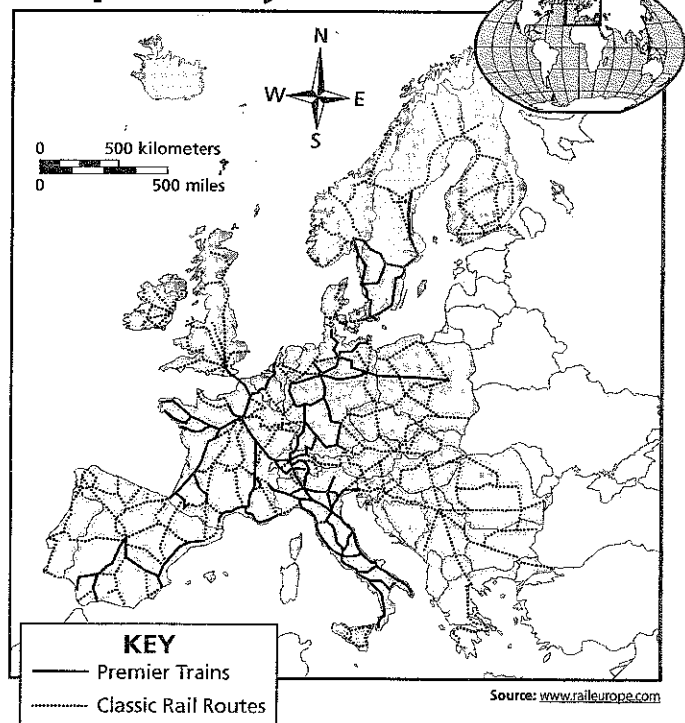
Old Cities, New Cars It is not unusual for Europeans to bike to work or take a bus to go shopping. To understand this tradition, it helps to know how Europe developed.

Many western European cities were settled in medieval times. They are filled with ancient, narrow streets that meander beside centuries-old buildings. These streets were designed for animals or people moving on foot. They were not designed for cars.

After the car was introduced, officials in many western European cities tried to discourage people from driving cars. They wanted to preserve their historic cities, so they restricted vehicles and made parking expensive.

In addition, western European governments tended to treat early automobiles as luxuries, and they placed high taxes on them. In the middle of the twentieth century, Europeans were struggling from the

Europe's Rail System



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destructive aftermath of two world wars. Most Europeans could not afford to pay the high taxes on cars.

At the same time, those governments invested in buses, streetcars, and trains. Officials worked hard to make transit quick, comfortable, easy to use, and reliable. Government policies encouraged people to live in cities or in nearby suburbs. Transit works best when people live close together.

Automobiles Emerge Today in Europe, car use is on the rise. More people can afford to own and use cars than ever before. In the last three decades, car ownership among western Europeans more than tripled. As a result, cities in western Europe today face increased traffic and congestion.

Solutions Commuters are encouraged to choose transportation that is friendly to the environment. European cities often use a "transit-first" policy. This means that public transit takes priority over cars. Buses and streetcars get to travel in their own lanes, can move to the front of the line ahead of other vehicles, and can selectively switch a stop light from red to green.

When new neighborhoods and business districts are built, wide sidewalks are constructed to invite pedestrians. Streets are kept narrow, so traffic moves slowly.

Government officials also encourage cities and towns to grow in ways that make trips shorter. Shops are built close to homes, for instance. That way, people can walk, bike, or use transit to reach their destination.

It's a Fact

1. Bicycle use is high in the Netherlands and Denmark. The average person in these countries pedals more than 500 miles (800 km) every year.
2. When people began migrating to Europe more than 35,000 years ago, woodlands covered much of the region. Today Europe is densely populated, with most Europeans living in cities. Most of the original woods have been converted to farmland. Half of the native European mammals and one-third of the reptiles, birds, and fish are endangered.

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EU and the Environment

Many Europeans recognize that protecting the environment is not a job for individual governments acting alone. In 1993 the European Union (EU) was formed. It is an international organization consisting of 25 countries in eastern and western Europe. One of the goals of the EU has been ensuring that the environment is clean and healthy for people.

The EU passes laws that protect the environment, and it makes sure that member countries follow its laws. It helps clean up pollution, funds research on environmental problems, and works to develop innovative ways to make the environment cleaner.

✓ Review the Facts

Directions: Read the information about transportation in Europe. Then answer the following questions.

1. Identifying What are two ways that automobiles damage the environment?

A. _____

B. _____

2. Listing List three advantages to the environment of biking and walking.

A. _____

B. _____

C. _____

3. Explaining Why do streets in European cities discourage the use of cars?

4. Determining Cause and Effect How is new development designed to encourage sustainable transportation?

5. Explaining How are buses given priority over cars in traffic?

6. Specifying What are two ways the European Union is working to protect the environment?

A. _____

B. _____