

# Life in a Megacity

## Challenges of Urban Living

How the world's biggest cities are dealing with overcrowding, housing, and modern life

■ B1 Reading ■ 30 min ■ World Around Us

<b>Level</b>	B1 (Intermediate)
<b>Skill</b>	Reading
<b>Topic</b>	World Around Us
<b>Duration</b>	30 minutes
<b>Age Group</b>	Teens & Adults

### Learning Objectives

- ◆ Read and understand a text about challenges in the world's megacities
- ◆ Learn 15 key vocabulary items related to urban life and infrastructure
- ◆ Identify problems and solutions in modern city planning
- ◆ Discuss personal experiences and opinions about city life
- ◆ Write a creative paragraph about an ideal city

## 1 Before You Read — City Life

Think about the city or town you live in and discuss:

1. What do you like most and least about living in your city?
2. What is the biggest problem your city faces right now?
3. Would you prefer to live in a small town or a megacity? Why?

## 2 Reading: The Megacity Challenge

### The Megacity Challenge: Living Among Millions

In 1950, only two cities in the world — New York and Tokyo — had populations exceeding ten million people. Today, there are over thirty such cities, and by 2030, the United Nations predicts there will be more than forty. These enormous urban areas, known as **megacities**, are home to hundreds of millions of people, and their numbers are growing rapidly. For the first time in human history, more people live in cities than in rural areas, and this shift is creating both extraordinary opportunities and enormous challenges.

The **urbanisation** trend is driven by a simple reality: cities offer jobs, education, healthcare, and entertainment that rural areas often cannot match. Young people flock to cities in search of better opportunities, and many find them. But the rapid growth of megacities has also created serious problems that affect the daily lives of millions of **residents**.

### The Housing Crisis

Perhaps the most pressing issue is **affordable** housing. In cities like London, Hong Kong, and San Francisco, property prices have risen so dramatically that ordinary workers can no longer afford to buy — or even rent — a home near their workplace. Many people spend more than half their monthly salary on rent alone, leaving little for food, transport, or savings. In some cities, this has led to the growth of **informal settlements** — areas where people build their own houses from whatever materials they can find, often without access to clean water or electricity.

Governments and urban planners are experimenting with solutions. Some cities are building **high-density** apartment blocks to fit more people into less space. Others are encouraging people to move to smaller surrounding towns by improving transport links. In Vienna, the city government builds and manages thousands of social housing units, keeping rents affordable for all income levels — a model that many other cities are now studying.

## Transport and Congestion

Getting around a megacity is another daily struggle. Traffic **congestion** in cities like Jakarta, Cairo, and Mumbai means that a journey of ten kilometres can take over two hours during peak times. The average commuter in a major city spends between one and three hours travelling to and from work every single day — time that could be spent with family, exercising, or resting.

Public **transport** systems are often overcrowded and underfunded. Tokyo's metro system, one of the most efficient in the world, still employs professional "pushers" to squeeze passengers into trains during rush hour. Many cities are investing heavily in new **infrastructure** — metro lines, bus rapid transit systems, and cycling networks — to reduce car dependency and improve air quality. Cities like Copenhagen and Amsterdam have shown that investing in cycling infrastructure can dramatically reduce both congestion and carbon emissions.

## Noise, Stress, and Loneliness

Living in a megacity can also take a serious toll on mental health. Constant noise from traffic, construction, and crowds increases stress levels and disrupts sleep. The fast pace of urban life leaves people feeling **overwhelmed** and exhausted. Paradoxically, despite being surrounded by millions of people, many city dwellers report feeling profoundly **lonely**. The **anonymity** of big city life — where you can live next door to someone for years without learning their name — can create a deep sense of disconnection.

Some cities are fighting back against urban loneliness. Seoul has introduced "social dining" programs where strangers can sign up to share a meal together. Barcelona has redesigned entire **neighbourhoods** around the concept of "superblocks" — car-free zones where residents can walk, sit, play, and talk to their neighbours. These initiatives recognise that a truly liveable city is not just about buildings and roads — it is about creating spaces where people can connect.

## The Green City Revolution

Perhaps the most exciting development in urban planning is the growing focus on **sustainability**. Singapore has earned the nickname "City in a Garden" by integrating parks, rooftop gardens, and vertical forests into its dense urban landscape. Medellín in Colombia transformed some of its most dangerous neighbourhoods by building parks, libraries, and cable car systems that connected isolated hillside communities to the city centre.

The challenges facing megacities are enormous, but so is the creativity being applied to solve them. As more and more of us become city dwellers, the way we design, build, and manage our cities will determine not just our quality of life, but the future of our planet.

## 3 Key Vocabulary

Word / Phrase	Definition	Example Sentence
<b>megacity</b>	a very large city with more than ten million people	Tokyo is the world's largest megacity with over 37 million people.
<b>urbanisation</b>	the process of people moving from rural areas to cities	Urbanisation is happening faster in Africa and Asia than anywhere else.
<b>residents</b>	people who live in a particular place	The city's residents are demanding better public transport.
<b>affordable</b>	cheap enough for ordinary people to pay for	Finding affordable housing in London is extremely difficult.
<b>informal settlements</b>	areas where people build houses without official permission	Millions of people live in informal settlements without clean water.
<b>high-density</b>	having a large number of people or buildings in one area	High-density housing helps fit more people into limited urban space.

Word / Phrase	Definition	Example Sentence
<b>congestion</b>	too much traffic, making movement slow and difficult	Traffic congestion costs cities billions of euros every year.
<b>transport</b>	a system for carrying people from one place to another	Good public transport reduces the need for private cars.
<b>infrastructure</b>	the basic physical systems of a city (roads, bridges, water)	The city is investing heavily in new transport infrastructure.
<b>overwhelmed</b>	feeling unable to cope because there is too much to deal with	Many city residents feel overwhelmed by the fast pace of urban life.
<b>lonely</b>	feeling sad because you have no company or close connections	Despite living among millions, many city dwellers feel lonely.
<b>anonymity</b>	the state of being unknown or unrecognised by others	The anonymity of big cities can make people feel disconnected.
<b>neighbourhood</b>	a district or area within a city where people live	Barcelona redesigned entire neighbourhoods into car-free zones.
<b>sustainability</b>	the practice of using resources without harming the environment	Singapore is a world leader in urban sustainability.
<b>commuter</b>	a person who travels regularly between home and work	The average commuter spends up to three hours travelling each day.

## 4 Useful Collocations

urban planning · public transport · traffic congestion · rush hour · housing crisis · cost of living · population growth · air quality · carbon emissions · quality of life · city centre · green spaces · car-free zone · daily commute · noise pollution · sustainable development

## 5 Reading Comprehension

**1. How many megacities existed in 1950?**

a) None  
**b) Two ✓**  
 c) Ten  
 d) Twenty

**2. What is the most pressing problem in many megacities?**

- a) Lack of entertainment
- b) Affordable housing ✓**
- c) Too many parks
- d) Language barriers

**3. What does Tokyo's metro system use to manage overcrowding?**

- a) Ticket price increases
- b) Professional pushers to squeeze passengers in ✓**
- c) Separate trains for tourists
- d) Automatic crowd-control robots

**4. Why do many people in megacities feel lonely?**

- a) Because there are no social events
- b) Because the anonymity of big city life creates disconnection ✓**
- c) Because they do not speak the local language
- d) Because they work too many hours to have any friends

**5. What is a 'superblock' in Barcelona?**

- a) A very tall apartment building
- b) A car-free zone designed for community interaction ✓**
- c) A new type of shopping centre
- d) A special area for tourists only

**6. Why has Singapore been called 'City in a Garden'?**

- a) Because it has banned all construction
- b) Because it integrates parks and green spaces into its urban design ✓**
- c) Because it is surrounded by forests
- d) Because most people grow their own food

**6 Vocabulary Exercise — Fill in the Blanks**

Complete the sentences with the correct word from the box:

congestion · infrastructure · affordable · urbanisation · overwhelmed · sustainability ·  
commuter · anonymity

1. Traffic \_\_\_\_\_ in Jakarta means a 10km journey can take over two hours.

2. The city is building new \_\_\_\_\_ including metro lines and cycling networks.
3. Finding \_\_\_\_\_ housing near the city centre is almost impossible.
4. \_\_\_\_\_ is happening fastest in Africa and Asia, where millions move to cities each year.
5. Many residents feel \_\_\_\_\_ by the noise, crowds, and fast pace of urban life.
6. Singapore is a global leader in urban \_\_\_\_\_, with parks and gardens everywhere.
7. The average \_\_\_\_\_ in a megacity spends up to three hours travelling each day.
8. The \_\_\_\_\_ of big city life means you can live next to someone for years without knowing them.

## 7 Answer Key

### ■ Vocabulary Exercise Answers

1. congestion
2. infrastructure
3. affordable
4. Urbanisation
5. overwhelmed
6. sustainability
7. commuter
8. anonymity

## 8 Speaking & Writing Tasks

### ■ ■ Speaking Task: Discussion

Discuss these questions with a partner or your teacher:

- What are the biggest advantages and disadvantages of living in a large city?
- If you could redesign your city, what would you change first?
- Do you think cities should ban cars from their centres? Why or why not?
- Would you like to live in a megacity like Tokyo or New York? Why or why not?

### ■ Useful Phrases for Describing Places

- **One of the biggest problems in my city is** the lack of affordable housing.
- **What I like most about living here is** the variety of restaurants and cultural events.
- **Compared to** smaller towns, big cities offer more job opportunities but less space.
- **If I could change one thing,** I would improve the public transport system.
- **The main advantage / disadvantage of** city life is that...

### Writing Task: My Ideal City

Write a paragraph (120–160 words) about this topic:

**"Describe your ideal city. What would it look like? How would people travel? What would make it a great place to live?"**

Use vocabulary from this lesson. Think about housing, transport, green spaces, and community. Include at least one idea from the text.