Transportation Vocabulary

Topic vocabulary for the IELTS exam

*Important

• Do not try and learn this list of vocabulary.
• Identify the vocabulary you find useful for answering practise questions about transportation.
• Record these in your vocabulary notebook and practise using them regularly.

Set 1: Key definitions

**vehicle** – a machine, usually with wheels and an engine, used for taking people or goods from one place to another, especially on roads
- Three vehicles were involved in the accidents near my house.

**to transport** – take or carry people or goods from one place to another using a vehicle
- Their furniture was transported to their new house in a large lorry.

**transportation** – a vehicle or system of vehicles, such as buses, trains, etc. for getting from one place to another
- What form of transportation are you going to use to get to the airport?

**a means / form of transportation** – any vehicle that you can travel in or on or use to carry goods in
- Bicycles are a cheap means of transportation and also keep you fit.

**transport system** – a facility consisting of the means and equipment necessary for the movement of passengers or goods
- The transport system in my country needs a lot of improvement.

**public transport** – a system of vehicles such as buses and trains that operate at regular times on fixed routes, charge set fares and are used by the public
- It's much cheaper to use public transport in the city than drive a car.

**private transport** – means of transport that are not available for use by the general public such as your own car
- Most people prefer to use private transport to public transport as it makes them more independent.

**traffic** – the vehicles, pedestrians, ships, or planes moving along a route
- There was a lot of traffic on the roads this morning.

**infrastructure** – the basic systems and services, such as transportation and power supplies, that a country or organization uses in order to work effectively
- The earthquake caused serious damage to the area's transport infrastructure.

**a journey** – the act of travelling from one place to another, especially in a vehicle
- The train journey took them through beautiful countryside.
Set 2: Means of transport

car  motorbike / motorcycle  van
bus  scooter  train
coach  boat  tube / metro train
minibus  ship  airplane / plane
taxi / cab  ferry  helicopter
tram / streetcar / trolley  barge  space rocket / spacecraft
bicycle / bike  lorry / truck

Set 3: Roads & traffic
road – a long, hard surface built for vehicles to travel along
- Shakira waved to her mum as the bus drove off down the road.
lane – a division of a road marked off with painted lines and intended to separate single lines of traffic; a narrow rural road
- I find it quite scary driving in the fast lane of the motorway.
cycle lane – part of a road marked off with painted lines, for use by cyclists
- There have been far fewer cyclists killed on the roads since the government introduced cycle lanes in our towns and cities.
bus lane – part of a road marked off with painted lines, for use by buses
- Car drivers are not allowed to use the bus lanes.
bypass / ring road / beltway – a road which circles a town or city and enables you to go faster from one point to another.
- I usually take the ring road to visit my brother as the roads through town are always congested.
freeway / highway / expressway – a public road, often with multiple lanes, especially an important road that joins cities or towns together
- The traffic in the city centre moved slowly but once Raul hit the freeway there was less traffic and he was able to drive much faster.
motorway (UK) – a road with three lanes going each way
- Motorways are vitally important for the transportation of goods around the UK.
overpass – a bridge that carries one road over another road
- No-one believed that the new overpass would really ease traffic congestion but it has made a noticeable difference.
junction – where two roads meet
- Aksel only just missed the car that pulled out in front of him at the junction.
roundabout – a road junction at which traffic moves in one direction around a central island to reach one of the roads converging on it
- The traffic flowed much better when they replaced the traffic lights with a roundabout.
**traffic light** – a set of automatically operated red, amber and green lights for controlling traffic at road junctions and pedestrian crossings
- I have to drive through ten sets of **traffic lights** on the way to work and if I’m late, you can be sure they’ll all stop on red.

**traffic jam** – a line of vehicles moving very slowly or not at all
- The **traffic jam** was caused by roadworks near the shopping centre.

**Collocations:**
- to be caught in traffic / a traffic jam
  - Mayurree missed her train after getting **caught in traffic** on the way to the station.
- to get stuck in traffic / a traffic jam
  - I nearly always **get stuck in a traffic jam** on my way to work.

**heavy traffic** – a lot of vehicles on the road
- A sunny weekend is forecast so there will be **heavy traffic** on the roads as people head to the coast.

**to be congested** – when a road or place is so crowded with traffic or people as to hinder or prevent freedom of movement
- The roads are particularly **congested** during the rush hour.

**congestion** – the state of being congested
- Congestion is a serious problem in most cities across the world.

**queue** – a line of people or vehicles waiting for something
- There were so many people heading into town for the sales that I had to **queue** for the car park.

**roadworks** – building or repair work on a road
- The **roadworks** were causing long delays for people travelling to work.

**diversion** – a different route used because a road is closed
- The accident closed the road and traffic had to take a two-mile **diversion** to get into town.

**to be held up** – to be stopped and delayed because of work on the road, diversions or accidents
- Soo-min apologised for being late and explained that she’d **been held up** in traffic.

**bottleneck** – a place where a road becomes narrow or a place where there is often a lot of traffic, causing the traffic to slow down or stop
- The roadworks were causing a serious **bottleneck** on the main road into town.

**speed limit** – the fastest rate at which you are allowed to drive in a particular area
If you are caught exceeding the **speed limit**, you will have to pay a fine.

**speed camera** – camera set up by a road to photograph cars exceeding the speed limit
- Most drivers slow down when they are approaching a **speed camera**.

**road accident / car crash** – a bad incident involving vehicles that happens unexpectedly and unintentionally, typically resulting in damage or injury
- Two people were taken to hospital following the **car crash** on the freeway.

**Set 4: Travel**

**to commute** – travel some distance between home and work on a regular basis
- When Talin got her new job, she moved closer to the city so that she wouldn’t have to **commute** too far each day.
to commute – travel some distance between one’s home and place of work on a regular basis
- When Talin got her new job, she moved closer to the city so that she wouldn’t have to commute too far each day.
to travel by – to use a particular mode of transport, e.g. bus, car, train, bike, etc, to get from one place to another
- To get to work, I travel by bus.
to take – to use a particular mode of public transport, e.g. bus, train, taxi, plane
- She didn’t want to wait for a bus in the pouring rain so took a taxi instead.
to get on – to get into a bus, train or plane
- They arrived at the station just in time to get on the train before it left.
to get off – to disembark from a bus, train or plane
- Shona pushed the bell as she wanted to get off the bus at the next stop.
bus route – the fixed, regular journey made by a bus
- One of the reasons I moved to my new address is because it’s on the main bus route into town.
bus service – a public facility whereby the general public can travel on a bus from one place to another along set routes for a fixed fee
- There is a good bus service into town from where I live.
timetable / schedule – a plan of the times when particular events are to take place
- Jared’s interview was at 9.30 a.m. and the timetable showed that the early train would get him there in plenty of time.
rush hour – the times at the beginning and end of the working day when many people are travelling to or from work
- Ogasi was so fed up with the rush hour traffic jams that he bought a bike to cycle to work.
carpool (US) / car share (UK) – an arrangement between people to make a regular journey together in a single vehicle, usually taking turns to drive
- If more people organized carpools, the roads wouldn’t be so congested.
park-and-ride – a system for reducing urban traffic congestion, in which drivers leave their cars in car parks on the outskirts of a town or city and travel into centre on public transport
- The park-and-ride scheme was so successful that a second one was set up on the other side of the city.
the outskirts – the areas that form the outer edge of a town, city or village, that are furthest away from the centre
- It’s great living on the outskirts. It’s easy to get into the city but we are also close to the countryside.
convenient – fitting in well with a person’s needs, activities, and plans
- There’s a bus stop right outside my house which makes it very convenient for catching the bus to work.
independent – not influenced or controlled in any way by other people or events
- I’m so much more independent now that I have a scooter to get around.
overcrowded – full with too many people for it to be comfortable or safe
- The tube is so overcrowded in the rush hour that it’s impossible to get a seat.
unreliable – something or someone that is not trustworthy or efficient
- Our local bus service is very unreliable and is usually running late.
Set 5: Transport systems

network – a group or system of interconnected people or things
- The new government made a commitment to improving the country's transport network.

Collocations:
- road network – a system of interconnected roads
- rail network – a system of interconnected railway lines

the underground / the tube/ the subway / the metro – an underground railway system in a city
- The quickest way to get around London is on the underground.
canal – an artificial waterway constructed to allow the passage of boats or ships inland
- Ship canals such as the Panama Canal and Suez Canal are vitally important for world trade.
a shuttle – a vehicle or aircraft that travels regularly between two places
- Itsuki took the shuttle from his hotel out to the airport.

Set 6: Transportation & the environment

fuel – a substance that is used to provide heat or power, e.g. petrol, diesel, gasoline, oil, usually by being burned
- Scientists are working hard to develop more environmentally friendly fuels.
emissions – an amount of something, especially a gas such as carbon dioxide, that is sent out into the air and harms the environment
- Car manufacturers are under pressure to reduce exhaust emissions.
emit – to produce and discharge something, especially a gas
- Vehicles emit high levels of harmful gases into the atmosphere.
exhaust fumes – harmful gases emitted from a vehicle engine
- Many cities have a big problem with air pollution caused by exhaust fumes.
energy efficient – using only a small amount of fuel
- I chose this make of car because it is very energy efficient.
air pollution – the presence of harmful substances in the air, often consisting of waste emissions from vehicles
- Air pollution is so bad in some cities that people have to wear face-masks when they go out.
environmentally-friendly – not harmful to the environment
- Electric cars are a more environmentally-friendly than those that run on petrol.
gas guzzler (informal) – a vehicle that uses a lot of fuel
- For many people, a large car is a status symbol and they aren’t concerned about the harm their gas guzzler is doing to the environment.

Set 7: The future

autonomous vehicle / driverless car / self-driving car – a car capable of driving itself through a computer system
- I would be very nervous of riding in an autonomous vehicle and don’t think that they are safe.
**space travel** – travel through outer space
- They say that it won’t be long before members of the public are able to enjoy space travel.

**high-speed rail** – a passenger train that travels at a very high speed using specialised rolling stock and a system of dedicated track
- In the future, high-speed rail networks will take over from traditional railways.

**Set 8: Other vocabulary**

**to go on foot** – to walk somewhere
- The restaurant was only a mile from our house and we decided to go on foot so that we could all enjoy a bottle of wine and no-one had to worry about driving home.

**pedestrian** – a person who travels on foot
- Some areas of our city are for pedestrians only and vehicles aren’t allowed there.

**to run a car** – to own and drive a car
- It's not really worth running a car if you live in the city as it's easier and cheaper to get around on public transport.

**toll** – money that you pay to use a particular road or bridge
- Some countries charge motorway tolls but most of our motorways are free to travel on.

**a speeding fine** – a sum of money that must be paid as punishment for driving faster than legally allowed
- I was really cross with myself for getting a speeding fine but it was my own fault for driving too fast.

**Set 9: Idioms**

**bumper to bumper** – very close together, as cars in a traffic jam
- The traffic is usually bumper to bumper when I take the kids to school.

**beat the traffic** – to leave early to avoid travelling when the roads are crowded
- Sharon left for the airport at 7.00 a.m. in order to beat the traffic.

**hit the road** – set out on a journey
- They hit the road early as they wanted to reach the holiday cottage by lunchtime.

**hitch a lift / ride** – to get a ride in someone else’s vehicle
- If I miss the bus, I can usually hitch a lift with a colleague who lives a few streets away from me.

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**For IELTS-style practise questions**

For IELTS-style transport-related practise questions and sample answers visit: