

BBC Learning English
6 Minute English
21 March 2013
Global traffic jam



Rob: Hello, I'm Rob, welcome to 6 Minute English. I'm joined today by Jennifer.

Jennifer: Hi there, Rob.

Rob: Thanks for joining me. Now, this year the BBC is looking into the future, in key areas of science, politics, education and our personal life in a series called 'What If...'. One of the questions it's asking is 'What if everyone had a car?' and that's what we're discussing today and we'll be looking at some of the language associated with driving and traffic.

Jennifer: Well, living in London, I know all about traffic, especially **traffic jams** – that's where too many cars, lorries and buses get stuck in long queues on the road.

Rob: Yes, they are stuck together, just like jam! And it's a big problem in cities around the world. It could be the situation that one day, all the traffic becomes one long queue and we have a global traffic jam! Today, we will be hearing about some possible solutions that may prevent this problem from happening. But first, I think it's only fair that we begin today's journey with a question.

Jennifer: And this question is for me I suppose?!

Rob: It is. On the subject of traffic jams, your question today is this. In 2010, one of the world's longest jams occurred in Beijing in China. Do you know how long it was? Was it:

- a) 50 kilometres
- b) 100 kilometres
- c) 200 kilometres

Jennifer: They're all very long but I think I will go for a) 50 kilometres.

Rob: OK, well let's find out if you are right at the end of the programme. So we're discussing the question, what if everyone had a car? It's quite a worrying thought

because already there are a billion cars in the world. And it is estimated – or predicted – that by 2050 there will be 4 billion cars.

Jennifer: That really would cause some serious **gridlock** – that means roads in towns and cities are so blocked that traffic is unable to move.

Rob: It's like that now in some developing countries where there has been a huge increase in car ownership; as people become wealthier, they want to own a car. But in one Indian city for example, that's a big problem, as we can hear now from the BBC's Theo Leggett. What word does he use to describe the chaotic mix of different types of vehicles?

Theo Leggett, BBC correspondent:

This is Mumbai, the commercial capital of India, a fast growing city and a potent symbol of India's recent economic success. But it has a problem or to be more precise it has 1.8 million problems. That's how many motor vehicles there are here, a maelstrom of cars, lorries, auto rickshaws and motorbikes, all crammed into roads that can't cope with this much traffic.

Rob: That's Theo Leggett in Mumbai – a city which he describes as a potent symbol – a powerful symbol – of India's economic success. But that success has come at a price – in other words, there is a negative side to the story.

Jennifer: Yes – the traffic, which he describes as **a maelstrom** – so a confusing, chaotic mix of vehicles which are crammed – **bumper to bumper**, so squeezed closely together in the city's streets.

Rob: So when the commuters start their journeys - or **get behind the wheel** - in the morning rush-hour – the busiest time of day – they could spend hours just trying to make a relatively short journey to work.

Jennifer: Well I think it would be quicker to walk! That's certainly a good option in London, where research has found that traffic is slower now than it was 100 years ago.

Rob: So is this **the end of the road** for cars?

Jennifer: You mean will we stop using them? I think not. And Bjorn Lomborg, Director of Copenhagen Consensus Centre, agrees. Even with good public transport – that's bus and train services – he says we love our cars. What does he think the solution is?

Bjorn Lomborg, Director of Copenhagen Consensus Centre:

The solution is not, as many would like it to be, to cut back on cars because people want cars, the solution will have to be technological to find smart ways of getting less polluting cars and cars that can pack much tighter and get much more efficiently around town.

Rob: Right – so the solution is technological. Better technology to make cars less **gas-guzzling**, so using less fuel, which causes less pollution and they need to be smaller too.

Jennifer: Yes, one company is already designing an M.I.T. City car which actually folds. Another is designing a thinner car with two wheels – like a motorbike but more stable.

Rob: And I've heard about self-driving robot cars that can save space on the road by driving closer to the car in front. All very clever ideas. But there is one thing you can't change – and that's the driver! And come on, Jen, who's the worst – men or women drivers?

Jennifer: It's definitely men! Women drivers are very safe at all time in my experience.

Rob: I thought you'd say that! There's one thing you can't change – your answer to today's question. Earlier, I asked you, in 2010, one of the World's longest jams occurred in Beijing in China. Do you know how long it was?

- a) 50 kilometres
- b) 100 kilometres
- c) 200 kilometres

Jennifer: And I guessed a) 50 kilometres.

Rob: And, I'm afraid you were wrong – a bit too short. This traffic jam was 100 km long. It happened on the Beijing to Tibet Expressway and lasted 12 days! I wouldn't like to have been stuck in that. OK Jennifer, before we go, could you remind us of some of the words we learned today?

Jennifer: Yes. We heard:

traffic jams

gridlock

a maelstrom

bumper to bumper

get the behind the wheel
the end of the road
gas-guzzling

Rob: Thanks Jennifer. Well, that's it for today.

Both: Bye.

Vocabulary and definitions

traffic jams	a queue of vehicles on a road that are not moving, or moving very slowly
gridlock	a situation where there are so many vehicles on the road that none of them can move
a maelstrom	a situation that is confusing and chaotic
bumper to bumper	cars travelling close together and almost touching
to get behind the wheel	to start driving a car
the end of the road	a point where you cannot continue any further
gas-guzzling	using a lot of fuel

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