

The Motor Car

- A** There are now over 700 million motor vehicles in the world - and the number is rising by more than 40 million each year. The average distance driven by car users is growing too - from 8km a day per person in western Europe in 1965 to 25 km a day in 1995. This dependence on motor vehicles has given rise to major problems, including environmental pollution, depletion of oil resources, traffic congestion and safety.
- B** While emissions from new cars are far less harmful than they used to be, city streets and motorways are becoming more crowded than ever, often with older trucks, buses and taxis which emit excessive levels of smoke and fumes. This concentration of vehicles makes air quality in urban areas unpleasant and sometimes dangerous to breathe. Even Moscow has joined the list of capitals afflicted by congestion and traffic fumes. In Mexico City, vehicle pollution is a major health hazard.
- C** Until a hundred years ago, most journeys were in the 20km range, the distance conveniently accessible by horse. Heavy freight could only be carried by water or rail. Invention of the motor vehicle brought personal mobility to the masses and made rapid freight delivery possible over a much wider area. In the United Kingdom, about 90 per cent of inland freight is carried by road. The world cannot revert to the horse-drawn wagon. Can it avoid being locked into congested and polluting ways of transporting people and goods?
- D** In Europe most cities are still designed for the old modes of transport. Adaptation to the motor car has involved adding ring roads, one-way systems and parking lots. In the United States, more land is assigned to car use than to housing. Urban sprawl means that life without a car is next to impossible. Mass use of motor vehicles has also killed or injured millions of people. Other social effects have been blamed on the car such as alienation and aggressive human behaviour.
- E** A 1993 study by the European Federation for Transport and Environment found that car transport is seven times as costly as rail travel in terms of the external social costs it entails - congestion, accidents, pollution, loss of cropland and natural habitats, depletion of oil resources, and so on. Yet cars easily surpass trains or

buses as a flexible and convenient mode of personal transport. It is unrealistic to expect people to give up private cars in favour of mass transit.