Rationalisation of road spaces

What is the issue?

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Traffic situation in developing nations are becoming a matter of concern wherein big cities among them are running out of space around the world.

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What are the concerns with developing nations?

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- Many recent reports show that world's most congested places are dominated by emerging markets.
- Among cities in developed countries, only Los Angeles makes it into the top 15.
- Some of the world's worst traffic snarls are in South Asian cities such as Dhaka, Delhi and Karachi.
- Their problems are only likely to get worse as growing populations and rising incomes push already-straining transport networks to the limit.
- In emerging economies, many cities have reached the point where roads' carrying capacity is running out.
- There are about 40 registered vehicles for every kilometre of road in the US, France, Russia and Brazil, based on analysis of World Health Organization and Central Intelligence Agency data.
- On the other hand, emerging economies like Iran, Thailand, Vietnam and Indonesia run more than 200 vehicles per kilometre.
- However, number of accidents as a result of traffic jams is low in developing cities like Tehran, Bangkok, Ho Chi Minh City and Jakarta.
- Two factors are responsible for this manageable traffic in developing

countries, atleast for the time being.
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- First, fewer people own vehicles in poorer places.
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- There are just 13 registrations per 1,000 people in Bangladesh, 30 in Nigeria, and 44 in Pakistan, compared with more than 500 in most wealthy countries.
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- And when people in low-income regions do get their first vehicle, they tend to be motorbikes and scooters, which take up less space than passenger cars.
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- However, both those mitigating issues are less helpful than they look, since as incomes rise, vehicle ownership rises too.
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- Thailand, Vietnam and Indonesia have almost as many vehicles per head as the UK.
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- For another, two-wheelers still require surrounding space to avoid collisions.
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- Scooters and motorbikes on the move take up about half the space of a car.
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- The release of exhaust fumes has already paved the way for motorbike bans implemented in parts of Jakarta and Manila and planned for the entire city of Hanoi by 2030.
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What are the measures taken in this regard?

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- One way of stopping the rise of private vehicle usage has been restricting vehicle usage itself.
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- Road-space rationing programmes, which ban driving for some cars on particular days, have been implemented in cities from Manila and Mexico City to Bogota and Beijing.
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- London charges for entry into the central city, which has a similar effect.
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- Alternatively, car numbers can be limited by mandating special permits for car ownership and using auctions or lotteries to allocate a fixed quota.
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- This special permit system was first established in the 1990s by Singapore.

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- It has since spread to more than half a dozen Chinese cities, including Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, Shenzhen, and even the comparatively sleepy outpost of Guiyang.
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- Also, there are more free-market solutions like ride-sharing and autonomous driving which have attracted the most investments and interest in recent years.
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- However, these aren't likely to make a decisive difference.
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- Studies of ride-hailing services such as Uber and Lyft suggest they encourage some people to give up on owning their own vehicle.
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- But it also tempts riders away from higher-capacity public transport modes.
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What should be done?

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- Autonomous vehicles could increase road capacity by using shorter stopping distances than would be safe with human drivers.
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- But for the moment, such technology remains on paper, especially in the complex, dynamic streetscapes of emerging-world cities crowded with scooters, hawkers, pedestrians and livestock.
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- Thus the solution that is likely to be the most effective in the long-term is an expansion of public transport.
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- In particular, metro and suburban rail networks have to be promoted to remove traffic from roads altogether.
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- The world will add about the same length of metro-rail tracks in the 10 years through 2022 as it built in the previous 150 years since the opening of London's Metropolitan Railway in 1863.
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- China's metro systems have expanded at breakneck speed this century, and India is gradually catching up.
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- Even laggards like Dhaka, Jakarta, Lahore and Lagos are finally building dedicated commuter-rail networks.

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- The transportation systems in Beijing shows that a city can be able to meet the demands of transporting a fast-growing urban population.
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- It has created road-space rationing, vehicle quotas and a brand-new metro system to accommodate their swelling populations without grinding to a halt.
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- It serves as the showpiece capital of the most ambitious infrastructure-developer the world has ever seen.
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- Thus, city governments elsewhere in the developing world should have a vision of the future to emulate the best models of the developed world in the transportation sector.
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Source: Hindustan Times

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