

Topic: Transportation
(International Organization for Migration, Overseas Processing Entity, Nairobi)

Activity: Transportation Overview; Car Ownership Discussion

Objectives

In this unit, instructors provide a general overview of transportation in the US, emphasizing that public transport varies greatly across the country. Requirements and responsibilities of owning a car and driving are also discussed.

Modes of transportation, availability and costs in participants' countries of origin are different from the United States. As a result, transportation can be one of the most confusing issues new arrivals face. At first, all participants will need to use public transportation. The sooner new arrivals master the transport system in their city, the easier it will be to adapt.

Materials

- Teaching points (included)
- *Welcome to the United States* video, transportation segment
- Newspaper with used car advertisements
- Visuals showing examples of public transportation

Introduction

Discuss the values and concepts of time and planning ahead.

Time:

Effective time management is one of the first steps to understanding and adapting to life in the US. People are expected to be on time for all appointments, for work, and for social engagements. Being late is often considered irresponsible and can cause problems. The importance that Americans place on time may be one of the most difficult concepts for new arrivals to understand.

Planning ahead:

Thinking about and understanding time in the long term is also an important element in being successful in the US. Most Americans plan ahead, whether it be to organize a trip, to save money for school, a car or a house, to have a child, or simply to figure out how long it will take to get from one place to another. Planning ahead will provide balance and stability in life.

Ask participants to consider the following:

- How did you come to class this morning?
- If by bus, how much is the bus fare?
- How do you pay for the fare?
- Do buses leave at a scheduled time?
- How many people have driven a car or owned a driver's license?
- How do you acquire a driver's license?

Practice

1. Split the class into 2 groups.
2. Assign one group to discuss all the pros of car ownership.
3. Assign the second group to discuss all the cons of car ownership.
4. Groups should then appoint one spokesperson to present findings to the whole class.

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Discussion Questions

- What percentage of the class has driven a car or held a driver's license?
- Are participants used to keeping time schedules regarding transportation?
- What are the main modes of transportation that participants use?

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Teaching Points

Public Transportation

Public transportation varies greatly across the US. Many cities offer extensive public transportation systems (bus, subway or commuter train) that allow people to lead active lives without a car. Taxis are also available, but are expensive. In other areas, public transport is not easily accessible. In such cases, participants should look into car-pool options, or see how quickly they can purchase a vehicle. However, the majority of refugees resettle to areas where life is manageable without a car.

Discounted Tickets

Many cities offer discounted tickets for students and people over 65 years old.

Learner's Permit

A learner's permit allows the holder to drive during daylight hours under the supervision of an adult. In order to receive a learner's permit, an individual must pass a written test and a vision test. The written test involves answering 18 of 20 questions correctly. Manuals are available in a number of different languages. Participants who have never driven before must obtain a learner's permit in order to learn how to drive and to take a driving test.

Driver's License

A US driver's license is required to drive a car in the United States; an international license is not an acceptable substitute. The minimum age at which one can obtain a driver's license varies from state to state – ranging somewhere between 16 and 18. Requirements for obtaining a driver's license include passing a written test, a vision test and a driving test. The cost ranges from about \$20-40. A driver's license is not permanent. It must be renewed regularly, and breaking certain laws, (for example driving while under the influence of alcohol) may result in a person losing his or her license. In addition, a non-citizen runs the risk of deportation for serious law infractions.

Car Ownership

In areas where public transport is not available, the vast majority of Americans own cars. Used cars are widely available and are generally less expensive than in a participant's native country, but one must be careful when purchasing a car.

Responsibilities of Owning a Car

A person considering buying a car should keep in mind these costs and responsibilities:

Insurance. In most states the law requires drivers to own some form of car insurance. The types of insurance required (and costs) vary from state to state. Fees can be quite expensive, especially for those with no driving record in the US.

Registration. Car owners must register their vehicles with the department of motor vehicles. Participants must be careful to only buy registered cars (an unregistered car may have been stolen, in which case the buyer would lose possession of the car and be subject to criminal penalties).

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Inspection. Almost all states require yearly car inspections of cars to ensure the car meets operating standards and is not dangerous. An up-to-date inspection sticker indicates that the car is road-worthy. Failure to have such a sticker will attract the attention of the police, who may fine the vehicle owner.

Petrol / gas. Petrol in the US is generally less expensive than in other countries, but it is still a considerable expense, particularly for families with limited incomes.

Maintenance of the vehicle. Auto mechanics in the US earn a good living; correspondingly, car repairs can be quite costly.

Parking. Parking can be quite expensive, especially in urban areas

Traffic Laws

In contrast to the case in many participants' native countries, traffic laws in the US are strictly enforced. Participants should learn these laws and observe how Americans drive in order to follow suit. Some of the laws that participants must be aware of include:

- Car registration
- Insurance
- A driver's license is required in order to drive
- Speed limits on every road
- Drinking and driving
- Seat belt use (mandatory in many states)
- Children under a certain age are required to sit in specially designed safety seats

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