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Transportation in Istanbul, Turkey is an adventurous affair. First of all, there are several modes from which to choose, including ferry, steamship, sea bus, motor boat, metro, light metro (only on the European side), sub urban trains, municipality bus, public bus, tunnel, tram, and taxi. However, the vast majority of people prefer to drive, therefore roads are extremely congested and even treacherous. Two bridges connect Europe and Asia across the Bosphorus, and they are particularly subject to horrendous traffic. Yet driving can be a more convenient (though not always faster) means to cross the strait because, while the boat may be more efficient, transport is required to and from the stations. While certain bus lines also venture across the bridges, the considerable number of bus stops on either side can make an already long trip even more time-consuming. However, a taxi is so expensive it is pretty much out of the question. The solution: the dolmus or public taxi is an ideal mode of transport that combines the best aspects of taxi, bus, and car while being more efficient than any of these types of driving and therefore more sustainable.

Turkey is 20th internationally for CO2 emissions in general, but it is only 76th when that statistic is analyzed per capita<sup>1</sup>. However, when analyzing specifically pollution from fossil fuels, Turkey ranks 24th in the world for some of the highest energy-consumption-related output<sup>2</sup>. Therefore, with its large population, public transportation is a feasible and substantial means by which the nation can attempt to

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<sup>1</sup> [www.nationmaster.com](http://www.nationmaster.com)

<sup>2</sup> [www.nationmaster.com](http://www.nationmaster.com)

alleviate some of these environmental issues. With the establishment of the Environment Ministry in 1991, Turkey began to make significant progress addressing some of its most pressing environmental problems. The most dramatic improvements were significant reductions of air pollution in Istanbul and Ankara. However, progress on the remaining -- and serious -- environmental challenges facing Turkey has been slow. In 2003, the Ministry of Environment was merged with the Forestry Ministry, reducing the influence of environmental officials in government decision-making. With its goal to join the EU, Turkey has made commendable progress in updating and modernizing its environmental legislation. However, environmental concerns are not adequately integrated into public decision-making and enforcement is lacking. Turkey faces a backlog of environmental problems, requiring enormous outlays for infrastructure<sup>3</sup>. Thus, as Turkey begins to examine its environmental situation, it is somewhat hampered by a culture that lacks awareness of and interest in sustainability as a priority. People use public because it is quicker or cheaper than other forms of transport as opposed to because it is also more environmentally friendly.

In Istanbul in particular, this dense urban area would benefit greatly from a comprehensive transportation system, but for reasons like convenience, it can be difficult to travel quickly while maintaining control over your destination. For example, driving a car allows you to control your starting and ending points but is extremely stressful. On the other hand, a bus relieves you from driving, but bus stops may be far apart or at least removed from your final destination. The train system that exists is used almost exclusively for long-distance travel. A subway system that would cut through some of the most dense and hard-to-reach parts of the city is in progress; however, construction is

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/3432.htm>

constantly being interrupted by the archeological excavation of the ruins over which most of the city was built—the unfortunate side effect of being historically significant. Yet, this type of dilemma relates to another impediment to transportation: city planning. Istanbul is composed of many narrow, winding roads that are difficult for the everyday person to navigate in a car and are not accessible by bus. With the lack of an elaborated city plan Istanbul changes face quite fast. The city offers many traffic challenges to its citizens.

For example a person living on the Anatolian side may work on the European side or just the opposite. Therefore during the rush hours the existing two bridges over the Bosphorus (Bosphorus and Fatih Sultan Mehmet Bridges respectively) and three bridges over the Golden Horn are very crowded. Well at least you can enjoy the panorama of both the Bosphorus and Golden Horn while waiting in the terrific traffic!<sup>4</sup>

The dolmus, while consuming fossil fuels like any automobile, still offers a more efficient alternative to driving, taking a bus or taxi, or using the pleasantly scenic but ordinarily simply time-consuming boats.

The dolmus is a somewhat unique way to travel. Like a bus, dolmus stops are marked with a large “D” in various points in the city. There, minibuses (13-seater vans) line up to pick up passengers. However, these stops only exist in a few key points that are especially prominent points of interest and travel as opposed to every few meters like bus stops. Dolmus lines are organized by destination, but people are free to ask to be dropped at any point between pickup and the final destination. If your destination is remotely in the vicinity of a route between the two points, the dolmus driver will adjust to drop you off within a block of your house. Furthermore, mass transit is only as efficient as it is full;

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<sup>4</sup> [www.mymerhaba.com](http://www.mymerhaba.com)

therefore an empty bus is not doing much of a service to the environment. On the other hand, a dolmus rarely leaves before it is completely full. If for some reason it cannot fill up, it honks to people on the street as it drives, offering its services, so it is almost always full. Riding in the dolmus alleviates the stress of driving it, placing the responsibility in the hands of the most able and experienced drivers in the city. Not only will you arrive calmer, but these experts know every side street and shortcut and will likely get you there in less time than you would have taken yourself plus parking is another worry forgone. This is a very practical means of transportation and much cheaper than a taxi. You pay the fee to the driver. Prices differ depending on distance traveled. The relatively cheap prices are set by the municipality and displayed somewhere visible within the vehicle<sup>5</sup>. Usually the fare is no more than a few coins.

While the dolmus is by no means as utopian as perhaps the monorail, I think that it contributes to sustainability in Istanbul. It is commercially endorsed carpooling that provides greater flexibility than bus or boat with less stress or cost than car or taxi. While it seems that the most efficient transit system would be the most regulated or structured, in reality, it is this improvisational operation that makes traveling around Istanbul easiest and sometimes—when in close quarters with interesting characters—the most adventurous.

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<sup>5</sup> [www.mymerhaba.com](http://www.mymerhaba.com)