



# ***ISRAEL MATTERS!***

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## **Israelis on the Move!**

If you've visited Israel, you've no doubt noticed that Israelis seem to always be on the move – in lots of different ways! Transportation in Israel has experienced a remarkable evolution since the establishment of the state in 1948. From its early infrastructure to modern innovations, transportation in Israel has been pivotal in shaping social dynamics and economic growth.

### **The Past: Paving the Way**

In the early years following Israel's establishment, the transportation infrastructure was functional but rudimentary. The country relied primarily on a basic road network, which was largely designed for military use. Public transport was primarily served by Egged, the national bus company, which connected cities and rural areas with limited routes. The first railway line linked Tel Aviv and Jerusalem, and started in 1948.

The 1960s and 1970s marked a turning point as car ownership increased significantly, fueled by economic growth and rising living standards. The expansion of highways and road networks made personal vehicles more accessible, but this led to increased traffic congestion in geographically-tiny Israel, particularly in urban centers. The need for improved public transport became evident, as cities struggled to cope with the growing number of vehicles.

### **The Present: Planes, Trains and Automobiles (and motorcycles and scooters and...)**

Today, Israel boasts a diverse and advanced transportation landscape. The Israel Railways has undergone significant modernization,

expanding routes and enhancing services to improve connectivity between major cities. High-speed trains are used extensively, servicing an average of 200,000 riders a day, reducing travel times and making rail travel a viable alternative to driving. The railway system is extremely clean and reliable, and makes it easy to get quickly and efficiently from Tel Aviv up the coast through Haifa and Nahariya, and south and east to Ashdod, Ashkelon, Be'er Sheva and Jerusalem.

In urban areas, public transport has transformed dramatically. The introduction of light rail



systems, such as the Jerusalem Light Rail, operational since 2011, has improved accessibility and reduced

congestion. The Tel Aviv Light Rail recently opened the first of several lines, providing an efficient alternative option to move about this busy city. (Traffic in cities like Jerusalem and Tel Aviv is frequently worse than traffic in midtown-Manhattan!) The Tel Aviv Light Rail will be both above and below ground.

Buses continue to play a crucial role in public transport, with Egged and Dan operating extensive networks that serve both urban and rural populations. Recent technological advancements, such as mobile ticketing and



real-time tracking, have made using public transport more convenient and user-friendly. Additionally, the adoption of electric buses reflects Israel's growing commitment to sustainability and reducing air pollution.

And how do you pay for riding trains, light rail and buses? You use your rechargeable RavKav card of course! There are also a few apps you can use to pay.



## Other Ways to Move Around Israel

Ridesharing apps like “Gett” (very similar to Uber), motorcycles, bicycles and electric scooters have emerged as popular alternatives to driving your own car. You can rent a bike or an electric scooter along the Tel Aviv streets to get you from one place to another – but beware! These seemingly innocent scooters can go pretty fast, and are permitted on streets and sidewalks – so watch out for them as you cross streets or paths!

When it comes to air travel, most people have heard of Ben Gurion Airport, but did you know that Israel actually has three public airports? The other two are Haifa Airport and Eilat's Ramon Airport. Are you taking a mini-vacation to Eilat? Skip the 6-hour drive and hop on a 45-minute flight from Ben Gurion or an hour flight from Haifa.

And if you find yourself in Haifa, you can travel by cable car! The “Rachbalit” cable car runs from Mifratz Bus Station to Technion University and further up the mountain to the University of Haifa. There is also the more scenic Haifa Cable Car, which climbs Mount Carmel from Bat Galim Beach up to the Stella Maris Monastery, where the view is breathtaking.



While it's rare to travel via waterway within Israel, it's not entirely unheard of. For example, there is a water taxi between Haifa and Akko – a hidden gem known only to locals, port workers and now, readers of TBS's *Israel Matters*!

## What about Shabbat?

Although taxis and rental scooters are available on shabbat, buses and trains do not operate in Israel from Friday afternoon until after sundown on Saturday. One exception is the relatively new “Shabbat Bus” which travels in and around Tel Aviv during Shabbat for free, stops at every stop, and makes it possible to spend Shabbat with friends and family that are beyond walking distance.

## The Future: Innovations on the Horizon

Looking ahead, Israel's transportation system will include further innovations and enhancements. The government has set ambitious targets to promote sustainability in transportation, aiming for a significant increase in the use of electric and hybrid vehicles by 2030. This shift is expected to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and improve air quality, especially in densely populated areas.

The development of autonomous vehicles is another exciting frontier. Several companies are actively testing self-driving technology, with the potential to revolutionize public transport in Israel. Autonomous shuttles and buses could become common in urban areas, offering a safe, efficient, and cost-effective means of transportation.

Rail infrastructure is also expected to expand significantly.



Plans for new high-speed rail lines connecting key cities aim to boost economic growth and improve regional connectivity.

These initiatives are designed to enhance the overall efficiency of the transport network while promoting sustainable travel.

Finally, Israeli urban planning initiatives are increasingly prioritizing public transportation. Investments in pedestrian-friendly infrastructure, bike lanes, and integrated transport hubs designed to create a seamless experience for users. These developments promote the idea that transportation should be accessible and environmentally friendly, encouraging a shift away from car dependency.

The evolution of transportation in Israel is a testament to the country's resilience and innovative spirit. From its modest beginnings to a modern, multi-modal transport network, Israel has continually adapted to meet the needs of its citizens. With each step forward, Israel is paving the way for a more connected, efficient, and eco-friendly transportation landscape.