**Track 56**

Commuting in urban areas during rush hour can be time-consuming and stressful. Traffic congestion or vehicle breakdowns may cause people to be stuck in gridlock for long periods of time. Instead of driving, commuters might consider taking public transportation, like the metro or train. Some companies or business parks even offer a shuttle service that picks workers up and drops them off at stations. Public transportation options have predictable schedules and allow you to relax during your commute. You may even save time!

**Track 57**

1. The UN predicts that by 2050, half the world's population will be living in urban areas.

2. We need sustainable solutions to the problems of urbanization.

3. Finding ways to reduce emissions will improve air quality for everyone.

4. Renewable energies can help reduce our reliance on fossil fuels.

5. Climate change could lead to rising sea levels, threatening coastal areas.

6. Many members of the millennial generation are environmentally conscious.

7. The city is taking an eco-friendly approach to solving urban issues.

8. Large-scale urban developments need cutting-edge technologies.

**Track 58**

As urban areas go, you probably wouldn't first think of Las Vegas, Nevada, in the United States as being an especially green, sustainable, environmentally-conscious city. This southwestern city is known more for its gambling, outrageous hotels, and extravagant pools and fountains in the often scorching desert environment. But City Center, a resort complex located on the Las Vegas Strip, might come as a surprise. Its numerous US Green Building Council LEED certifications make it the single largest concentration of eco-rated buildings in North America. LEED stands for Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design.

It is a massive complex, including four hotels, an indoor shopping area the size of two New York City blocks, 2,400 private residences, more than five football fields' worth of convention space, and a man-made river designed by Maya Lin and made entirely from recycled silver. Can something of this size – and the attendant hordes of conventioneers – possibly tread lightly on the planet? And the fact that a gambling corporation – MGM Resorts International -- is behind this cutting-edge development might make some even more skeptical. The kind of green that is normally associated with Las Vegas is cold, hard cash. Yet the staggering investment to build the complex – 8.5 billion dollars – has made it the single largest private development and largest green project ever undertaken in the U.S. A top to bottom eco-friendly approach was taken. In addition to using non-toxic paints, sealants, and adhesives, builders recycled 95% of construction debris, keeping thousands of tons of steel, concrete, paper, and plastic out of Nevada's landfills. And in the harsh, arid environment, water conservation technology saves almost 200 million liters a year.

‘Las Vegas can be a leading green destination,’ insists James Murren, MGM's chairman and CEO. ‘Designing City Center was about creating a healthier environment for our guests, for the planet and for the 12,000 people who work here. And, yes, about bringing in the money too,’ he says. And commenting on the crowds of stylish twentysomethings filling the bars, shops and restaurants, he adds,’ That's one of our target audiences. Members of the so-called millennial generation are more environmentally aware; they look for organic menus, embrace the latest technology and like to party.’ According to a TIME Magazine poll, nearly 50 percent of Americans surveyed said protecting the environment should be a priority.

Behind the scenes, a natural gas cogeneration plant – the first on the Strip – reduces emissions and uses waste heat to provide hot water, and in public areas an advanced floor-based air conditioning system avoids wasting energy on cooling empty spaces near the ceilings. Despite all this, City Center is not without its critics. Thierry Roch, executive director of Historic Hotels of America says, ‘A sustainably designed project of City Center's size and magnitude is certainly commendable, however, renovating existing buildings is a much better way to save natural resources and have less of a negative impact on the environment.’ Still, expecting companies to stop putting up new buildings is unrealistic. And other sustainability experts argue that if a global green economy is really going to take root, sustainable practices must be used on the full spectrum of construction, from small eco-lodges to large-scale urban developments. Because of City Center's size, huge construction firms that worked on the project were introduced to environmentally-friendly building techniques, resulting in an increase in the number of green building suppliers. The oft repeated theme of Las Vegas is ‘what happens in Vegas stays in Vegas.’ In the case of urban development, perhaps we should hope that it doesn't.

**Track 59**

Environmentally Friendly Transportation Solutions

Every year on September 22nd, Car Free Days are celebrated around the world. In participating cities, citizens and residents are encouraged to leave their cars at home and use alternative means of transportation to get to school or work. The goal of Car Free Days is to help people see what life in their cities would be like with fewer cars. Some cities even allow people to use public transportation for free throughout the day.

Car Free Days were first organized in the 1950s, notably in the Netherlands, Belgium, and New York City. In 1998, the French government instituted a national Car Free Day, leading the European Commission to fund the program throughout Europe. Within two years, the movement had spread to more than 1,000 cities. Currently, the world’s largest Car Free Day takes place in Bogotá, Colombia.

It’s difficult to imagine that a modern city could function entirely without cars, but there are proposals around the world to develop urban areas that will do just that. In 2012, the city of Chengdu, China, partnered with an American architectural firm and made plans to develop a 1.3 square kilometre area that will be entirely car free. The site has been given the name Chengdu Great City, and will be a satellite of the main Chengdu metropolitan area. Once complete, it will house 80,000 people. Residents will be able to walk everywhere within 15 minutes along broad, tree-lined promenades, and there will be no need for vehicles of any kind.

Similarly, the government of Abu Dhabi is in the process of constructing Masdar City, a futuristic urban space. When it is finished, the development will house 50,000 people and will provide employment for 60,000. Instead of cars, Masdar residents and visitors will get around via Personal Rapid Transit automobiles (PRTs). PRTs are small, driverless pods that are powered by rechargeable batteries. Although Masdar is not yet complete, the PRT system is already operational and has been praised as an environmentally-friendly transportation solution. It is hoped that in the future, other cities will follow in the footsteps of Chengdu and Masdar and develop car-free zones of their own.

The city of Istanbul, Turkey, often attracts praise for its elaborate ferry network. Roughly 300,000 people commute to work by ferry on a daily basis. The city has almost 40 passenger boats in service, some of which can accommodate more than 2,000 people per journey. The importance of ferries in Istanbul is a consequence of the city’s geography. The city’s European and Asian sides are divided by the Bosphorus Strait.

Recently, cities such as London, Paris, and New York have been looking to expand their ferry networks as a way to cut down on car use.

Extraordinary technology is currently in development that will allow passengers to travel overland at a rate almost as fast as the speed of sound. This exciting new mode of transportation is called Hyperloop.

One way to think of Hyperloop is as a kind of futuristic train. The technology is a series of compartments that can be propelled through tubes either above or below ground. After they are set in motion, the pods levitate above their tracks using magnetic suspension and zip to their destination at high speeds. Hyperloop will be both a comfortable and convenient way to travel. Moreover, fare prices will be economical. For these reasons, it is expected that the technology will reduce our dependency on conventional means of transportation such as cars, buses, trains, and even planes. The site of the world’s first Hyperloop has not yet been chosen, but possible locations have been identified in the United Arab Emirates, Europe, and the US.

**Track 60**

1. There’s been a significant increase in traffic congestion.

2. Public transportation can be a real nightmare sometimes.

3. Train cancelations present a particular problem for commuters.

4. The government is going to increase funding for public transportation.

5. I bought a bike as a present for myself so that I could ride to work.

6. How do they plan to transport the building materials?

**Track 61**

Wanis Kabbaj, What a Driverless World Could Look Like

1. I cannot tell you how much I enjoy watching cities from the sky, from an airplane window. Some cities are calmly industrious, like Dusseldorf or Louisville. Others project an energy that they can hardly contain, like New York or Hong Kong. And then you have Paris or Istanbul, and their patina full of history. I see cities as living beings. And when I discover them from far above, I like to find those main streets and highways that structure their space. Especially at night, when commuters make these arteries look dramatically red and golden: the city's vascular system performing its vital function right before your eyes.

2. Isn't it absurd that we created cars that can reach 130 miles per hour and we now drive them at the same speed as 19th-century horse carriages? In the US alone, we spent 29.6 billion hours commuting in 2014. With that amount of time, ancient Egyptians could have built 26 Pyramids of Giza. We do that in one year. A monumental waste of time, energy and human potential.

3. We've been stuck in an endless debate between creating a car-centric society or extensive mass-transit systems. And I think we should transcend this. I think we can create vehicles that combine the convenience of cars and the efficiencies of trains and buses.

4. But what would happen when whole cities become driverless? Would we need traffic lights? Would we need lanes? How about speed limits? Red blood cells are not flowing in lanes. They never stop at red lights. In the first driverless cities, you would have no red lights and no lanes. And when all the cars are driverless and connected, everything is predictable and reaction time, minimum. They can drive much faster and can take any rational initiative that can speed them up or the cars around them.

**Track 62**

1. You explained that you’re carrying out a survey. I wonder if I could ask, where are you going to publish the results?

2. I’d say that, generally speaking, car sharing is pretty effective.

3. I know you’re probably quite busy, but would you mind answering a few questions about the new shuttle service?

4. You asked if I knew anything about the environmental impact of commuter trains. I have to be honest – I haven’t got a clue.

5. Congestion in the city is a real problem. We’re going to conduct a survey because we’d like to know what the public thinks about the issue.

6. I’m worried about smog in my city. Do you have any idea where I can research the problem?

**Track 63**

**A:** Good morning! I’m carrying out a survey on taxi use in the city. Do you have time to answer a

few questions?

**B:** Sure, but generally speaking, I don’t take taxis very often. I use my car.

**A:** Oh, I understand. Well, do you happen to know the cost of an average taxi fare?

**B:** Sorry, but I have no idea. As I said, I don’t really use taxis.

**A:** That’s OK. The reason I’m interested is because a couple of months ago, the base fare went

up by $2. I’d like to know if you think that’s a big increase.

**B:** I suppose it is… In fact, for people who take taxis a lot, I’ll bet it’s quite a lot of money.

**A:** Yes, I agree. Most people are quite upset about it. Can I ask one more question?

**B:** Of course.

**A:** If taxis were less expensive, do you think you would use them more often?

**B:** I’d say so. I’d use them once in a while, at least.

**A:** Thanks for your time.

**B:** No problem.

**Track 64**

Question 1

Public transportation in my area is pretty good. We have a decent bus network, and the metro isn’t too bad either. The only thing is, buses and trains don’t run after about 12:30 at night or so. I suppose it would be better if they ran later, especially on weekends.

Question 2

I realize it isn’t feasible everywhere, but in my opinion, cities should ideally offer public transportation 24 hours a day. Even smaller towns should provide some sort of transportation at night. When trains and buses don’t run, people are forced to rely on cars and taxis, or else just stay at home. A 24-hour system would be good for the economy, because people would get out and about much more.

Question 3

Well, I think there are a couple of reasons. First of all, it goes without saying that flying is much faster. Who wants to spend 8 hours on a bus when you can fly somewhere in a fraction of the time? Another reason is that the cost of flying has come down a lot over the past few years. Flying used to be more expensive, but now there are lots of discount airlines. Personally, I don’t think twice when I have to book tickets. I always fly when I can.

Question 4

It’s a tough question. I don’t have kids, so I’ve personally never been in the position of paying for children to use public transportation. However, I know that for many people it’s a big expense. I think children should be allowed to ride for free until they’re about 10 years old or so. When they’re younger than ten, they’re so small that they hardly take up any space. And obviously, they don’t normally travel on buses and trains alone at that age. After 10 I think they should have to pay, although maybe they could get a discount.