



Benchmarking Jordanian cities: A report on urban transportation and accessibility

Gilles Duranton, Adam Storeygard, Victor Couture, Prottoy Akbar and Bernardo Ribeiro

- More than 85% of Jordanians live in the country's four largest cities, which are expected to continue expanding over the next decade.
- The policy challenge is clear: how to manage a growing population in already busy cities while designing urban spaces that work for all.
- This study compares accessibility, measured as the time needed to reach destinations, in Jordanian cities and peer cities in low- and middle-income countries in the MENAT region across destinations and transport modes.
- Using Google data on simulated trips and venue locations, we find that accessibility in Jordanian cities is generally lower than in peer cities.
- This gap is driven mainly by longer distances to destinations, not unusually slow travel speeds.
- Policy should focus on bringing key services closer to residents, while targeting congestion in Amman rather than prioritising road expansion.

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Urban policy challenge in Jordan

More than 85% of the urban population of Jordan lives in its four largest cities, Amman, Zarqa, Irbid, and Russeifa, and these major urban areas are projected to grow even larger over the next decade. The country is also a major destination for refugees, with migrants currently accounting for almost half of the country's total population. In that context, policymakers face a clear challenge: managing a growing population in already busy cities while designing urban spaces that work for all their residents

Our research

Our report compares urban accessibility, measured as the time needed to reach destinations, in Amman, Zarqa, Irbid, and Russeifa, with other cities in middle- and low-income countries in the Middle East, North Africa and Turkey (MENAT) region. We aim to identify the broad factors impeding the ability of residents in Jordan from reaching their destinations.

Measuring urban accessibility

To measure accessibility, we combine travel time data from trips simulated on Google Maps with information on the location and characteristics of venues from Google Places. We collect travel data for the same routes for both driving and walking, which allows us to compare accessibility across the two modes of transportation.

The importance of measuring accessibility for urban policy

Comparable accessibility data remains scarce, limiting the ability of policymakers to measure accessibility needs effectively. Determining whether slow speeds, traffic congestion and/or long travel distances constrain residents is crucial for designing effective urban policies.

Research questions and key findings

Research question	Key findings
How do travel speed, congestion, distance, and accessibility in Jordanian cities compare with those in other cities in the region?	Accessibility in Jordan ranks below the MENAT average. Travel speeds in Jordan are close to the MENAT average, although Amman stands out with exceptionally high congestion. Residents of cities in Jordan have to travel longer distances than their regional peers.
What are the key determinants of accessibility	Higher travel distances are the main determinant of relatively low accessibility in Jordan. Major roads in

and its components in Jordanian cities?

Jordan are 20% shorter than the MENAT average, yet vehicle speeds remain comparable to peer cities.

However, even when compared to cities with similar populations, areas, and road networks, travel distances in Jordan are 24% longer. This happens because existing venues are built far away from where people live, not because there are fewer places to go.

How do accessibility constraints differ across venue types and transport modes?

Distances in cities in Jordan are not higher than in other MENAT cities for all types of destinations. Accessibility to places of worship and groceries is adequate, but distances are substantially longer for specialised services like hospitals.

Within cities, trips by car yield the highest accessibility, but walking outperforms driving in neighbourhoods close to the city centre and for local amenities, such as grocery stores.

Policy recommendations

Our research can inform policy by identifying the specific barriers to urban access in Jordan. Based on our findings, here is what we recommend:

Shift the focus beyond road expansion

Despite having less major road infrastructure than comparable cities in the region, Jordanian cities do not have particularly slow travel speeds. This suggests that roads in Jordan seem to work efficiently, and urban policy in the country should not prioritise building more roads.

Bring destinations closer to where people are

Jordan's accessibility gap is driven mainly by long distances to destinations. The biggest gains are therefore likely to come from bringing essential services closer to residential areas and improving the spatial distribution of key amenities across neighbourhoods.

Target key destinations

Jordan performs relatively well for nearby, common destinations such as groceries and places of worship, but much worse for more specialised services such as hospitals. Policy should focus on improving the spatial distribution of key public services.

Address congestion in Amman

Long distances are the main source of low accessibility in Jordan overall, but Amman also stands out for especially high congestion. This points to a role for targeted policies in the capital to reduce traffic delays and improve urban mobility