

A Sustainable ISRAEL



For Israel's future, sustainable development is a matter of utmost urgency. Development of freeways, sprawling commercial and business facilities and wastefully-built residential projects is recklessly using up precious resources we can't afford to lose, and requiring Israelis to live behind the steering wheel and spend money they often don't have on cars and on non-renewable, greenhouse gas-emitting fuels.

Merhav – the Movement for Israeli Urbanism (MIU) has achieved **concrete** improvement of the quality of urban life in Israel by actively promoting the development of sustainable and humane urban environments, including the direct investment of tens of millions of shekels to date in Israeli city centers.

No land to spare: Israel has a large and fast-growing population. With ten times more inhabitants than at the State's establishment six decades ago, Israel is currently home to more than 7.5 million people, and growing at a rate of about 1.67% annually, significantly faster than the United States growth rate of just under 1% per year, or the 1.17% annual growth rate of the planet's total population.

Israel's territory, on the other hand, is very limited, covering only about 21,000 km² (8,000 square miles). **Israel is smaller than El Salvador or Belize.** What's more, fully 55% of Israel's land mass is taken up by desert. Even including this large amount of sparsely inhabited terrain, Israel's population density is ranked 6th in the world* (365.3 inhabitants per km², or 946 per sq mi), with **more people per square kilometer than Japan** and most European countries. Israel has about 3 times as many inhabitants per km² as France (115 people per km²; 299 per sq mi) and **more than ten times as many inhabitants per km² as the US** (32 people per km²; 83 per sq mi).

Merhav is developing creative tools so that Israel's future population growth may be comfortably accommodated within **existing** built areas in a way that **strengthens cities** and ensures survival of **open space** and limited **natural resources**.

Car lifestyle is not an option: In addition to causing environmental damage, planning for a car lifestyle in Israel unjustly burdens the majority of the population. Gas prices in Israel are more than twice the prices found in the US and more than a third above gas prices in Canada. At the same time, the average wage in Israel is about 60% of the average wage in North America. It is no wonder then that Israel has about half the number of cars per capita than West European countries and about a third of the number of cars per capita than the US. Urban planning that focuses primarily on ensuring ease of access for private vehicles, at the expense of public transportation, disadvantages the country's poor and middle class, as well as women, the young and the elderly. It worsens the quality of life in Israeli cities, and forces all those who can afford it – and many who can't – to own a car and use it for accessing almost all of their daily destinations, wasting non-renewable fuels and increasing air pollution. If we do not change urban planning in Israel radically, by 2030 we will have to live with 3 times as many cars, more roads that consume scarce land and cut up the countryside, and severe congestion.

Dangerous dependency: Israel must urgently minimize its dependency on petroleum, more than 99% of which is imported. For both security and environmental reasons, the government began addressing the issue by changing policies regarding tax incentives, promoting technological solutions like electrical cars and alternative fuels for industry, and banning the importation of particularly egregious gas guzzlers. **The most effective way to reduce consumption of oil in the long term**, however, is to increase the number of households that do not depend on private vehicles for their daily routine. The best way to do that is through **urban planning that halts suburban sprawl and promotes public transportation and walkable neighborhoods**, in which daily necessities and services are easily accessible on foot or by bicycle, as Merhav actively promotes.

Israel simply cannot afford to follow a land- and fuel-intensive growth model.

We reject the suburban sprawl growth model of single family homes and out-of-town shopping and employment centers, which needs universal car ownership and a network of land consuming and redundant multi-lane freeways to support it.

Merhav is carrying out work that **is vital to Israel's national interest**, in promoting development that **prioritizes public transportation, walkability and bicycle use, and that envisions compact urban areas mixing housing, business and commerce, linked by an efficient network for transportation of people and goods.**

* relative to all counties the size of Israel or larger