NEWS LESSON

When the Pictures Are Easier Than the Building



BEFORE YOU READ

1 Warm up

Talk about these questions with a partner.

1. Would you live in a city with no private cars?
2. What would you want within ten minutes of your front door?
3. Would a completely planned city make everyday life simpler?

2 Key words

These words are in the article. Write the letter of the meaning (A to H) in each box.

1	**radically**	☐	A	a new idea or way of doing something
2	**stacked**	☐	B	basic systems such as roads, power and water
3	**promotional**	☐	C	made to advertise something
4	**infrastructure**	☐	D	put one on top of another in a pile
5	**investment**	☐	E	money put into something to make a profit later
6	**innovation**	☐	F	moves later than planned
7	**realistically**	☐	G	in a way that is sensible about what can really happen
8	**slips**	☐	H	in a very large and complete way

3 Read

Read the article and underline the key words from task 2. The paragraphs are numbered.

The Line promised mirrored walls, rapid transport and homes within easy reach. Semafor reported in May 2026 that further work would wait until after 2030.

1 Saudi Arabia once presented The Line as a radically different answer to urban life. Instead of spreading outwards like an ordinary city, it would stretch for 170 kilometres through the desert, with homes and services stacked into a narrow, high-density structure. Promotional images showed two enormous mirrored walls cutting across the landscape, and they travelled around the world within days.

2 The Line forms part of NEOM, a development project intended to attract international investment and support Saudi Arabia's effort to diversify its economy away from oil. Its promoters imagined neighbourhoods linked by rapid transport, with daily necessities within easy reach and far less dependence on private cars. On paper, it solved problems that older cities have struggled with for a century.

3 The promise was extraordinary, but so were the practical obstacles. A city on this scale would call for vast amounts of construction material, energy and water, as well as complicated transport and infrastructure systems. Creating comfortable public spaces inside such an unusual structure presents challenges that cannot be solved by dramatic computer images alone, and the desert environment makes every one of them harder. There is no existing city of this shape to learn from either, so even routine engineering decisions have to be worked out from scratch.

4 In May 2026, Semafor reported that further work on The Line had been put back until after 2030 as Saudi authorities reconsidered their spending priorities. The report did not establish that every element of the plan had been permanently abandoned. It did, however, point to a widening gap between the early promotional vision and what might realistically get off the ground in the near future. Governments rarely announce a change of heart loudly, which is why a reported delay can say more than an official statement.

5 Large projects often change as costs rise and governments face competing demands on their budgets. Supporters argue that ambitious experiments can drive innovation even when their original scale is scaled back, and that a few useful ideas may survive. Critics question whether the money would be better invested in housing, public transport and infrastructure that communities can actually use within a decade. There is also a question of timing, because a project that slips by ten years loses the technology and much of the enthusiasm it was designed around.

6 The Line is a particularly dramatic example of a familiar dilemma. An impressive design can persuade people that the future is already visible and more or less paid for. Construction forces them to confront far less glamorous questions: how much will it cost, who will live there, and what happens if the financial plan no longer adds up?

Sources: Semafor. Picture: AI illustration.

4 True, false or not given

Circle **T** (true), **F** (false) or **NG** (the article does not say).

1. The Line's promoters expected most residents to depend on private cars. T F NG
2. The report established that the plan had been permanently abandoned. T F NG
3. The delay was linked to a change in the Saudi authorities' spending priorities. T F NG
4. Investors have asked for their money back. T F NG
5. The writer suggests that a very long delay can weaken the idea behind a project. T F NG

5 Vocabulary

Complete the sentences with words from the box. Two words are not needed.

dilemma **diversify** **expansion** **glamorous** **necessities** **obstacles** **reconsidered** **reluctant**

1. The team overcame several _____ before the bridge was finally opened.
2. After the flood, the charity gave families food, water and other basic _____ .
3. After the protest, the council _____ its decision and agreed to keep the library open.
4. Countries that rely on one product often try to _____ their economies.
5. Choosing between a high salary and more free time is a real _____ for many people.
6. The magazine's covers look _____ , but daily life for the staff was far from exciting.

6 Verb forms

Write the correct form of the verb in brackets.

1. By the time the report was published, the early images _____ around the world. (TRAVEL)
2. Details of the new budget _____ yet. (NOT / PUBLISH)
3. Critics say the money _____ on housing instead. (SHOULD / SPEND)
4. While the engineers _____ the materials, the budget was cut. (TEST)
5. When costs rose sharply, officials _____ to wait. (DECIDE)

7 Language focus: linking words

Complete the sentences with words from the box. Two words are not needed. Despite takes a noun phrase. Whereas introduces a contrast clause. Otherwise, therefore and unless each begin a new clause or sentence.

despite	otherwise	provided	therefore	unless	unlike	whereas

1. _____ the enormous costs, the government kept the project going for years.
2. Some people see the project as a bold risk, _____ others see it as a waste of money.
3. Costs must be controlled; _____ , the budget will run out.
4. The first phase took longer than planned. _____ , the opening date was moved back.
5. The project will not go ahead _____ the government finds extra funding.

SPEAK

8 Talk about it

Discuss in pairs or small groups. Give reasons for your answers.

1. What would you ask the people behind a huge new city before moving there?
2. Can a city designed on paper leave room for unexpected ways of living?
3. Would you rather improve an existing city or build a new one?

9 Role-play: shrink the city or keep the dream

Work in pairs. Read your card, then have the conversation. Swap roles and do it again.

Student A · the government adviser

You want to keep the full 170-kilometre plan. Explain why the idea is important. Answer your partner's worries and try to agree a plan.

Student B · the finance officer

You think the city is too costly. You want to make it smaller or wait until after 2030. Ask about the cost and offer a compromise.

Useful phrases

I'm worried about the cost.

We can't give up on this dream now.

What would that mean for the people who live there?

Could we start with a smaller version?

I'd rather wait than waste the money.

Let's agree on a plan we can both support.

Afterwards, tell the class: did you keep the big plan, shrink it or put it off, and why?

ANSWER KEY

2 Key words

1 H · 2 D · 3 C · 4 B · 5 E · 6 A · 7 G · 8 F

4 True, false or not given

1 F · 2 F · 3 T · 4 NG · 5 T

5 Vocabulary

1 obstacles · 2 necessities · 3 reconsidered · 4 diversify · 5 dilemma · 6 glamorous

6 Verb forms

1 had travelled · 2 have not been published · 3 should be spent · 4 were testing · 5 decided

7 Language focus

1 Despite · 2 whereas · 3 otherwise · 4 Therefore · 5 unless

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