



Drivers take a back seat in new transport era



Driverless vehicles look set to change the city landscape in countless ways...and are likely to do so much sooner than you may think. Coupled with the meteoric rise of Uber and a renewed focus on car sharing, urban transport is facing a major shift in direction.

General Motors executive Harry Lightsey gave a strong indication of the speed and scope of this transport revolution at a recent conference in Washington. "We expect the auto industry to change more in the next five years than it has in the last 50," he predicted.

There was broad agreement at the Urban Land Institute event that driverless cars will have a widespread and disruptive impact: combined with 'already popular car-sharing programmes', they will require people to rethink 'everything'.

Among the many likely impacts of the autonomous vehicle rollout are:

- Massive reduction in parking spaces, freeing up land for other uses
- Decline in demand for oil and gas as most driverless vehicles are electric
- Lost municipal revenue from parking fees, tickets, moving violations and taxes
- More street-level space required for pick-ups and drop-offs
- Greater need for data centres and transportation-oriented cybersecurity
- Huge drop in household car ownership

A recent KPMG survey of car industry bosses found 59% believe that more than half of all car owners today will no longer want to own a car by 2025. By then, most manufacturers estimate that the first highly- to fully-automated vehicles (AVs) will have hit the market.

The arrival of the driverless vehicle will present even more choice if the experts are to be believed. With six levels of automation – from no to full – people can choose from a menu of options. For example, they can still drive their own classic car, be a 'controlling passenger' in their private self-driving car or a 'complete passenger' in a robo-taxi.



Stan Boland, CEO of FiveAI, which builds AI-driven software for AVs, says we are far more likely to rely on “mobility as a service” by 2030. “Imagine an Uber-like service you can summon at the touch of a button, but without a driver. Consumers will buy a service like using an Uber today, but with a wider range of vehicle configurations to suit different types of travel.”

Uber is already laying the groundwork for this new way of travelling. In the UK, people use its app-based taxi service for an estimated 1 million trips per week across 20 towns and cities. It has become so popular that congestion is now an issue - especially around major transport hubs. In response, Uber is seeking a portfolio of car parks where drivers can wait to pick up passengers rather than clogging up busy roads.

The taxi giant is also looking to roll out its UberPool car-sharing scheme which, in the UK, is so far restricted to London. It doubled the area of the city covered by this service last December, estimating that customers had opted to use it 3 million times since launching in 2015.

In another important step, Uber has teamed with PRS developer Moda Living to offer tenants £100 of Uber credits per month in exchange for their parking space. The concept will be trialled at Moda’s Angel Gardens scheme in Manchester where, if all tenants agree, it could release 46,600 sq ft for alternative uses.

Uber says cars are one the most expensive assets people own yet are only used 5% of the time. Its tie-up with Moda is a novel idea and taps into a zeitgeist where car ownership is reducing and car sharing/taxi services appear to be growing. If this paves the way for a greener, safer and less congested future, we could be entering another golden age of transport, albeit one where the driver increasingly moves into the passenger seat.