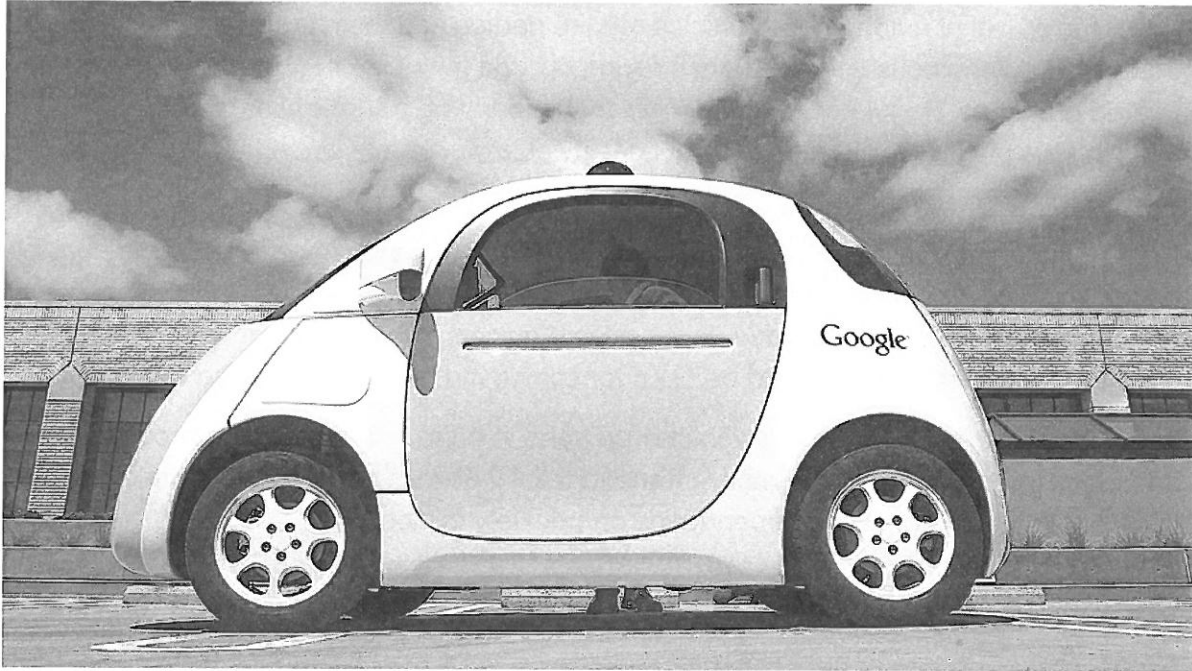


Driverless cars are leaving cities in the dust, report says

By Detroit Free Press, adapted by Newsela staff on 02.04.16

Word Count **687**



This photo shows Google's new self-driving car during a demonstration at the Google campus in Mountain View, California. A study says that cities are lagging behind in preparing for driverless cars. Photo: AP/Tony Avelar

DETROIT, Mich. — The technology industry is racing to create an autonomous-driven vehicle and get it on the road in 10 years or less. To be successful, America's urban planners need to resolve a host of questions about how cities will respond to the future of transportation.

A new report from the National League of Cities was recently released. It finds only 6 percent of U.S. cities have devoted planning resources to figuring out changes needed to accommodate self-driving vehicles. Only 3 percent have studied the impact of ride-hailing services like Uber and Lyft, which function as alternatives to traditional taxi services.

However, 50 percent of cities' plans include recommendations for new highway construction. New highways help address auto congestion in the traditional way. The issue is handled with more roads, more lanes and more parking garages.

In Detroit, the changes wrought by autonomous vehicles could be especially profound. Detroit residents are already coping with a rapidly redeveloping downtown and the coming of new mass transit options.

Questions About Road Ahead

The report, titled "City of the Future: Technology and Mobility," is meant to help city leaders understand, imagine and plan for the coming changes in the urban environment due to autonomous vehicles and other new transportation options.

Among the questions that cities need to consider:

—Will the arrival of autonomous vehicles require dedicated lanes for them? Technology that keeps autonomous vehicles from straying outside their lane might solve many safety-related problems. Regulators might decide that separating traditional cars from autonomous ones into different lanes or zones would work best, especially in crowded downtown areas.

—Will autonomous vehicles lessen the need for downtown parking garages? One possible future would see most autonomous vehicles as part of large fleets operated by services like Uber and Lyft. In that scenario, fewer private owners would be looking for parking downtown, and urban sites could be used for something other than parking decks.

—Will the spread of autonomous vehicles go hand in hand with more bicycle commuting and other "green" forms of alternative transportation? Should cities spend more on public transportation to help lessen dependence on privately owned cars?

Technology Goes Full Throttle

Brooks Rainwater is an author of the new report. He is also director of the Center for City Solutions and Applied Research at the National League of Cities in Washington D.C. Rainwater said these issues are starting to get a look as the technology of autonomous vehicles advances with unexpected speed.

"The rate of change is definitely happening much faster," Rainwater said. "Cities are getting up to speed and they're looking at what they can do, but the planning perspective oftentimes hasn't been aligning with how quickly technology has been changing."

Besides the rush toward autonomous vehicles, the report found that 13 cities now have new streetcar lines coming. It discovered that more than 20 have so-called bus rapid transit systems under consideration, and 49 cities are building or planning new bicycle-sharing systems to be in place by 2020. Some cities are doing all three.

And in addition to the on-demand services like Uber and Lyft, a company called Bridj is expanding. Bridj runs on-demand bus system that currently operates in Washington, D.C., and Boston.

A Call For "Complete Streets"

All these changes will lessen the need of cities to accommodate private automobiles, although to what extent won't be known for years.

Todd Scott is executive director of the nonprofit Detroit Greenways Coalition. He said he would like to see more planners recognize the importance of road design in building livable, vibrant and safe communities. So-called "complete streets" would reduce lanes for vehicles. This provides lanes for bicycles, wider sidewalks for outdoor seating, medians to make it easier for pedestrians to cross, and more. These options become more likely if there are fewer privately owned cars and trucks clogging up the roadways.

"Complete streets policies are more often aspirational than reality, and planners can lead on changing that," Scott told the Detroit Free Press newspaper. Planners should focus on more dense communities, he said. Those are areas "where biking, walking and transit can be viable transportation options," Scott said.

Quiz

- 1 Which of the following statements BEST represents Brooks Rainwater's approach toward city planning in the article?
 - (A) It's important to be aware of new technologies and challenges and learn to adapt quickly.
 - (B) Cities are too far behind in their planning and will have to deal with the consequences.
 - (C) The best approach is to get as many cars off the streets as possible and aim for complete streets.
 - (D) City planners do not have very much power, especially compared with the technology companies.

- 2 The author develops the main idea of the article in each of the following ways EXCEPT:
 - (A) by giving statistics about what percent of cities are planning for self-driving cars
 - (B) by quoting an expert who helped to write the report on the rate of change
 - (C) by including examples of questions from the report that city planners need to tackle
 - (D) by quoting an expert who wants to see more cities focus on "complete streets" policies

- 3 Read the sentences from the section "A Call For Complete Streets."

Planners should focus on more dense communities, he said. Those are areas "where biking, walking and transit can be viable transportation options," Scott said.

Which of the following is the BEST substitute for "viable?"

- (A) lively
- (B) idealistic
- (C) practical
- (D) profitable

- 4 Read the paragraph from the introduction [paragraphs 1-4]

In Detroit, the changes wrought by autonomous vehicles could be especially profound. Detroit residents are already coping with a rapidly redeveloping downtown and the coming of new mass transit options.

What is meant by "profound" in this example?

- (A) deep
 - (B) intense
 - (C) heartfelt
 - (D) emotional
5. In at least one paragraph (5-7 sentences) answer the following prompt about the article.
- What search terms might you use to conduct more research to understand some of the topics in this article better? What would you hope to learn in your research?