

Parking's Role in the New Transportation Ecosystem

By Brett Wood, CAPP, PE

EVERYWHERE YOU TURN THESE DAYS, you hear that the personal automobile will be replaced by autonomous cars and drones, advanced ride-sharing services, and hyperloops—technologies to improve personal transportation. And some of our constituents' outlook is that the parking industry will be gone within the next few years. I try to calm my parking industry friends by reminding them that we are all kind of old; by the time that happens, we'll be ready to retire anyway.

But truth be told, sticking our heads in the sand or fighting change is likely to leave us on the outside looking in. So, what should we do?

First, it should be said that we aren't entirely sure for what what we're preparing. While autonomous cars are becoming more prevalent, we don't yet know their future. Will people own them outright? Will it be a full car-sharing model? Will zero-occupant vehicles zip around our cities?

The answer is probably somewhere in between, with a mix of personally owned vehicles (autonomous and traditional); autonomous transit fleets with shorter,

more efficient routes; and autonomous ride-sharing vehicles carrying and delivering passengers more efficiently. This mixed conclusion will most likely mean that the way vehicles interact with our cities and campuses will dramatically change. And if you look around, that's likely already happening with bike-sharing, ride-sharing, car-sharing, and other rapid changes to the ways people move around.

Getting Control of the Curb

Step one for parking professionals is finding a way to control the activity along curbs (see the July issue for more on this).

The recent IPI Emerging Trends survey listed this as parking professionals' No. 1 concern. In the past two or three years, municipal parking operators have likely seen a transition from parking-centric curbs to a multitude of curb uses and activities. Food trucks, transit, ride-share vehicles, freight loading, parklets, cycling activity, and regular parking compete daily for curb space. Each plays a critical role in enhancing the success of communities' businesses and patrons.

I often hear that losing on-street parking spaces is devastating for parking professionals. Actually, we should embrace this change and manage our curbside environment to serve the surrounding community's needs. Bicycle parking may seem like a lost parking space, but if it incentivizes patrons to not drive, it reduces congestion, maintains business support, and frees up other parking spaces elsewhere. Our curbs should be designed and managed to adapt to the needs around

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them, including dedicated transportation network company connection points, flexible spaces that serve needs by time of day, and prioritization for multiple modes to serve better access to the community.

Expanding Your Role

The primary task of today's parking professional is to embrace expanded responsibility and knowledge. We've adapted well during the past decade to be specialists in operations, management, technology, politics, planning, communication, and beyond. However,

on the verge of this potentially staggering change to our communities, it's imperative for us to expand our knowledge base to grow the ways our parking systems adapt to change. We need to become specialists in mobility, connected vehicles, transportation demand management, first- and last-mile connectivity, and transit integration. We need to be the driving force for change in our communities, rather than the hesitant and resistant obstacle that inevitably gets pushed aside.

Change is unavoidable. While many of us can weather the short-term storm

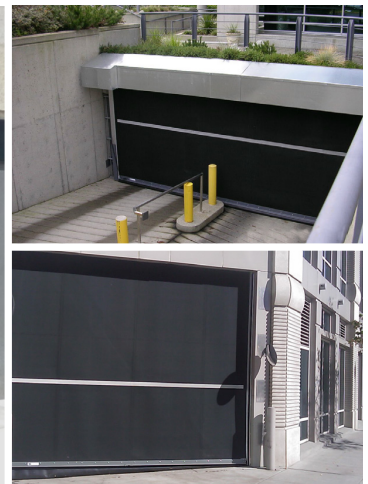
and keep plugging away at our status quo parking gigs, the industry will experience this change. How well we adapt today defines how our industry will evolve during the next 20 years as well as the type of industry we leave for the people coming after us. Will our industry be an obsolete relic? Or an evolving force for change? 📍



BRETT WOOD, CAPP, PE, is a parking and transportation planner with Kimley-Horn. He can be reached at brett.wood@kimley-horn.com.



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