

# THE FUTURE OF PARKING

By John Dorsett



No one can know what the future holds, but I am optimistic parking will play a meaningful role and not be buried somewhere with all of the buggy whips. Parking has changed in past decades, it will continue to change, and the change will likely be incremental. Abraham Lincoln’s quote “The best thing about the future is that it comes one day at a time” offers some advice on managing one’s emotions during periods of change.

The following are some things that we can expect to see unfold in the U.S. in the next few decades:

- Population and real estate development growth. In 1990, the population was 250 million. Today it is about 325 million, and it is projected to increase to 438 million by 2050. This growth will stimulate real estate development and mobility needs, including parking.
- TNCs. Transportation network companies such as Uber and Lyft are growing and will likely continue to grow, further affecting parking demand and revenues. Uber didn’t exist until 2009, and today it reportedly operates in 248 U.S. cities.
- Autonomous vehicles (AVs). Automobile and technology companies are promising that fully autonomous vehicles—vehicles that drive themselves without human intervention—will be available for consumer purchase within five years. However, it will likely be decades before they become mainstream. Most experts expect AV sales to be predominant, if not 100 percent of new-vehicle sales, by sometime around 2040, but with the average age of vehicles at 11.5 years, that means that fully autonomous vehicles may not represent a majority of vehicles on the road until at least 2050.
- Technology growth. Fiber-optic networks are here and growing. Computer software that can teach itself—artificial intelligence—has been invented and is making its way into different products. Cellular 5G networks are coming. Cities are wanting technology-based solutions, whether payment-by-cell-phone, automated parking guidance, parking enforcement through license plate recognition, automated tolling, or centralized management.
- Mobility options. Cities are undergoing continuous redevelopment and offering transportation options, promoting downtown work-live-play environments that encourage walking, biking, car-sharing, and the

use of public transportation. In some cities, developers are providing fewer residential parking spaces and tenants are self-selecting to live in these housing units.

- Smart cities. With the increased availability of data from sensors, cities are making more decisions that are data driven and that improve service delivery. Last year, Columbus, Ohio, competed against 77 other cities and was awarded a \$50 million U.S. Department of Transportation Smart City grant (see the November issue of *The Parking Professional* for more) to develop the city into a laboratory consisting of AVs roaming city streets, more electric-vehicle charging stations, and cars communicating with traffic signals and other transportation infrastructure.

## What Can We Do?

Our goal is to create value for stakeholders. We do that by being thoughtful about the future. The following are added-value propositions we can all embrace:

- Right-size the parking supply considering the effects of TNCs to provide just enough parking for commerce to thrive and maximize parking occupancy. Right-sizing requires no extra capital and indeed usually results in lower costs through fewer spaces.
- Consider TNC pick-up and drop-off zones.
- Consider flexibility in parking facility design, allowing for the adaptive reuse of spaces into non-parking land uses, e.g., residential, retail, or office. As an alternative to paying a premium to construct for adaptive reuse, it may be beneficial to plan to phase out older facilities by demolition, instead of bearing the cost to change the use of the new facility later.
- Facilitate the new technology needed to accommodate autonomous vehicles. For example, where needed, consider installing microcells that allow cellular communications throughout a facility. **P**



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