

The urban mobility revolution is here

By **John Rossant**, Chairman of the NewCities Foundation and Chief Curator of LA CoMotion

The jury is now in: the next great urban revolution will be sparked by the vast changes underway in how people and goods move around. Consider that over the last century or so, nothing much changed in the landscape of urban mobility. The way we move around Manhattan in 2018 is almost exactly the way we moved around the city in 1918, right after the First World War—in private cars, taxis, subways and buses. Within the next ten years though, everything will change as urban mobility becomes more electric, more autonomous, more shared and more connected. And also, of course, airborne: within ten years, autonomous and electric air taxis will be a regular feature in most large cities.

At the heart of this revolution is a dramatic transition. The global tech industry, fueled by Artificial Intelligence (AI) and billions in funding, is now segueing into mobility. Tech pioneers like Elon Musk—who made his early fortune in the Internet—was an early and very notable example of how Silicon Valley is discovering mobility as the next big frontier. Now tech-powered mobility startups are multiplying like mushrooms on four continents. Venture capitalists are investing billions in new mobility technologies. Many bets will fail—but there is no doubt that the successes will transform our cities and towns—and also our lives.

Human mobility is in the second stage of an ongoing tech-driven upheaval. In the first two decades of this century, information became mobile. The marriage of the cell phone to a networked computer put the universe of knowledge into our pockets and purses, and added what amounts to an electronic lobe to the human brain. We're now accustomed, and even addicted, to carrying around networked technology. In coming years, advanced blends of that technology will be carrying us around.

This revolution couldn't have happened a decade, or even five years ago.



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But the pieces are now in place. Batteries are more efficient than ever and ready for prime time, material sciences are cooking up miracle composites, smartphones have incubated a host of location-based apps, and AI is rocketing ahead. The job, already underway, involves launching new varieties of electronic devices, big ones this time, most of them fitted with wheels or wings, and a host of services to manage them.

Mobility is an enormous market, the biggest in the world. Movement, after all, is central to our lives. If you add up all the money spent on cars, trains, planes, oil, shipping, body shops, the road crews jackhammering on the highways—in short, global spending on movement—it consumes fully one-fifth of the planet's total economic output.

So it's a mouthwatering target. But there's another even more important

incentive fueling this revolution. Many of us involved in developing new mobility solutions believe fervently that the cleaner and more efficient mobility technologies we are launching will save our cities from choking gridlock—and perhaps even rescue our species.

That is ultimately why the mobility revolution will be even more consequential than the IT revolution. It will reshape the geography of all cities and will alter the way we humans think about work and play and alter our very notions of space and time and movement.

Cities that move effectively—and equitably—will be the real power players in the coming decades. Creating greater access to mobility in our cities is something we must aspire to in order to improve the lives of those who rely on our roadways and mobility services—as virtually all of us do. ■