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As cities get smarter and mobility solutions and consumer habits change, more urban planners are eschewing the construction of public parking garages — or changing how they conceive of them altogether.

Smart Cities

Cities across the globe are installing technology to gather data in the hopes of saving money, becoming cleaner, reducing traffic, and improving urban life. In Digital Trends' [Smart Cities series](#), we'll examine how smart cities deal with everything from energy management, to disaster preparedness, to public safety, and what it all means for you.

With ride-sharing services gaining ground, a shifting demographic of people who no longer own cars, and the coming revolution of autonomous vehicles, transportation planners and city managers are rethinking parking despite the fact that more people are expected to move from rural to urban centers in the coming years.

According to a survey by commercial real estate firm CBRE, [U.S. & Canadian Mobility 2018](#), the concept of commuting by car is about to undergo a paradigm shift. Indeed, in the U.S. people under 30 are more than seven-times more likely to take public transportation than those over 60 years of age. Furthermore, over the past three decades, the percentage of younger people who apply for a driver's license has [dropped nearly 20 percent](#), according to the University of Michigan's Transportation Institute.

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“The demographics are changing, with younger people not owning as many cars,” Brian Abbanat told Digital Trends. Abbanat is a senior transportation planner for the city of Davis in California, which is considered one of the most progressive cities in the U.S. when it comes to transportation; it was one of the first

municipalities to create dedicated bicycle lanes back in 1967.

Still, it’s a challenge to predict what a city’s parking needs may be decades into the future.

“And technologies come and go. Fuel cells were going to be big, then there was the Segway, now it’s the e-bike sharing systems,” Abbanat said.

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As for the long term, Davis is not planning on building any parking garages. Outside consultants agree that the coming trends argue against it, with the mayor of Davis, Brett Lee, recently pointing out that a municipal garage would cost roughly \$15 million and the city would have to increase property taxes for five years to cover the cost.

Moreover, there are many benefits that result from choosing not to build parking lots.

UN-PAVING PARADISE

“It’s not just about the car industry,” Esther Bahne, head of strategy and innovation at [Mini](#), told Digital Trends. “It’s about the whole environment. Getting rid of parking lots, for example, can free up streets, allow for more parks and less pollution.” Bahne, who has worked in the auto industry for over 14 years, said the coming changes of electrification, ride sharing, and autonomous vehicles require creative ideas in cities in order to plan for the future.

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Esther Bahne

In fact, even where people are still building parking lots, they are taking a whole new approach that the Abbanat calls “adaptive reuse” of parking facilities.

In Columbus, Ohio, which won the U.S. Department of Transportation’s \$40 million Smart City Challenge two years ago, the local government has been studying and running various pilot projects to deliver solutions to city problems. Andrew Ginther, the mayor of Columbus, told Digital Trends that one of the major issues facing towns is affordable housing, especially as more people are predicted to move to cities.

“So now we ask, how can we build a parking garage so that it can be repurposed and reused in the future?” Ginther told Digital Trends when we asked him [about the city’s smart city progress](#).

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MAKING THEM DIFFERENT

“We are now building parking garages with the ramps on the outside of the main structure, in anticipation of a future where we won’t need as much parking and can then re-purpose the garages as residential properties, just by tearing off the outer ramps,” Michael Lee Sherwood, the director of technology and information for Las Vegas, [told us at the Smart Mobility conference](#) in Tel Aviv last fall.

Such considerations also affect the design and construction of office and apartment buildings.

A Hudson Pacific Properties office complex going up on Sunset Boulevard in Los Angeles, for example, will have a dedicated ride-share drop-off lobby and two floors of parking that can be converted into office space in the future. The location is expected to house Netflix’s new headquarters, but even in the car-centric West Coast metropolis, planners are considering changes in the transportation landscape.

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Such design changes mean building garages with higher ceilings and eliminating the sloping floors of typical indoor garages. A 15-foot floor-to-floor plan, for example, is usually needed for a loft, shopping, or apartment space. And if garages are to be converted to habitable office or apartment space, there also has to be accommodation for additional plumbing and electrical work, something that's usually not considered in the construction of poured concrete multi-level parking facilities.

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vehicles, they may not need parking, in which case a garage wouldn't be profitable. So being able to easily convert such spaces into office, retail, or rental properties is a critical consideration today.

"But it's hard to foresee the changes that are going to happen," Abbanat of the city of Davis said. Even though the city has had bike lanes for over 40 years, for example, it's now wrestling with how to handle e-bikes and scooter sharing services because the city has an ordinance that bikes need to be locked at a bike rack. However, there aren't many bike racks around town now; should they install more? What about on suburban streets? What about charging stations?

Now imagine the legislative headaches when people start riding in shared autonomous electric vehicles everywhere.

Editors' Recommendations

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Annie Griffiths has spent 40 years as a photojournalist, starting her career as one of the first women photographers at National Geographic. She now runs her own nonprofit working to empower women around the globe.

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