

URL: <https://ecorner.stanford.edu/in-brief/play-out-the-possibilities/>

Stanford Professor Chris Gerdes talks about conceivable second- and third-order consequences of widespread adoption of autonomous vehicles. He uses the example of how transportation costs could drop dramatically when drivers are removed from the equation. Will that drive up car use and energy consumption? Will that open up new ways to advertise to a captive audience that is otherwise sitting idly?



Transcript

- What are the unintended consequences? So this is one that I enjoy playing around with a little bit, because if you work through the math about how much transportation needs to cost or could cost per mile, let's say that I have developed my software for an automated vehicle.. I can now replicate that with very low incremental costs.. I have electric vehicles.. I use some shared mobility.. I can in fact move people around town potentially for about 10 cents a mile or so.. And we're a magnitude cheaper than I do today.. Okay, so if you want an idea about where our ventures may be in the future, play that out a little bit.. What happens when transportation costs for individuals drop by a factor of 10? Hmm.. Suddenly now the cost associated with moving people, or potentially the cost associated with moving spaces changes a lot.. That can have a huge negative consequence, right? As something becomes much cheaper, I'm gonna wanna consume more of it..

Maybe I actually don't bring people to places, maybe I just send rooms to people, because I can move that around.. Maybe, actually, transportation at this point is provided for free, so long as I can actually get the data of where you're going.. Maybe data actually becomes the gold of the gold rush, and not mobility in some ways.. Maybe actually what I will even pay you to go somewhere if I can kinda curate that experience that you're getting in your automated vehicle with whoever the advertiser is.. Forget clicks, if you look at cost per clicks, well, imagine instead of having somebody click on their home computer, see what people are willing to pay for that, think about 10 cents a mile transportation, people could provide free rides to give you a much more immersive experience with advertising.. I think there's all sorts of different places that this could go, and I think those will have either positive or negative consequences.. So I think it's a great exercise to sort of play out what are the industries that are relying on these transportation barriers, or in fact, profiting from this, and how will this reshape our world?..