

## **Can You Imagine a New Safer World of Driverless Vehicles?**

Doesn't it sound great? No drunk, distracted, speeding, careless, clueless drivers! It's closer than you might realize. Although the big three automakers never saw it coming.

Over the past 10 years Google has been executing its vision of millions of autonomous vehicles safely transporting passengers who were making good use of their time not having the responsibility of driving the vehicle. In 2011, they went to GM and pitched their idea of self-driving cars. GM just didn't get it. They were stuck in their 1970s business model of creating shiny cars to sell in showrooms. Finding no takers, Google pressed on with their vision of providing a unique "transportation service."

Fast-forward to 2017. GM has announced a \$2.25 billion self-driving subsidiary called Cruise Automation. Ford announced plans of investing \$4 billion into its own autonomous car start-up. They realized they had been left at the gate. In 2016, Google was way ahead of them and spun off its self-driving car division known as Waymo. An analyst with Morgan Stanley this month speculated that Waymo may be worth \$175 billion, which is 40% more than the combined capitalization of GM, Ford and Fiat Chrysler.

Google's latest vision involves on-demand autonomous vehicles as a transportation service. They calculate it costs about \$.65 a mile to own and operate your vehicle, which sits in the garage or parking lot most of the time. They believe they can provide this service for about \$.20 per mile. That makes sense because Uber, which is developing its own strategy, calculates that paying the driver of their vehicles accounts for about 70% to 90% of their cost per mile.

The realization that Google and Uber have the same end in mind is what finally caught the attention of the big three automakers. A GM executive has been quoted as saying he expects to see "more changes in the automotive industry in the next five years than in the last 50." One of those changes, no doubt, will be on-demand autonomous vehicles. Lyft is already experimenting in several markets with unlimited rides on demand for a flat fee of \$200 a month. Why own a car? Autonomous vehicles will be even less expensive to operate.

This is all very interesting you might be thinking, but how does it relate to cycling. Despite some well-publicized software errors by Tesla, autonomous vehicles will be much safer than driver-controlled vehicles. We're still in the early stages of the software development of autonomous driving. It will get better and better with the continued application of artificial intelligence. This is an area where artificial intelligence will shine.

That's why we can all imagine a safer world of small autonomous vehicles which will always stay within its lane, never drift into the bike lane, never run a red light or stop sign and never tell a cop "I never saw them."

Source: Wall Street Journal, Late to the Driverless Revolution, by Lawrence D. Burns, Saturday/Sunday, August 18-19, 2018. The complete article is even more fascinating.

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