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DRIVERLESS CARS

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DRIVERLESS CARS

Five Myths of Autonomous Vehicles

This article suggests that we should not believe all the hype we have read about the coming of autonomous vehicles (AVs). It's very possible that they won't eliminate private cars and that they're not going to fix downtown congestion. Here is thinking that argues the reality of five persistent myths concerning the impact of driverless cars in the future.

Myth # 1

There will be fewer private cars.

Recent studies predict that the advent of self-driving cars will reduce private car ownership in the United States by 43% by 2030, because families will need fewer cars as they opt for vehicles summoned on demand. But people don't buy cars just to get around. They own cars for the convenience of getting from A to

B -- a car at your doorstep, available any time you need it, with your belongings where you left them, no planning ahead.

Automobiles signal our values, our identity, and extend our private space unlike what a shared service provides. A lot of people will want to own a private auto to use the way they want, without compromise. For many people owning a private car will be cheaper than buying a self-driving car or hailing a ride. It's going to take more than a new generation of highly efficient taxis to eliminate private car ownership.

Myth # 2

Self-driving cars will fix congestion.

Automakers, politicians, and tech leaders say that self-driving cars will end congested





streets by traveling in tight groups, packing more cars onto the road.

But without careful management, autonomous vehicles will likely make traffic worse, cruising the streets waiting for their next ride. Research shows that if people choose driverless cars over public transportation, traffic volume in urban areas will increase. The more self-driving cars are used, the more cars there will be on the road, and the more downtown roads will be congested.

Myth # 3

AVs will reduce environmental impact.

People conflate AV technology with electric vehicles. Some experts claim that self-driving cars could reduce traffic-related carbon dioxide by up to 60%. But self-driving cars may be both electric and gasoline powered. Even if AVs are electric, their environmental impact will depend on the generation source of electricity. As driverless cars make road travel cheaper and more readily available, it is likely that the number of vehicles on the road and the miles traveled will increase -- as will the environmental impact.

Myth # 4

Auto insurance industry will shut down.

Driving an AV eliminates human error, lowering the cost of car insurance, and causing a contraction of the insurance industry by 60% by 2050.

But autonomous vehicles will not eliminate the risk of accidents -- just reapportion it. AVs will still make mistakes, and computers will crash, injuring or killing people and damaging property. AVs will introduce new risks like being hacked by bad actors. It is unreasonable to believe that insurance will no longer be needed.

Myth # 5

AVs are safer than human driving.

Some optimistic reports suggest that the widespread use of AVs could reduce traffic accidents by as much as 90% due to eliminating driver error.

But we don't currently have the right tools or protocols to evaluate the safety of AVs. Self-driving cars don't have enough miles on the road to compare their safety record with driven vehicles. Accidents involving AVs will happen and will generate a lot of press coverage. As long as there is a risk of an accident involving an AV, there will be a significant degree of mistrust. The public is wary of this new technology -- one study shows that only 21% of adults would willingly ride in a driverless car.

Edited from an August, 16 2019 article in the Washington Post written by John Browne 