



**The Journal of Robotics,
Artificial Intelligence & Law**

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Autonomous Vehicles, Ride Sharing, and the University

Louis Archambault and Kevin M. Levy*

This article addresses some of the pending disruption for colleges planning for autonomous, connected, electric and shared vehicles and ride sharing and provides suggestions on how a campus can prepare for those changes.

The real estate industry is on the verge of major disruption due to futuristic technologies. These technologies are changing the way developers and cities plan for future development. Two such technologies are ride-sharing applications and autonomous, connected, electric and shared (“ACES”) vehicles. The technologies will decrease the need for parking spaces, both in structures and lots, and present opportunities for educational leaders to rethink their campus plans to prepare for ACES vehicles. This article addresses some of that pending disruption for colleges planning for ACES and ride-sharing vehicles and provides suggestions on how a campus can prepare for those changes.

Ride Sharing

Ride sharing is a recent introduction to America’s new gig economy, with 45 percent of young adults aged 18-29 claiming to use ride-sharing apps Uber and Lyft as of 2018, according to “Snapshot: Who Uses Ride-Sharing Services in the U.S.?”¹ by Gallup. And though the introduction of ACES vehicles to America’s streets might seem entirely futuristic, the National Highway Transportation Safety Administration (“NHSTA”)² already acknowledges that ACES vehicles have been driving on our roads for several years in varying levels from cruise control mechanisms to automatic braking to prevent crashes. These vehicles have the propensity to simply take up less space on America’s streets and can drastically reduce our dependence on static parking facilities.

On Campus Parking

Institutions of higher education engage in comprehensive multi-year campus plans outlining projected growth, anticipating changes in university needs, and predicting their place in the local community. Providing a campus plan to the municipal zoning board is required in some jurisdictions in the country. In Washington, D.C., for example, where every college and university campus is zoned as a special exception within residential zones, complying with local planning regulations is vital to a campus's continued prosperity. The District's requirement that schools consider how parking factors into their campus plan is a smart one, and schools across the country should proactively address the topic in their own internal campus expansion and development plans, preparing for the future with an eye toward ACES vehicles and the ride-sharing economy.

Challenges

Colleges and universities can face significant challenges³ if they do not appropriately prepare for ACES technology. As large parking requirements are reduced in zoning codes and parking structures become obsolete, universities will face major costs in demolishing garages and constructing new buildings for future use.

*The Washington Post*⁴ has reported that urban planners are beginning to prepare for shifting real estate priorities, recognizing that the demand for parking, especially street parking, will begin to decrease if ACES vehicles begin to hit the streets en masse. Large parking requirements in zoning laws will likely be updated to recognize the growing number of people who use ride-sharing apps like Uber and Lyft, as Professor Jonathan Levine of the University of Michigan explains.⁵

Many universities face challenges similar to those that urban cities face. Throughout the country, institutions of higher education are required to have a specified amount of parking spaces per square footage of developed real estate. Given the perceived need for less parking in the future, some universities have redeveloped surface parking lots into modern academic, residential, and administrative buildings accompanied by new above- and below-ground parking garage structures. A New Jersey university announced a major redevelopment on its flagship campus a few years ago that

both beautified its campus and built at least five new buildings, but resulted in fewer parking spaces for municipal residents. Another New Jersey institution revamped its campus plan regarding parking, acknowledging that centralizing parking⁶ “mitigates the risk of overinvesting in parking infrastructure at a time of anticipated major shifts in transportation technology. There is potential for technologies such as autonomous vehicles and smart campus systems to lead to significant changes in the way people arrive on campus and the manner in which vehicles are parked.”

Recently, a Pennsylvania university completed its redevelopment of a large surface parking lot into new residence halls with future plans to develop a coffee bar, a restaurant, a new performing arts center, and a five-level parking garage. The development has not come without community costs, however, such as some community leaders protesting the university’s ability to work cooperatively with the township to adjust its zoning restrictions to permit these new redevelopments. Assumption College in Worcester, Massachusetts, partnered with Uber⁷ in 2018 to provide full coverage of a student’s Uber bill to get from campus to another institution in the city for classes, and according to Uber’s press release “the College will contribute \$4 to the total cost of a student’s ride to select student hotspots around Worcester (including the train station, movie theater, and . . . a number of trendy restaurants), as well as rides back to campus from anywhere in the city.”

Some jurisdictions are reducing their parking requirements in light of changing behaviors, such as ride sharing and technological advancements, including autonomous and electric vehicles. The City of Chandler, Arizona, has effectively become a municipal laboratory for the issue⁸ of ACES vehicles and ride-sharing companies. Chandler adopted a zoning ordinance designed to provide the City with more flexibility to reduce minimum parking requirements as parking demand changes and encourage developments to install passenger loading zones according to the City’s Principal Planner. Specifically, the ordinance allows developers to request a reduction of up to 40 percent “of the number of parking spaces required” when they include design features to accommodate increased demand for electric vehicles and ride-sharing opportunities, and also as ACES vehicles are introduced to the local economy.

The City of Chandler has taken a progressive approach to the car-less future, and universities are well-situated to partner with their government counterparts to chart the way forward.

The Future

In envisioning their future campuses, colleges and universities should prepare for this changing landscape by:

- Contemplating plans for repurposing⁹ parking garage structures and parking lots into academic or even residential spaces.
- Proactively considering the immediate impact of fewer parking spaces in your local community, even as future predictions limit parking needs.
- Centralizing pickup and drop-off locations and incentivizing students and employees to use ride-sharing apps.
- When redeveloping, working with local zoning boards to request variances and other relief from significant parking requirements.
- Consulting with counsel regarding applicable zoning/land use rules and regulations, as well as evolving law related to technology and its application to future redevelopment plans.

Notes

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