

Viewpoint: We must build the Pittsburgh region's transportation future for all

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What does the future of mobility look like in the Pittsburgh region? It's a tough question to answer given the rapid pace of change taking place in that space. When the state passed Act 89 in 2013 — the critical transportation funding package that averted massive cuts to public transit — autonomous vehicles weren't even on most people's radars. Now, six leading autonomous vehicle R&D centers operate in Pittsburgh — Aptiv, Argo AI, Aurora Innovation, Caterpillar, Ford and [Uber](#).



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Self-driving cars are just one example of the shift taking place that will define the future of transportation. With an eye toward this future, the business community recognizes that a robust, well-maintained and well-connected transportation network is critical for economic competitiveness in the region. It's why the Allegheny Conference on Community Development convened public and private sector leaders and engaged community stakeholders via the Regional Transportation Alliance, and produced principles that can guide future transportation investments. We have been and continue to be focused on strengthening the region's transportation network to ensure a prosperous economy and superior quality of life for all who live and do business in the region.

However, in the midst of all this change, there has been a growing sense of urgency that our region needs to do more to take charge of our transportation future. The RTA work demonstrated we need to optimize our existing assets — transit, roads and other infrastructure — to make the most of everything we already have. Our transportation investments must also be flexible and future-proof. The smartest

investments are those that can provide us with maximum utility today, but also adapt to future technology trends. And, finally, our transportation network must operate as an integrated system. A deliberate effort to plan, design, build and operate a “system of systems” and work across jurisdictional lines will benefit mobility across the entire region.

The region is moving ahead in the right direction. The downtown to Oakland Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) project is advancing; the autonomous vehicle industry is expanding; and innovative technology investments are being made to reduce congestion on roadways. Pittsburgh International Airport is embarking on a \$1 billion+ terminal modernization project. And new leadership at the Port Authority of Allegheny County and the City of Pittsburgh’s Department of Mobility & Infrastructure is opening the door to fresh ideas and partnerships.

While this progress is great, it still is not enough. For our region to be globally competitive, we need a prioritized plan of transportation-related investments that would make a real difference on issues of reliability, inclusivity and better mobility options. We also need a way to pay for the system we want.

Time is not on our side. Competitor regions are blazing ahead with their own transportation strategies. Indianapolis is investing in a complete redesign of their transit system and a new BRT line to downtown. Raleigh, Durham, and Chapel Hill, N.C., are investing in a set of rapid transit corridors to connect their universities, downtowns and major airport. And Columbus, Ohio, is in the process of evaluating rapid transit and technology options for five key regional corridors and implementing their winning \$50 million Smart City Challenge grant from the U.S. DOT.

Transformative change won’t happen unless we, as a region, think differently, work collaboratively and not accept the status quo. The Allegheny Conference is committed to convening the public, private and nonprofit communities to work together to identify high-impact transportation opportunities and develop plans to achieve them. Leading transportation and mobility experts will be in Pittsburgh in October for Rail~Volution, a national mobility conference that we are proud to support. We look forward to learning from these experts.

It is clear that truly transformative investments and changes are possible here. We ask you to continue to collaborate with us as we work to advance ideas to improve

transportation and mobility to help us stay competitive and achieve a next-generation economy for all.