UNIVERSITY OF OREGON

JUNE 2020

THE FUTURE OF PUBLIC SPACES AND PLACEMAKING

Summary of Findings from the Knight + Urbanism Next Portland Workshop

URBANISM NEXT CENTER

urbanismnext.org

UNIVERSITY OF OREGON

in partnership with

KNIGHT FOUNDATION

alta PLANNING + DESIGN

Spirit for Change CONSULTING, LLC

Metro

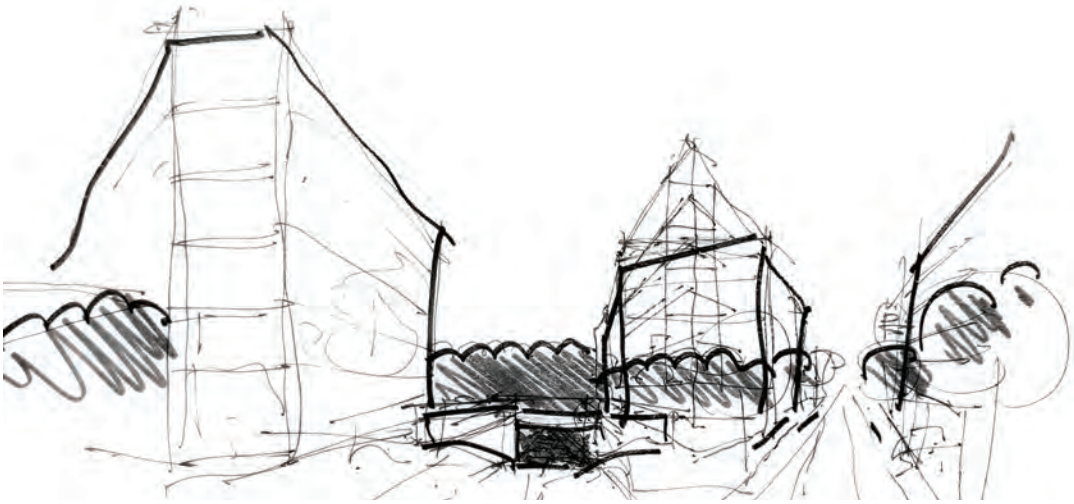
PROLOGUE

Much has changed in the world since we held the Future of Public Space and Placemaking Workshop in late January of 2020. In February and March, we were hit by a global pandemic that has led to widespread illness and deaths, stay-at-home mandates, significant transportation disruptions, and a complete shift in the use of public space. By April, we experienced a dramatic rise in unemployment and the beginning of an economic recession. In late May and early June, widespread protests engulfed the country in response to incidences of police brutality and the deeply embedded racial injustices in our social, economic, educational, legal, and political institutions.

It is unknown what the long-term impacts of these concurrent events will be on our cities, our society, or our way of life. These events, however, have put an even sharper focus on the need to address equity concerns, not only in moments of disruption, but in our day to day lives and actions and one thing is abundantly clear—returning to a 'normal' that has systematically disenfranchised and disproportionately harmed so many people in communities across the country is not an option.

It is in this context that we present the findings of our work over the last year. While the landscape has shifted since the workshop was held in January, we believe the key takeaways remain as relevant as ever. Particularly that we must prioritize people, place, equity and experience over connected technology, that we must treat our streets as places, and not only transportation corridors, that we must incorporate geographic variance in the changes we see across the country, and that collaboration and public-private partnerships are keys to any future success.

We welcome your thoughts on this research and are committed to ensuring that communities have agency shape those changes to help attain community and societal goals.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Urbanism Next would like to thank our organizers, speakers + sponsors for putting on an engaging and productive workshop, as well as all those that helped moderate and participate in the discussion.

The event was organized by:

Jean Crowther	Alta Planning + Design
Amanda Howell	Urbanism Next
Nico Larco, AIA	Urbanism Next
Ted Reid	Metro
Lynn Ross	Spirit for Change Consulting
Mary Stewart	Alta Planning + Design
Matthew Stoll	Urbanism Next/UO
Marsie Surguine	Urbanism Next/UO

Additional thanks to Derek Abe, Kirk Paulsen, and Jennifer Davidson for helping to moderate and manage the event.

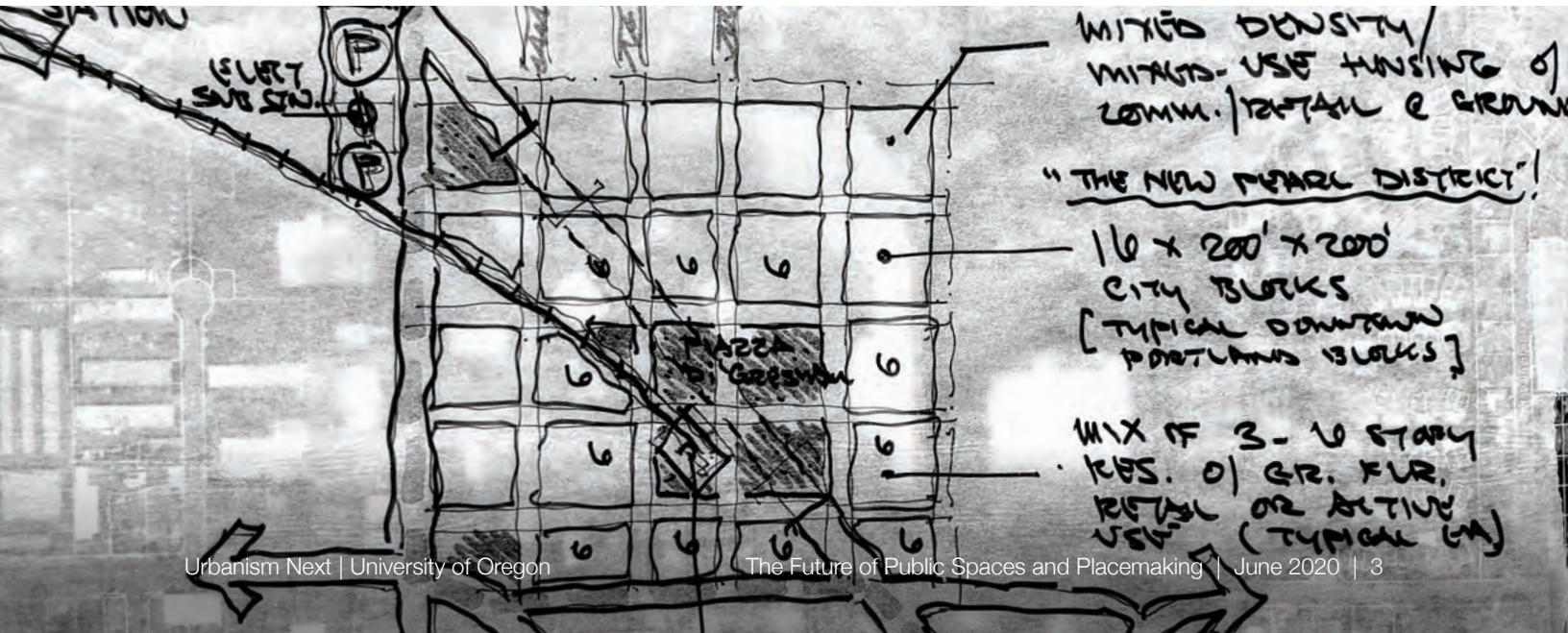
And a special thanks to Lilian Coral and the Knight Foundation for supporting this work.

Images courtesy: Marsie Surguine/Urbanism Next

INTRODUCTION

The Urbanism Next Center at the University of Oregon, in partnership with Alta Planning + Design, Spirit for Change, and Metro hosted the Future of Public Spaces and Placemaking workshop on January 24th, 2020. This one-day workshop, supported by the Knight Foundation, brought together a wide range of community activists, government officials, policymakers, urbanists, planners, designers, technology representatives, and other professionals to share ideas and concerns, and to discuss emerging technologies such as new mobility[1], Mobility as a Service (MaaS), autonomous vehicles (AVs), and e-commerce, and their impacts on urban space and placemaking. The workshop concluded with a site-specific charrette aimed at investigating how communities can best prepare for these changes and adapt their public spaces to create places that are resilient, dynamic, equitable, and sustainable. The following is a summary of the discussion points and key takeaways from the event, as well as actions that communities can take to address the effects of these technologies.

1. New mobility refers to new technologies that are rapidly entering the market today, including micromobility services like e-scooter share, bike share, car sharing, and ride hailing Transportation Network Companies (TNCs) like Uber and Lyft. Mobility as a Service is the broader trend of these modes of transportation being offered as app-based subscriptions and not through private ownership. Other technologies like autonomous (self-driving) vehicles, online retail, and delivery robots are also considered within this context. There has been substantial growth in development in all of these areas in the past ten years.



MORNING SESSION: PRESENTATIONS

The event kicked off with a series of presentations laying the framework for the workshop. The first few presentations focused mainly on the real and potential impacts that technology and new mobility are having on our communities, with the following presentations largely centered on issues of equity, sustainability, and creating resilient public spaces. These presentations set the scene for the afternoon charrettes and helped establish a common framing.

THE IMPACTS OF TECHNOLOGY AND NEW MOBILITY

Nico Larco (Urbanism Next):
State of Emerging Technologies, New Mobility, and E-Commerce
New mobility, AVs, and e-commerce are having and will continue to have a rapid and profound effect on our communities, health, transportation, and lifestyles. The rate of innovation and adoption is happening at an ever-accelerating pace, which makes it difficult for communities to adequately plan for and adapt to the changes at hand. These changes are going to have impacts far beyond transportation, including impacts on land use, street design, land values, equity, and the environment. If cities are proactive in planning for these changes, they can leverage them for public good and to help achieve community goals.

Amanda Howell (Urbanism Next): Shift in Retail/Goods Delivery Issues
E-commerce has seen a rapid rise in the last 15 years and continues to grow as physical retail evolves in response. Brick-and-mortar retail stores are fewer and smaller, as companies have adopted “experiential retail” to attract customers. These shifts are also creating significant demand for quick, convenient, door-to-door goods delivery. New technologies like parcel lockers, courier network services, meal delivery apps, and autonomous delivery robots are changing the landscape and increasing demands on the right-of-way.

Jake Bryda & Josymar Rodriguez (UO): Shifts in Parking & Auto-Oriented Uses
Due to zoning policies and land development in American cities, there is a large quantity of underutilized parking. With changes in mobility and vehicle ownership, there will likely be a decrease in demand for parking and other auto-oriented uses like garages, gas stations, and car dealerships. This shift represents an opportunity to reclaim vast amounts of underutilized land within our cities for redevelopment into new amenities.

CREATING HEALTHY, EQUITABLE AND RESILIENT PUBLIC SPACES

Hana Creger (Greenlining Institute): Equity Considerations

New mobility must be viewed within the context of the racially inequitable housing and transportation policies that have shaped communities in this country, creating barriers to opportunity for people of color. Introducing new mobility services into a broken system will exacerbate these issues if mobility equity is not front and center. An equitable decision-making process should 1) assess and consider the community's needs; 2) analyze the equity of this new mobility; and 3) allow community participation in deciding on the best paths forward.

Jean Crowther (Alta Planning + Design): New Directions for Street Design

A complete street new mobility future must incorporate existing and proven basic principles of street design while also leveraging the advantages of new technologies and services. Principles that can guide future-ready design include prioritizing uses and allocating space to best serve those priorities, accommodating a broader suite of modes, designing with safety in mind, creating complete transportation networks, and considering future adaptability. By using this framework, streets will better serve all uses, have more robust infrastructure, support small businesses, and serve private and public needs, regardless of the innovations before us.

Anna Muessig (Gehl): Designing Streets

While many may not consider them as such, streets are places. They make up 80% of open space in cities, and provide critical opportunities for engagement and interaction. By designing streets with intuitive, people-centric features and creating activated, engaged ground-floor edges, cities can create lively public spaces. New mobility can actually be a policy lever for creating cities designed for people.

Suzanne Nienaber (Center for Active Design):
Public Space & Healthy Communities

Thoughtfully-made and well-maintained public spaces can promote mental, social, and physical well-being. There is also a link between having access to quality public space and better civic trust and engagement, which increases stewardship of these places in turn. Three guidelines for creating good street design and public space are 1) prioritize maintenance of public space; 2) incorporate nature into the design; and 3) celebrate community identity.

AFTERNOON SESSION: WORKSHOP

Following the morning presentations, participants were divided into groups of eight and assigned to one of four local sites, each representing a different place typology ranging in density, mix of uses, and community demographics. The groups were given an introduction to each site context by a local representative:

Holladay Park & Lloyd Center (Portland)
This downtown park block is adjacent to a large urban mall. The surrounding neighborhood has an age distribution that is hourglass-shaped, with a higher percentage of both younger and older residents than the county as a whole. Residents are also more likely to have only one car or none at all, and to use non-auto transportation modes. This site has less racial diversity, a lower median income, and a higher percentage of renters than the county as a whole. With declining physical retail, high-density development, a regular urban grid and close proximity to the city center, this district has a high potential for redevelopment.

Hollywood Transit Center (Portland)
This urban transit center links two residential neighborhoods and a historic commercial corridor to Downtown. It is characterized by a tight urban grid and a mix of uses. The neighborhood has a similar makeup to the overall county for age distribution, though it is slightly less racially diverse and with a lower median income. The number of residents who commute, rent and/or don't own a car is much higher, and the area has seen an increase in housing density along the commercial corridor. Due to its access to multiple modes, its proximity to Downtown Portland and a nearby highway, this site could serve as a mobility hub.

82nd & Division (Portland)
This intersection of two busy, auto-oriented corridors is characterized by large areas of surface parking and auto-oriented businesses. Pedestrian safety is a significant concern as there have been multiple pedestrian fatalities and the area has been identified as a high-crash corridor. The neighborhood is on par with the county as a whole for age distribution, and home and car ownership, though it has higher public transportation usage, lower median income, and is much more racially diverse than the broader county. This area could be greatly affected by a potential decrease in auto-ownership and an eventual shift to AVs.

Oregon Trail Shopping Center (Gresham)

This suburban strip mall has an abundance of parking and access to a major arterial and light rail line connecting it to downtown Portland. The neighborhood is less racially diverse, has an average age distribution and a lower median income than the county as a whole. Home and car ownership rates are similar to the county average, but commutes are much more likely by car than by transit. With a decline in demand for big box retail and parking, this large site has opportunities for redevelopment and densification, though it is challenged by separation from downtown Portland and reliance on private vehicles. The site has typical suburban, auto-oriented street designs with low connectivity and odd lot shapes and sizes.

Each group was asked to consider a near future where New Mobility, MaaS and AVs have been widely adopted. They were asked to assume an 80% adoption rate of these new technologies, with 50% of cars being shared and 50% individually owned, and e-commerce having risen to more than 50% of the consumer market. The participants were prompted to think about the broad implications of best- and worst-case scenarios, and to think about how communities can guide these developments to help support their goals through policy or action.

Source: All demographic data is from the ACS 2018 5-Year Estimates by Census Tract and is compared with Multnomah County overall.

LIMITATIONS

The workshop generated a lot of discussion, ideas, and potential actions that communities can take to create resilient, healthy places in the face of all of these changes. The format of the workshop was generally successful and could serve as a model for other places. One acknowledged shortcoming of this workshop approach is that it is difficult to generalize about place through site-specific discussions. Many conversations oscillated between localized approaches and large-scale policy decisions, potentially causing some confusion. We found that establishing common goals and values at the offset was one way that groups helped to focus their discussion. Also, having more clear deliverables and breaking down the workshop into separate scenarios or sections may be more effective in focusing the discussion on outcomes.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Following the discussion and development of the afternoon workshop, participants were asked to respond to the question: What are the biggest takeaways or lessons learned? Despite each site representing fairly different contexts, after reviewing the responses to these questions as well as the notes from each table, a few core ideas emerged that permeated much of the discussion. Those core themes are:

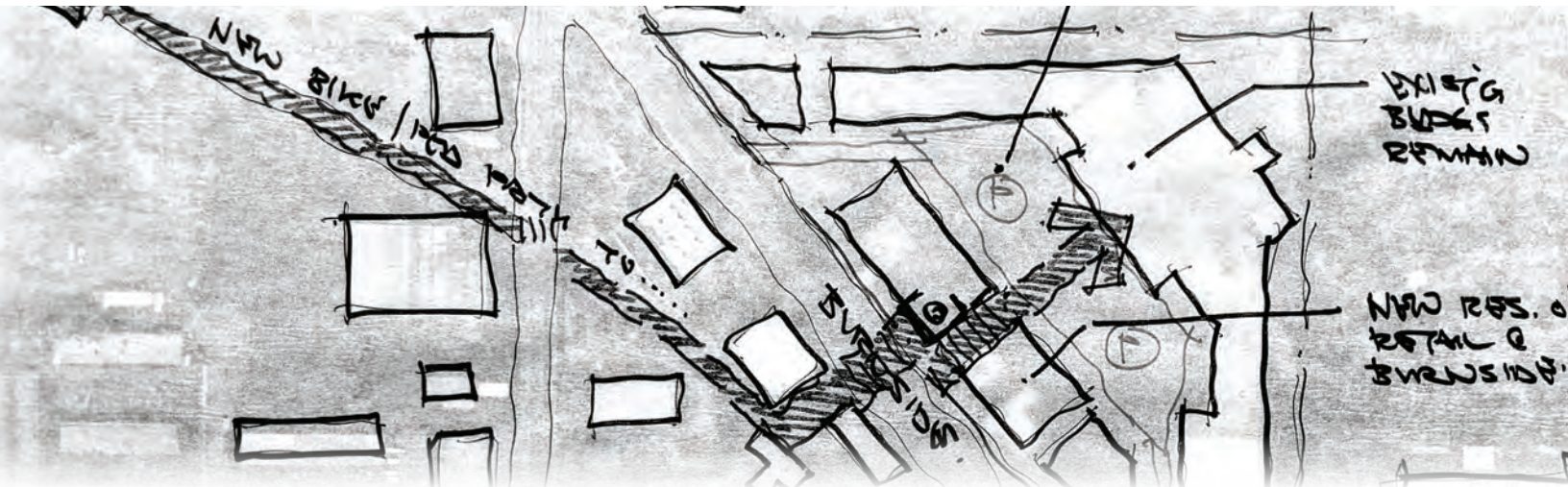
- **Streets are places.** They should be invested in, evaluated, and celebrated as such.
- **The value of people, place, equity and experience will only increase.** Even in a more digital future these things matter most. Human connection must be prioritized over connected technology.
- **Geographies will vary in the ability to address the coming changes.** Areas of growth and investment will have more power to enact policy and shape outcomes.
- **E-commerce effects are not limited to retail.** It is both a transportation and an economic issue as well.
- **Parking will be repurposed and redeveloped.** The link between parking and land use will be critical for the future development of communities.
- **Collaboration and public-private partnerships are key.** This will be increasingly important as technology services exert pressure on communities.

The second half of this report considers the physical, social, and economic impacts that emerging technologies may have with each theme described above. We also dive deeper into the major opportunities, threats, and known unknowns, as well as our recommendations for actions and policies that communities can take to shape the outcomes. By breaking down these common issues, we can build a framework for how communities can engage with these changes. From this, we end with next steps and recommendations for research that we believe will help communities better understand and react to these effects.

STREETS AS PLACES

Streets make up a large portion of the public space of cities. When they are designed well and with people in mind, they can be active and engaged spaces. In order to imagine the landscape of our future cities, one must address the right-of-way. With changes in technology, there is a huge potential for rethinking how the street is designed and used. This was particularly true for sites like 82nd & Division due to its heavily auto-oriented design and lack of pedestrian safety.

- **Opportunities:** Reduced congestion and increased safety (assuming AVs are more safe than human-driven vehicles) could make streets more pedestrian-friendly. There may also be less need for physical infrastructure (signs, bollards, etc.) with programmed AVs. A reduced demand for parking could open up land for redevelopment, potentially increasing land use density and green space.
- **Threats:** AVs could lead to a reduction in walk trips and an increase in private rides. E-commerce and AV goods/meal delivery could threaten brick-and-mortar retail and restaurants. Each of these trends would potentially decrease street life and engagement.
- **Unknowns:** Will AVs deliver on the safety promises they tout? How will retail/food choices change?
- **Recommendations:** Protect small, local, brick-and-mortar businesses and encourage engaged streetscapes by creating pedestrian-only streets, business corridors, and development incentives. Prioritize affordable housing and public space development to create more dense, walkable communities. Minimize negative impacts, such as congestion and pollution, through pricing and regulation.



VALUE OF PEOPLE, PLACE, EQUITY, AND EXPERIENCE

To create healthy, resilient communities, we need to invest in humans. Social isolation and inequality is increasing, as we shift from being place-oriented to being more convenience-oriented. To combat this, human connection must be prioritized over connected technology. Technology is just one tool at our disposal and will not create or solve any problems on its own. New services should support and complement a community's goals, not become a hindrance to or work against with those goals. Prioritizing communication and engagement will produce more positive and effective outcomes for the community. This theme was the most common across all site types and group discussions.

- **Opportunities:** New technologies may improve access between areas, goods and services and create more flexibility in mode choice. Reduced demand for parking could open up land for business or green space.
- **Threats:** Technology could exacerbate existing inequalities, the digital divide, social isolation, and civic disengagement. Digitized and automated interactions could overwhelm the ecology or personalness of public space.
- **Unknowns:** How quickly will different communities adopt these technologies?
- **Recommendations:** Use policies and tools like community land trusts to protect housing, prevent gentrification, and ensure safety and reliability. Ensure that policies, services, etc. are prioritizing equitable distribution, pricing, and access. Minimize impacts such as congestion and pollution through pricing and regulation. Create a clear framework that describes the prioritization of different modes (prioritizing pedestrians and cyclists over single-occupancy vehicles, for example) to be used as a guide for decisions about changes to the right-of-way and public spaces.

GEOGRAPHIC VARIANCE IN ABILITY TO ADDRESS THE COMING CHANGES

The communities with the highest growth and investment will be better able to control their destiny in the face of change. These communities will be better able to create policies and exert pressure on technology companies eager to gain access to their markets. Smaller, less economically powerful, or low-growth communities could be more impacted by these changes, and less able to regulate them. Government is limited in how much it can address these issues when new development and investment are scarce, especially if transportation and use of the right-of-way becomes increasingly privatized. That is why it is critical for cities and states to work together to create common guidelines, share information, and enact wide-reaching policies. This theme was a major point at the Gresham site because of its lower density and size and lack of investment growth.

- **Opportunities:** There are opportunities for public-private partnerships, especially for expanding access to goods and services.
- **Threats:** Regional disparities in how different communities are affected by these changes could further exacerbate existing inequities. Differences in deployment could create confusion for users and private businesses.
- **Unknowns:** What policies are most adaptable across different areas and markets? What factors are most critical in terms of growth, land vacancy, parcel size, parcel geometry, availability of funding, ability to create a strong public-private partnership, or ability to assemble land?
- **Recommendations:** Form strong public-private partnerships. Communities across a region or across the country should communicate, share data, and develop common strategies to have a stronger influence on new technology companies to help achieve community goals.

E-COMMERCE EFFECTS NOT LIMITED TO RETAIL

The growth of e-commerce is already having major effects in our communities, such as increasing the demand for warehousing, and contributing to a reduction of brick-and-mortar retail. New developments in technology will likely increase these impacts and could have major implications for our economy and transportation as the demand for goods delivery continues to rise. Small business and local retail is essential for livable, walkable communities. This was a common theme in sites like Gresham and Division & 82nd where the retail landscape could be more affected by e-commerce and a shift away from auto-oriented retail.

- **Opportunities:** Retail could become smaller and more efficient, allowing for greater densities and lower building energy consumption. Access to goods, groceries, and meals may increase in some communities as a result of e-commerce and goods delivery.
- **Threats:** Increased economic impacts and job-loss for brick-and-mortar retail may increase vacancies and alter new development designs. Reduced street presence of retail and restaurants could reduce street vitality and activity by reducing walking trips to those destinations. Increased deliveries may increase local congestion and demand for the curb.
- **Unknowns:** Will the demand for e-commerce continue to increase, or level off? How will these changes affect communities differently, and what factors are most critical?
- **Recommendations:** Increase incentives for small, local businesses. Invest in creating lively, walkable, dense commercial districts.

PARKING REDEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES

The increase of AVs and decrease in private auto-ownership could have large impacts on the demand for parking. What cities will do with this underutilized space will be critical. This has major implications for sites like Gresham and Division & 82nd, where there is a heavy reliance on private auto-use and a large amount of surface parking currently.

- **Opportunities:** Communities could shift away from auto-based development and transport and towards more multimodal and sustainable models, reducing parking and increasing density. There are also opportunities to rethink the design of streets, reconnect areas, reintroduce grids, reduce travel lanes, and increase pedestrian space, for instance.
- **Threats:** Reduced parking revenues will have broader economic impacts. This could be particularly painful for cities where parking revenue is used to support other critical services such as transit.
- **Unknowns:** Will parking demand decrease unevenly across different geographic areas? How quickly will demand decrease?
- **Recommendations:** Use tools like a community land trust or development incentives. Build as little new parking as possible, and build this parking in a way that is easily adaptable to other uses or dismountable. Prioritize affordable housing and public space development, which are critical for increasing equity, density, and community well-being.

COLLABORATION AND PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS KEY

Communities will need to engage directly with technology companies, as they take an increasingly larger role in transportation and services. By developing strong relationships and a common understanding, communities will be able to have a greater influence over the potential outcomes, and shape these changes to help meet their overall goals. Sites like Holladay Park and Hollywood explored this theme heavily due to their density, close proximity to commercial areas, and access to multiple transit modes.

- **Opportunities:** When communities engage directly with companies, they can create partnerships that can improve service and give residents a greater degree of options.
- **Threats:** The speed of change incentivizes technology companies to innovate and grow into new markets quickly, often resulting in less desirable outcomes and tension with these communities. Lack of reliability for these services over time can also cause confusion or gaps in service with less profitable areas suddenly left without transportation options on which residents may have come to rely.
- **Unknowns:** Will technology companies/governments do the work needed to gain trust with the communities that have been disproportionately harmed and historically disenfranchised by these entities? Will the private and public sectors find ways to collaborate or will an ongoing lack of transparency persist, limiting willingness to collaborate? Are new mobility company business models sustainable in the long term?
- **Recommendations:** Communities should set clear goals that technology companies can address to minimize conflict and miscommunication, and technology companies should prioritize transparency. Cities should seek out resources on participatory planning processes and co-create with local, representative community groups.

TOPICS FOR ADDITIONAL RESEARCH

In order to better understand the impacts these new technologies will have on communities and the challenges that need to be prioritized, more research needs to be done in several areas. The following topics were identified as areas that need more clarity:

What tools or levers can areas of lower growth or investment use to shape positive outcomes?
As discussed "Geographical Variance," smaller or lower growth communities will have less power to regulate these technologies as they enter the market. The workshop produced several ideas in this area, such as communities pooling data together, creating common regional policy frameworks, or using community land trusts to control land use. More research could be done into examples of where this has been attempted and its effectiveness.

How feasible are community land trusts for various place typologies? How important is density as a factor?
The idea of a community land trust came up in several key areas like "Value of People, Place, Equity & Experience" and "Parking Redevelopment Opportunities." This tool was seen as one of the most potentially effective at combating the fast pace of change and the potential effects of gentrification.

How do we create mobility hubs within a suburban context? What are the first steps?
Mobility hubs make sense in dense urban centers with multiple transportation modes, but are more difficult in less dense areas. AVs and micromobility could be one way of making this more economically feasible.

How do we ensure that this new mobility and e-commerce future is also creating spaces that consider public health as a priority? The focus cannot just be on the technology, mobility, or access to goods themselves.
There was considerable discussion about whether these technologies would be a benefit or detriment to public health. Much of the research into AVs and MaaS focuses on the immediate impacts of the technologies, and not on their cascading effects. A more holistic approach that considers community and public health goals and priorities at the forefront could result in solutions that are beneficial to a broader range of outcomes.

HOUSING
+ HOUSING
CLOSE TO SOV TRAFFIC
SLOW TRAFFIC
RETAIL
HOTELS
RETAIL
PARK
GREEN
FUTURE OF PUBLIC SPACES AND PLACEMAKING WORKSHOP
Understanding Emerging Technology, New Mobility and E-commerce's Impact on Public Spaces
Portland, Oregon, January 24, 2020
SCENARIO