



Citizen debate: Driverless vehicles in our future?

Ongoing research

In 5, 10 or 20 years... many predict the more or less rapid but inevitable arrival of driverless vehicles in our lives. But, be it in the city or in the countryside, on the road or in the air, what are citizens' expectations as regards their spread in France? Given that mobility is at the heart of our lives and changes in our transportation system may be afoot, the question must be raised. At the initiative of Missions Publiques, the Mobile Lives Forum and a dozen other partners have come together to hold citizen debates, which took place in five different locations in France on January 2018. We see it as an opportunity to do things differently: to find out what people actually want before introducing a new transportation system!

Research participants

Missions Publiques

Debate partners (Débat citoyen sur la voiture autonome)

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Why a public debate?

Driverless vehicles, flying cars and robot pilots... for decades, such notions have animated science fiction and the collective imagination. This imaginary is gradually becoming a reality, as driverless vehicles are slowly creeping into our territories without the general public even being aware of it. Many subways, river shuttles and even buses are already autonomous.

autonomous.

While the topic is not new and, in fact, is a reality that we already encounter in our daily lives, why take an interest today?

Because big changes may be coming, and their impact could be considerable.

Will the arrival of autonomous vehicles be just another step in automotive and transportation history? Or, more than innovation, will it be a revolution that will deeply impact our model of society? If so, what are people waiting for? What change(s) or transition(s) do we want the autonomous vehicle to serve? The time has come to question the possible consequences of the introduction of this technology in our societies. For instance, had we foreseen the consequences of the automobile's development – that is, making the streets dangerous for our children – would we have made the same choices?

In contrast to what usually happens, here we have the opportunity to reverse the situation: we know what citizens want ahead of developing a new transport system!

In response to the Missions Publiques initiative, the Forum Vies Mobiles (mobility think tank supported by the SNCF) joined forces with a dozen partners* and launched the first public debate on the future of travel on 27th January, in light of the arrival of driverless cars. Over 350 people attended events held in Conflans, La Rochelle, Rennes, Toulouse and Sophia Antipolis in order to exchange thoughts and debate opinions on the possible advantages and disadvantages of driverless cars.

Results of the debate

Key points to takeaway from the debate

Driverless cars could be used as a tool to transform the way we travel by encouraging citizens to give up three activities: driving, ownership and solo-driving. Whilst citizens may be ready to navigate these changes, it is on the condition that public authorities regulate the development of driverless cars to ensure we advance towards more inclusive, safer means of travel, within an framework of improved living conditions.

Yes to driverless cars, but not at any cost!

Participants emphasised the positive aspects of driverless cars, both on a personal level (free time gained, possibility of relaxing or doing an activity during journeys, etc.) and on a collective level (reduction in the number of road accidents, access to vehicles for those with limited mobility, etc.). However, they also highlighted a number of potential problem areas to monitor, such as limiting environmental impacts, regulating risks to employment

, ensuring data is protected, ensuring driverless cars are not a luxury product which serve to accentuate transport inequality, and above all, ensuring that the development of driverless cars does not have a negative impact on urban and rural living conditions (local noise and/or visual pollution).

Public authorities: playing a key role in protecting public interests

Debates have highlighted that citizens are looking to public authorities to coordinate and regulate driverless car technology. Exercises completed by citizens concerning numerous possible scenarios demonstrated that they fear driverless cars will become a luxury version of the car in its current form if nothing is done to guide or regulate their development. They are against 'laissez-faire' policies as well as stances stating that 'we must adapt' to the inevitable arrival of the technology.

And for good reason; they are strongly against driverless cars becoming a gadget limited to the wealthiest members of society. They also object to driverless cars simply increasing the amount of traffic on today's roads. Citizens are all for driverless cars if they are used to foster global change within coordination of the way we travel, and view public authorities as the pole-bearers of change in this regard.

Giving up three activities: driving, ownership and solo-driving

In order to coordinate this change, public authorities can rely on citizens, who appear ready to navigate numerous changes in their lifestyles and the way in which they travel. When questioned on behavioural changes anticipated due to the arrival of driverless cars:

43% of participants said they were ready to **"give up driving"**

40% explained that **they would be ready to give up their own car** and **54%** said they would take part in car-sharing (using a vehicle made available by a collective, business or individuals, for a fee)

36% stated that they would take part in **car-pooling** to a greater extent (travelling with other people in the same vehicle)

Whilst not all citizens are happy to give up these three activities, particularly all three at the same time, it can be seen that driverless cars have the potential to alter current practices.

Changes are nonetheless conditioned by two core factors: retaining the freedom to travel "when we want, where we want"; proposing a safe and flexible system. The service should be available at short notice, at any time and place.

Participants also stressed the importance of being able to choose between a number of various, mutually complementary solutions. Everyone is able to choose their mode of transport according to location, time and requirements: personal driverless cars, shared cars available on request: collective means of transport with or without drivers, sustainable transport (walking, cycling), etc.

This would provide public authorities with considerable room for manoeuvre in which to design a hybrid system focused on driverless cars, moving away from the ever-dominant alternative: that of personal vehicles versus public transport.

The debate organizers:

The debate will be facilitated by Missions Publiques, an agency specializing in the organization of citizen debates on political processes at the local, regional, national and international levels. Missions Publiques put together a coalition of actors (local authorities, institutions, research centers and private partners) to carry out the debate.

The Mobile Lives Forum is a debate partner and, as such, a member of the steering committee. As a mobility expert it is also a part of the scientific committee.

Other partners:

Urban communities:

- Sophia Antipolis Urban Community
- La Rochelle Urban Community
- Greater Paris Seine & Oise Urban Community
- Rennes Conurbation
- Toulouse Conurbation

Department:

- The Ecological and Solidarity Transition Department

Companies:

- Autonomy
- Airbus
- Allianz
- Kéolis

Research institutes and corporate think tanks:

- Le Forum Vies Mobiles

Mobility

Broadly, the word mobility can be defined as the intention to move and the realization of this movement in geographical space, implying a social change.

More

Lifestyle

A lifestyle is a composition of daily activities and experiences that give sense and meaning to the life of a person or a group in time and space.

More

Keywords : **car, automobile, Transition, driverless vehicules, citizen debate**

Disciplines : **Humanities, Social sciences**

Transport mode(s) : **Automobile**

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² <mailto:tom.dubois@sncf.fr>

³ <http://en.forumviesmobiles.org/marks/mobility-450>

⁴ <http://en.forumviesmobiles.org/marks/lifestyle-1756>

⁵ <http://en.forumviesmobiles.org/mots-cles/car>

⁶ <http://en.forumviesmobiles.org/mots-cles/automobile>

⁷ <http://en.forumviesmobiles.org/mots-cles/transition>

⁸ <http://en.forumviesmobiles.org/mots-cles/driverless-vehicules>

⁹ <http://en.forumviesmobiles.org/mots-cles/citizen-debate>

¹⁰ <http://en.forumviesmobiles.org/disciplines/sciences-humaines>

¹¹ <http://en.forumviesmobiles.org/disciplines/sciences-sociales>

¹² <http://en.forumviesmobiles.org/modes-transport/automobile>