

## Uber and Lyft Are Cannibalizing Transit in Major American Cities

New research from UC Davis shows that cities must strengthen transit in response to the growth of ride-hailing services.

By Angie Schmitt | Oct 13, 2017 |  118



If cities don't act decisively to prioritize bus and rail service, more riders will switch to ride-hailing in a vicious cycle of increasing traffic and declining transit quality. Photo: Oran Viriyincy/Flickr

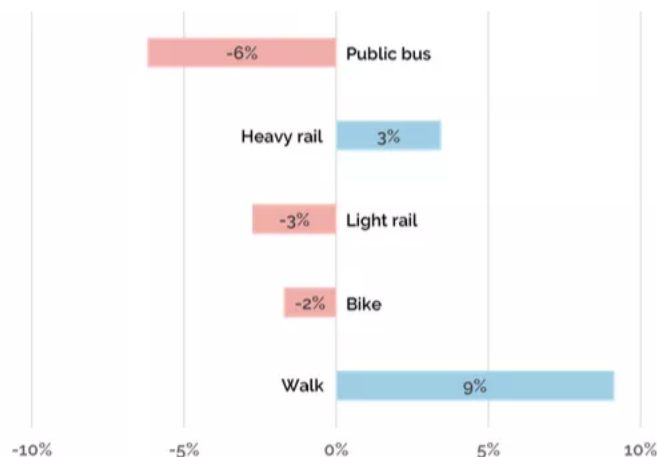
The arrival of ride-hailing services like Uber and Lyft has led to more car traffic and less transit ridership in major American cities, according to a new study from researchers at UC Davis [\[PDF\]](#). The results of their first-of-its-kind survey strongly suggest that large cities must take steps to prioritize and strengthen transit service in response to the growth of ride-hailing apps.

Unlike previous surveys that attempted to assess the effect of ride-hailing and car-sharing, which tended to be based on self-selected samples of people who use a particular service, Regina Clewlow and Gouri Shankar Mishra of UC Davis sampled the general population. They randomly surveyed 4,094 adults living in both urban and suburban areas of Boston, Chicago, New York, Seattle, DC, Los Angeles, and the Bay Area.

A large share of ride-hailing traffic is substituting for more efficient modes of transportation, they found. Between 49 percent to 61 percent of ride-hailing trips would have been made by transit, biking, or walking, or would not have been made at all, if the services were not available, according to the survey responses. In other words, Uber and Lyft are adding to traffic congestion.

After people start using ride-hailing services like Uber and Lyft, they are 6 percent less likely to ride the bus and 3 percent less likely to ride light rail. But ride-hailing apps did lead to a net increase in heavy rail use, which might indicate their use as a last-mile connection to stations beyond walking distance:

**Figure 12. Changes in transit use, biking, and walking after adoption of ride-hailing services**



Survey question: "Since you started using on-demand mobility services such as Uber and Lyft, do you find that you use the following transportation options more or less?"

Chart: UC Davis

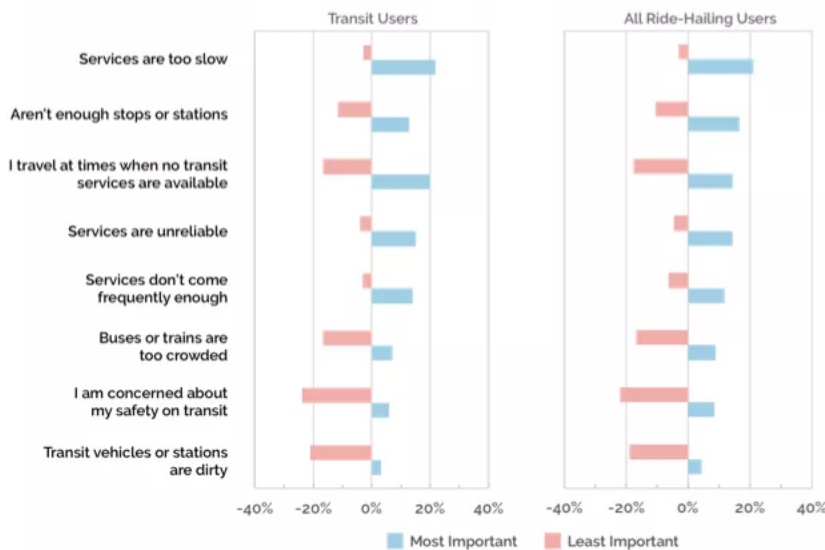
Ride-hailing services also appear to reduce drunk driving, with 38 percent of users saying they get regularly hire rides to get to bars and parties.

And they reduce car ownership, with about 9 percent of people who use the services reporting that they've gotten rid of at least one vehicle. Clewlow and Mishra caution that this is a smaller effect than previous research has suggested, however, and that decisions to own a car are primarily influenced by "socio-demographic, attitudinal, and built environment" factors.

Ride-hailing users tend to be younger, college-educated, higher-income people who live in urban areas. The 33 percent usage rate among people making more than \$150,000 a year is more than double the 15 percent rate among people making less than \$30,000.

The implications for transit riders are troubling. More affluent people are opting for ride-hailing because it's faster and more reliable than transit. This creates a vicious cycle where additional ride-hailing trips cause more congestion, which slows down transit — a dynamic that has been [documented in New York by analyst Bruce Schaller](#). People who can't afford an Uber fare are left with even worse bus service.

**Figure 13. Reasons for substituting ride-hailing for transit services**



Survey question: "What would you consider the most important versus least important reason you use on-demand mobility services such as Uber or Lyft instead of public transit?"

People say they switch from transit to ride-hailing because transit is slow, unreliable, and unavailable. Chart: UC Davis

Put it all together and Clewlow and Mishra's research suggests that cities have to strengthen and improve transit service in response to the growth of ride-hailing. They recommend dedicating street space to high-occupancy vehicles like buses and adopting policies like congestion

pricing to counteract the rising traffic caused by ride-hailing services in central cities.



Ride-hailing services can be a helpful addition to transportation systems, curbing car ownership, reducing drunk driving, and complementing transit networks. But if cities and transit agencies don't take action to improve the quality of bus and rail service, Uber and Lyft can end up doing more harm than good, clogging streets and cannibalizing transit.



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**JJAudubon** • a month ago

Rail transit lines exist in Atlanta, Dallas, Miami, and New Orleans — why are these southern cities ignored in the UC Davis survey? Uber and Lyft are there too. Selection of cities surveyed was not random.

4 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›



**Courtney** → JJAudubon • a month ago

I would presume they weren't included because these cities don't have the robust transportation systems that other cities in the studies do.

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**KJ** • a month ago

Dedicated transit lanes are needed (although this is difficult politically). In examples like the above crowded city (see picture in article), at least two of the lanes should be devoted to transit to allow buses to pass.

4 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›



**Michael** • 2 months ago

Hard to draw great conclusions since during the same period (2013 to current) a barrel of oil dropped from the 120s to the 20s. Seems around 50 bucks and above creates a lot of interest in transit.

4 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›



**Richard** • 2 months ago

I think we are at a point where we can call Ride-Hailing Taxis. They are better Taxis, cheaper Taxis, but still Taxis. They are not some brand new thing in the world, but a better version of an existing thing.

6 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›



**Baloo Uriza** → Richard • 2 months ago

They're gypsy cabs. And they've been around forever. The only difference now is that you can hail a gypsy cab with an app.

Also, I wish there was a term for this that didn't have a racial connotation.

3 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›



**Jym Dyer** → Baloo Uriza • a month ago

Touts.

^ | v • Reply • Share ›



**baklazhan** → Jym Dyer • a month ago

"Touts" conjures the image of someone actively trying to drum up business by approaching and soliciting people, which is kind of the opposite of uber.

I think "cabs" is fine. App-based cab if you need to make the distinction. Even Uber was originally named Ubercab.

^ | v • Reply • Share ›



**kevd** → Baloo Uriza • a month ago

"livery cab" works.

So does "car service" (which used to be summoned by telephone.

^ | v • Reply • Share ›



**Mike** • 2 months ago

As long as buses, taxis, cars, and bikes share the same road, people without any financial restrictions will usually choose the fastest, most convenient method, which is cars (if parking is cheap and easy and no alcohol is involved) or taxi-like services (if parking is expensive or alcohol is involved). But, those same riders choose rail over driving, probably because it is faster.

More taxis and taxi-like services slow traffic for everyone, but, those taxis remain the fastest option even while slowing down traffic for everyone.

Bus lanes, or other methods of making busses faster than cars and taxis, could tip the balance back to busses's favor..

3 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›



**SDGreg** • 2 months ago

My views on when and why I favor ride sharing over transit at times mirrors those of other transit users. For me, transit doesn't have to be as fast ride sharing to be my first choice. When I've chosen ride sharing over transit it's been either when transit service is too infrequent with transfer wait times too long, and/or times become too long due to unreliable service. Speed and frequency matter, a lot.

In San Diego, the bus to the airport only operates every 15 minutes on weekdays and every 30 minutes during evenings and on weekends. If I time it just wrong on an evening or weekend, a trip home from the airport can take 90 minutes versus 45 to 50 minutes if the wait times and transfer times are more optimal. With ride sharing, it takes as little as 15 minutes and rarely more than 30 minutes.

In Oakland, by contrast, the BART connector between the Oakland airport and the nearest BART station operates every 6 minutes and takes 8 minutes. From there, it's usually a 10 minute or less connection for the next train into San Francisco. I've never considered riding sharing a better or faster option for that trip.

5 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›





**mx** → SDGreg • 2 months ago

I agree. If I'm considering a trip, I can estimate with pretty good accuracy how long it will take in a rideshare (and I can open Waze for a realtime estimate if freeway traffic is a factor). Barring some calamity, I can plan around that. If transit service is too infrequent and/or unreliable that I might find myself sitting around for 30+ minutes, I'm going for another option, because I can't plan around that uncertainty.

I've done this in real-time arriving at SFO. Walk off the plane and head toward the BART station, checking the departures on my phone. Assuming it's not rush hour, if the timing is bad and it's going to be 20 minutes until the next train comes, I realize it's going to be over an hour before I get home, while it's about 25 minutes on Lyft for 2-2.3x the cost. If the train leaves in five minutes, I'll take it, even if it's going to be twice as slow as rideshare. But make me sit there waiting, and sorry I'm so impatient, but I'm gone.

For better or worse, we live in a world where making a web page take half a second longer to load will cause 20%+ of users to abandon the site. Is that good for society? Probably not, but transit has to adapt to that reality.

4 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›



**GlobalLA** • 2 months ago

This article only imposes the ideology that transportation is a zero-sum game. Nothing can be farther from the truth. How can ride-hailing services "cannibalize" mass transit when POPULATION GROWTH is INCREASING at the same time? It's remarkable that most major cities can adapt to these large inner-city migrations with both mass transit and ride-hailing services.

As a matter of fact, without Uber or Lyft, who's to say riders will take mass transit instead. If mass transit can't meet the general first-mile, last-mile requirements of most riders, guess what? Car ownership here we come! It's happened before and will continue to happen again absent of ride-hailing services. Thanks to Uber and Lyft, it's taken many single-rider vehicular trips off the road and REDUCED the number of people owning cars overall.

I'm all for mass transit, but I have nothing against Uber and Lyft if it means less people owning cars themselves. And to think, all this is happening while population rates are increasing in general.

5 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›



**Jym Dyer** → GlobalLA • a month ago

So I guess you didn't bother to read the part about car-ownership.

^ | v • Reply • Share ›



**GlobalLA** → Jym Dyer • a month ago

So I guess you love making assumptions. That part is more an AFTER THOUGHT. Sure, throw in some little research (which they don't even bother to elaborate on) to say it reduces ownership somewhat to make the reader say "wow, at least they are looking at this at all angles". BS. The key is rising population rates (eternally and externally) and how mass transit vs car ownership will absorb those rates.

"Clew low and Mishra caution that this is a smaller effect than previous research has suggested, however, and that decisions to own a car are primarily influenced by "socio-demographic, attitudinal, and built environment" factors."

Was born in L.A. and lived here most of my life. The biggest decision factor I see with everyone growing up here is the first mile, last mile convenience issue, which I mention. But it's okay if you think otherwise, you think whatever you want.

^ | v • Reply • Share ›



**jamesbeaz** • 2 months ago

This isn't surprising at all. In Paris, I take the Metro and generally arrive \*early\* at my destination, even if I'm running a bit late. In DC or NYC, I take the metro/subway and generally arrive \*late\* at my destination.

Honestly, when I look at the squalor and dysfunction of U.S. cities compared to those in Europe, Asia and, well, even much of rich South America, I think U.S. cities are beyond help.

3 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›



**Bernard Finucane** → jamesbeaz • 2 months ago

They aren't beyond help, but transit is only part of the problem. The real problem is land use.

Transit advocates in America always push for increasing mobility. That isn't really the solution to the problem in most American cities.

6 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›



**Joe R.** → Bernard Finucane • a month ago

I think the real answer is to get people to travel less, not more. That's particularly true of commuting to work. Any job which can be done at home should be. Any load we take off the transportation network means less money we need to spend for expansion, or even just routine maintenance.

^ | v • Reply • Share ›



**Bernard Finucane** → Joe R. • a month ago

Another solution is to reduce travel distances by allowing mixed use neighborhoods. I live in suburban Germany and my neighbor, a tax consultant, walks to work. I often walk or bike to the supermarket as well.

1 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›



**GlobalLA** → Joe R. • a month ago

Yes, allowing mixed-use zoning and communities where mass transit can satisfy short-trip travel will tremendously reduce hours of commuting time. However, there will always be a dynamic ceiling for that. People will always have the need to choose when and





commuting time. However, there will always be a dynamic ceiling for that. People will always have the need to choose when and where they want to travel. It's an expression of their FREEDOM and CHOICE. It's been part of the American dream and always will be in the future. I think your thoughts are a big part of that answer, but not necessarily the "real" answer.

^ | v • Reply • Share ›



**Jym Dyer** → GlobalLA • a month ago

The notion that car travel has something to do with FREEDOM and CHOICE is drummed into our heads over and over again by the largest advertising budget in the nation's history.

If it were as free as they say it is, they wouldn't have to spend so much money and effort insisting that it's so. And mind you, that's above and beyond the impetus created by an infrastructure that makes any other choice much more difficult.

4 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›



**Stephen Simac** → Jym Dyer • a month ago

I'm sure you've noticed that car ads invariably are filmed on wide open roads through beautiful scenery, not slowly moving traffic jammed "free"ways. I live near a popular car ad highway, (hint-probably the most expensive road in history) and they usually have another six vehicles for the crew, plus a few highway patrol cars stopping any traffic during shoots so they don't show any other cars. Lone drivers- the American Dream.

2 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›



**GlobalLA** → Jym Dyer • a month ago

Then you obviously ignore American history and I never said that the freedom to choose one's mode of transportation was "free". Enjoy keeping up your false narrative, whatever that is..

^ | v • Reply • Share ›



**Jym Dyer** → GlobalLA • a month ago

I don't ignore the inconvenient parts of American history that coerces this "choice" in so many ways.

2 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›



**GlobalLA** → Jym Dyer • a month ago

Oh ok, no problem have it your way.

^ | v • Reply • Share ›



**voltairesmistress** → jamesbeaz • 2 months ago

Well, if your attitude were shared by others, then U.S. cities definitely wouldn't improve. Fortunately, Americans in the U.S. tend toward optimism and innovation.

1 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›



**Baloo Uriza** → voltairesmistress • 2 months ago

"Well, if your attitude were shared by others, then U.S. cities definitely wouldn't improve."

I posit that this is actually the case; and this article is prima facie evidence supporting this hypothesis.

"Fortunately, Americans in the U.S. tend toward optimism and innovation."

That America died a long time ago. Now it's all about blaming minorities for the fact things suck instead of working to fix problems.

5 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›



**Joe R.** → Baloo Uriza • 2 months ago

I'd say that America started dying roughly in the early 1970s. Until then we were a forward-looking nation with people excited about the future and new technologies. Nowadays anytime something new comes out a lot of people can't let go of the old. And almost nobody can imagine things any way except the way they are. I don't know what happened between now and then, but we've lost our way.

I can say in many ways the present isn't the future I imagined when I was a kid. I thought we would have lunar and Mars bases by now, all our energy would be generated by fusion, solar, or wind, all our transportation would be electrified, we would have modern, efficient homes, we would be done with war, etc. Instead, we haven't sent anyone outside of low Earth orbit since the early 1970s, we're still using internal combustion engines and burning coal, we're still fighting wars, and we're living in inefficient, retro-look McMansions right down to the fake window panes. About the only area where we've embraced great advancement has been in electronics.

Meanwhile, other countries are doing many of the things I've envisioned. The future came to places like Japan, China, and much of Europe but skipped the United States. I'd love to see us get back on track but until the older generations who have kept us in the past let go of power I'm not seeing that happening. I'm just tired of hearing from that generation how wonderful the 1950s were, to the point it seems they want to keep us there forever.

2 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›



**GlobalLA** → Joe R. • a month ago

Great points Joe. You also have to consider how we have "progressed" as a nation from a cultural and political point of view. As we have become more diverse, understand we are also competing among more conflicting interests. I agree we haven't advanced as much as we would want. I share many of those ideas you have written. Unfortunately, I think we have lost our collective drive to



as much as we would want, I share many of those ideas you have written. Unfortunately, I think we have lost our collective drive to strive as a nation. Instead, we have granulated national goals into segmental and local ideologies competing for time, energy, and resources.

1 ^ | v • Reply • Share >



**RGD** → Joe R. • a month ago

We will be on mars by 2022, as I recall (privately funded US venture). We lost some steam when we moved to the suburbs. Now they have no jobs, and no new job growth. See how many new houses out there sell over the course of the next few years compared to what happens to land values downtown.

^ | v • Reply • Share >



**jamesbeaz** → voltairesmistress • a month ago

"Fortunately, Americans in the U.S. tend toward optimism and innovation."

Are you kidding me?

"No, we can't" do single-payer.

"No, we can't" build high-quality BRT.

"No, we can't" clean up the subway stations.

"No, we can't" do platform edge doors.

America is the most pessimistic place I've ever been.

2 ^ | v • Reply • Share >



**Jym Dyer** → jamesbeaz • a month ago

BRT is basically "no we can't build LRT." It was coined to usurp a light-rail boom in the 1990s.

^ | v • Reply • Share >



**RGD** → jamesbeaz • a month ago

I think it depends on where you live. I have seen much more cynicism in the North. But who invented the personal computer? The smartphone? The internet? How about electric lighting? Aviation? The telephone? Which is the only nation to put a man on the moon? Which nation ultimately became the proof of concept for a democratic government? There is one answer to all of these questions: the US. Innovative? Yes.

Unfortunately, we seem to not have much imagination when it comes to transportation...

As for optimism, that depends on where you live. I've found that some regions are quite cynical and pessimistic, while others are much more optimistic.

For those of you feel that the inventive America died a long time ago, to some extent it did: it became dormant as cities declined. When they come back, and they will, then we will once again have the full American ingenuity revived.

^ | v • Reply • Share >



**Jeremy** • 2 months ago

These companies are just burning cash and will eventually die one day

Good riddance

3 ^ | v • Reply • Share >



**Jym Dyer** → Jeremy • a month ago

The question is what damage they do along the way. The spin is that they'll reform/reinvent the taxi industry, but this research (you know, the thing that this article is actually about?) indicates that public transit is also facing an impact.

4 ^ | v • Reply • Share >



**Stephen Simac** → Jym Dyer • a month ago

I've read that Uber drivers (probably Lyft and others as well) are using bike lanes in SF to park and wait for a ride hail. The private buses to Silicon Valley businesses at least have to pay the city to use their bus stops.

1 ^ | v • Reply • Share >



**kevvd** → Stephen Simac • a month ago

if you go a block in NYC without a yellow cab or livery cab in a bike lane, you're doing really well.

^ | v • Reply • Share >



**Jym Dyer** → Stephen Simac • a month ago

I encounter multiple Uber and Lyft drivers doing this in San Francisco bike lanes every single day.

^ | v • Reply • Share >



**Frank Kotter** → Jeremy • a month ago

not a matter of doing as they are taxis but as call taxis you can contact which shortly will have no driver. There is a need and it is the taxi which



not a matter of dying as they are taxis but on-call taxis you can contact which shortly will have no driver. There is a need and it's the taxi which will die, not Ü.

That said, Ü, becoming the new taxi, will become about as profitable as a taxi. Not dead, but not throwing off any cash.

^ | v • Reply • Share ›



**jamesbeaz** → jeremy • 2 months ago

Not in developing country markets (and this includes the USA, IMHO).

^ | v • Reply • Share ›



**Baloo Uriza** → jamesbeaz • 2 months ago

Oh no, they're definitely lighting cash on fire in the US. They're basically using the late 1990s "pets.com" business model, minus the cute mascot.

1 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›



**Parque\_Hundido** • a month ago

Wow. Ride hailing leads to lower car ownership and increased use of rail. Yet it is "cannibalizing" transit?

How is anything that results in fewer single occupancy vehicles a bad thing? Cities should look to further restrict parking and single occupancy vehicles, not ride sharing or any other form of transit.

3 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›



**com63** → Parque\_Hundido • a month ago

Agreed. I gave up a car and fully depend on transit and uber/lyft now for gaps that transit cannot fill. It works just fine and I guarantee I cause less traffic than before. Seems like the easy solution is to just give more priority to buses so they are a competitive option to uber/lyft.

4 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›



**Guy Ross** → Parque\_Hundido • a month ago

Good point. However please don't equate 'lower car ownership' with being a benefit to public transit. The problem is that an Ü is on the road at all times, sometime occupied and sometimes not. This is a disaster for other forms of surface transportation.

Really, it all goes back to removing transportation subsidies in all forms, then you will see public transportation explode and the need for wide streets and parking implode.

1 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›



**Parque\_Hundido** → Guy Ross • a month ago

Not sure I can agree. Ride share is only profitable if there's more than one rider in the car. We should be asking how we can make it even more profitable to have more than two riders and how we can encourage this to become a reliable strategy for car sharing.

We need to remove all subsidies that encourage single occupancy vehicles from moving or parking. Everything else seems like it's on the right side of the transportation equation.

Am I missing something?

^ | v • Reply • Share ›



**D G Spencer Ludgate** → Parque\_Hundido • a month ago

As long as the rideshare companies continue to pay drivers less (about 16% less on average) for Pool/Line rides, drivers will continue to refuse to give the rides. After vehicle expenses, the average UberX or Classic Lyft driver makes minimum wage (\$10 to \$12 an hour).

If you want wide-spread acceptance of Pool/Line lobby the rideshare companies to properly compensate their drivers. Drivers should be paid the same per mile/minute rates for Pool/Line as X/Classic. Riders should also be compensated for each additional passenger pick-up. I for one will not advance environmental ideologies on the backs of minimum wage labor. When I use rideshare, I never use Pool/Line and tip my driver (\$3.00 for short rides, \$5.00 for longer rides, \$10.00+ for airport rides).

1 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›



**Parque\_Hundido** → D G Spencer Ludgate • a month ago

I hear what you're saying, but that sounds like a labor market regulation issue. If they refuse rides, the service stops and the vehicles revert to single occupancy.

^ | v • Reply • Share ›



**Ray** → Parque\_Hundido • a month ago

Uber & Lyft are just taking advantage of the cheap roads. Price the roads at market rates, and buses will become more competitive, frequent, and rapid. Uber & Lyft will switch to shuttle based services to compete.

^ | v • Reply • Share ›



**Parque\_Hundido** → Ray • a month ago

How would putting a toll on roads make buses better? It seems like it just makes driving worse. Singapore had a robust transit network in place before they instituted electronic road pricing.

Making things worse for motorists isn't going to make shared transit better, it will only make driving cost more.





making things worse for motorists isn't going to make shared transit better, it will only make driving cost more.

^ | v • Reply • Share ›



**Ray** → Parque\_Hundido • a month ago

Because the number one reason to someone to choose Uber over bus service is the time savings. Most of the reason why buses are slow is because they are stuck in congestion. Market pricing the roads will do 3 important things: 1) Make buses rapid. 2) discourage single-occupancy travel. 3) provide \$\$\$ for transportation innovation.



Singapore's road pricing is on top of the vehicle quota system. They don't allow more than a specific number of privately owned vehicle and the permits to own a vehicle are put to auction.

Also, to create the most efficient transportation system, you need to have it funded using fees from the system itself, not indirect general taxes.

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