

## FOCUS ON AI



# We need to talk about driverless cars

Perry Walker of Talk Shop led a discussion on autonomous vehicles at the 2018 Responsible Science conference and discovered participants thinking that – whether for or against them – driverless cars don't mix well with people.

After lunch, the conference divided into small groups to try out a discussion kit on driverless cars. This was developed by Talk Shop with support from Nesta under their 'Everyone Makes Innovation Policy' programme.

As you might expect, nearly 60% of those present reckoned that they knew at least a fair amount about driverless vehicles before the discussion began. By the end, that was up to 85%. At the start, in round numbers, 40% were against AVs (autonomous vehicles) with 15% for them – the rest being unsure. By the end, both these numbers had risen, as more people came off the fence, with half being against and 40% in favour.

Each group discussed two out of six possible topics. 'What are the biggest risks?' was the subject discussed by the highest number of groups. The comment that struck me as most profound was 'Unintended consequences', linked to 'More complicated interlocking agents involved in every journey – e.g. technology and corporations another factor in accidents.' A couple of groups worried both about the risks of crashes – and about how responsibility would then be allocated. Another commented that 'Vehicle design is likely to favour vehicle users over others.'

The next most popular topic was 'What will be the most significant effects on human behaviour – and what should we do about them?' The most positive effect was 'road rage goes down'. Groups were concerned about the interaction between humans and AVs. Examples included:

- Takes time to change human behaviour – longer than technology change
- Problem with reaction time delay with partial automation
- Losing ability to interact/act as people in future have fewer driving skills.

The most striking conclusion was that 'People will take more risks around autonomous vehicles – e.g. stepping out to test autonomous vehicles' and therefore there should be 'total segregation of AVs from drivers' cars and pedestrians'.

The third most frequent topic 'What would you like the effect of driverless vehicles to be on vehicle ownership and public transport?' What people wanted was a reduction in vehicle ownership and an integrated public transport system. What they feared was summed up in these two questions: 'Can AVs work in parallel with existing systems?' and 'Will AVs companies buy up trains and buses and run them down?'

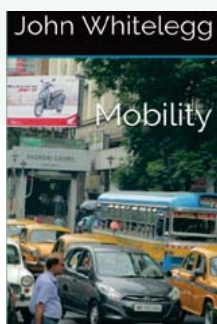
Finally, there was 'What will be the biggest effects of AVs on the environment and health?' Funnily enough, one group supported segregation for much more positive reasons than above – it would encourage cyclists and pedestrians. And, to end with, one group left me with an image of how the future might look different – they foresaw convoys of vehicles perhaps becoming the norm on our roads.

85% of the people who took part found it enjoyable. The comments generally backed that up: 'Learned more than I expected, more worried, clearer than before' and 'socially wonderful!'. One group though thought that there were 'Leading questions' and that the 'framing was unduly positive towards AVs'. A constructive suggestion was 'We are all either no-car or slight-car users, 3 use bikes – suggest this should be a question'. And the comment that pleased most of all was that it was a 'decent attempt at democracy'.

For more information about TalkShop, see:

<http://www.talkshopuk.org/>

For a summary of the rest of the conference, see p.23.



**Mobility: A New Urban Design and Transport Planning Philosophy for a Sustainable Future**  
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This book sets out a rationale for a transformation of the mobility landscape and argues that the sustainable transport options simply cannot thrive in a world that remains wedded to more mobility

and the manifestations of that cultural and political bias (subsidy, infrastructure and an astonishing lack of attention to death, injury, air pollution, climate change and social justice).

The book argues for the explicit adoption by all levels of government of three zeros:

- Zero death and injury in the road traffic environment
- Zero air pollution from traffic sources
- Zero carbon transport