



Articles, podcasts, and videos at www.davidzipper.com



Mobility friends-

It's been quite a month, eh? With Joe Biden safely inaugurated and normalcy beginning to return, we can start to appreciate the talent and diversity that the President is bringing into his administration—including throughout the Department of Transportation.

I'm particularly impressed by the depth of urban mobility expertise (list of appointments is [here](#)). Secretary Buttigieg is obviously the former mayor of South Bend, and Polly Trottenberg, his uber-qualified Deputy Secretary, used to run NYC's Department of Transportation. Robin Hutcheson, the chair of NACTO and former mobility head of Minneapolis, will direct safety policy, while Meera Joshi, who used to manage ride hail and taxis in New York, will take over truck and bus regulations. Former transportation officials in Portland, San Jose, and the District of Columbia have also landed top roles.

This is a big deal. Under the Trump administration urban priorities like transit, walking, and biking often seemed like afterthoughts, and discretionary funding programs [shifted](#) toward road construction. It's obvious that USDOT will now act differently. Reductions in traffic fatalities, greenhouse gas emissions, and even vehicle miles traveled are likely to become important priorities. I talked about the new federal transportation agenda—among other things—[on a new episode of the Movement Podcast](#).

One area where we'll clearly see progress is around automotive safety. Just after New Year's I [wrote an article in CityLab](#) about USDOT's failure to address risk to pedestrians and cyclists through its influential New Car Assessment Program (featuring the legendary crash test dummies). Happily, a week after the story ran the department announced that it would finally revise NCAP to do just that (one of its last moves before Inauguration Day). The comment period is now open, so [make your voice heard](#).



"It's time for Washington to work more like our best run cities, and not the other way around."

Pete Buttigieg

*nominee for Secretary of the US Department of Transportation
January 26, 2020*

Uber and Lyft have kept a relatively low profile in the last couple months, but I expect that to change. The companies have made clear their [intent](#) to apply lessons learned from their successful Prop 22 campaign in California to other states like [Massachusetts](#) where policymakers could classify drivers as employees instead of as contractors. We'll have to see what Congress and the Department of Labor have to say about that.

In the meantime, Uber has launched a new push to market its sizable Uber Transit program (220+ employees!). The company outlines its pitch to agencies in [a new report](#), which I [examined in CityLab](#) this week. TLDR: there are certain situations where transit and ride hail want the same things, but there are many others where they don't. Transit executives should tread carefully. I offered some specific tips in the article.

It's an especially exciting time to envision the future, so I'm looking forward to joining a panel at Micromobility World this Thursday (Jan 28) to discuss the future of cities along with leaders from the LA Mayor's Office, Culdesac, and Swiftmile (moderated by Andrew Hawkins of The Verge). Free to register [here](#). Looking ahead, on March 2nd I'll join the [Bike Summit](#) (annual meeting of the League of American Bicyclists) on a panel titled "Making Cars That Don't Kill." You can probably guess what Angie Schmitt, Dara Baldwin, and I will be discussing.



To close, I wanted to highlight a few resources that provide context for some of the major mobility controversies/debates that lie ahead:

- **USDOT Secretary Pete Buttigieg's nomination** hearing in the Senate was largely uneventful, but it's worth listening to his [opening remarks](#). Safety is clearly a top priority—and he talks about Complete Streets.
- **Democratic control of the Senate is enormously helpful for transit agencies** that require major federal assistance to maintain operations. Even when COVID ends, [evidence from Hong Kong and Taipei](#) after SARS shows that ridership (and farebox revenue) will take time to recover. Congressional Research Services issued a useful primer on federal transit funding for those who want to understand how the money flows. [Download link here](#).
- Many observers ([myself included](#)) have criticized the National Highway Traffic and Safety Administration for providing **inadequate oversight of autonomous vehicle technology**, including Level 2 and 3 tech like Tesla Autopilot that are already on American roads. Under President Obama NHTSA put out an [autonomous vehicle policy plan](#) that proposes numerous ways the agency could have authority to issue regulations (and penalize bad behavior). [A last-minute report](#) from Trump's DOT focused more on "removing barriers" to new AV tech, but I suspect it's the Obama-era report that offers insight about the incoming administration's orientation.

That's all from me -- at least for now. Here's to what's next.

Best,
David