

Zombie tax: emptying the streets, filling (robo)taxis

→ THE END OF CONSTANTLY PARKED CARS

Taxis, ridesharing services and robotaxis¹⁸⁰ all have a common feature: their effectiveness depends on their ability to be rapidly available in various places. Increased reliability is subject to their good knowledge of demand (trends, data, algorithms) and their capacity to provide a significant number of vehicles. In real terms, this means that vehicles roam the streets waiting for a customer to hail a ride, even riding with no passengers sometimes when demand is too low.

This trend is known as zombie cars. The constant circulation of several thousand passengerless vehicles heightens congestion without contributing to urban mobility¹⁸¹. Yet this trend is developing as it is economically more advantageous for a driver to travel with an empty car as parking would result in higher costs than driving. An American study¹⁸² conducted in New York stated that out of the total distance covered by ridesharing vehicles, less than half (45%) were made by vehicles with no other occupant than the driver.

→ ANTICIPATING THE ADVENT OF THE SELF-DRIVING VEHICLES

Ultimately, this trend will be heightened if robo-taxis become the standard for urban car journeys. To be profitable, it is in fleet operators' interest to minimise vehicle downtime. In other words, self-driving vehicles will spend most of their time roaming the streets waiting for customers.

In 2019, the State of Massachusetts considered a draft bill aimed at rolling out a series of actions to promote the rational development of self-driving vehicles in the State¹⁸³. This bill would include the

introduction of a fixed-rate tax of 2.5 cents for every mile driven by autonomous vehicles. This amount may be reduced if the self-driving vehicle belongs to a local or regional authority, if it transports several people, if it is driving in off-peak times or if it operates in an area with limited public transportation options.

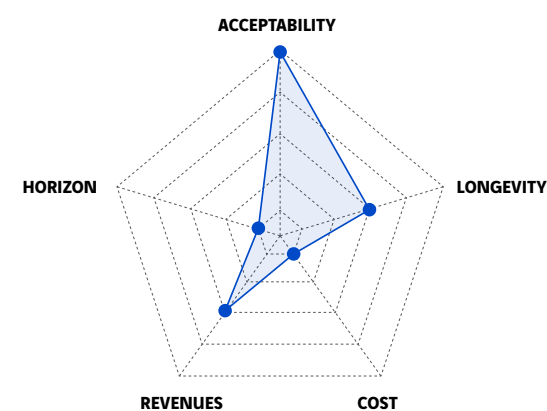
→ TAXATION TO URBANISE SELF-DRIVING VEHICLES

This type of tax aims to steer autonomous vehicles towards certain uses (shared vehicles rather than empty vehicles), in certain areas (with limited public transportation) and at certain times (off-peak hours). It also enables authorities to have a tax lever at their disposal, the revenues of which could partially offset the drop in fuel tax revenues.

Such a solution has not yet been tested. It raises the question of the quantity of parking spaces required to protect public spaces.



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Who pays?



STATE



COMPANIES



TAXPAYER

What scale of implementation?



LOCAL



NATIONAL