

## **A Tale of Two 15-Minute Cities: a Twitter sentiment analysis study**

### I. Project report

#### A. Introduction

The term “15-minute city” was coined in 2016 by urbanist Carlos Moreno to describe an urban environment in which citizens could easily access the necessities of daily life via foot, bicycle, or public transportation within 15 minutes of leaving their homes. This includes work, school, healthcare, food, shopping, and leisure. The overarching principle of the proposal was that reducing people’s dependence on motorized vehicles would improve their overall quality of life through increased exercise, reduced pollution, and reduced time spent in transit.

While the origin of the idea was fueled by good intentions and a desire to improve the lives of average citizens, a certain subset of the right-wing has latched onto the idea, applied conspiratorial rhetoric, and twisted the concept into “15-minute prisons.” This twisting of intent began in the more conservative corners of the internet during the pandemic and was viewed as an extension of lockdowns and overwhelming government control of the citizenry. Although this idea is based entirely on nonsense and hot air trapped inside a room-temperature-IQ echo chamber, the ripples of this viewpoint have made their way into the internet writ large.

The purpose of this study is to ascertain how the dialogue regarding 15-minute-cities has morphed since 2019 when the discussion revolved around how to improve people’s lives through intelligently designing cities by prioritizing people over automobiles into a discussion of a totalitarian nightmare in which you must submit papers to leave your immediate vicinity.

#### B. The importance of the problem

The project aimed to address the growing pushback against the concept of 15-minute cities. These urban planning ideas, designed to promote human-centered development and improve quality of life, have faced opposition fueled by disinformation and conspiracy theories. Understanding the roots of this resistance is crucial for fostering a livable future, as misinformation not only distorts public perception but also hinders progress toward sustainable and equitable urban design.

The goal was to analyze the underlying arguments behind these opposing narratives, which often mask deeper fears or misconceptions. By identifying and understanding these perspectives, the project sought to pave the way for more effective communication and advocacy for better cities and a more livable future.

#### C. Description of activities and reaching the stakeholders

During our midterm report, we asked for more funding to reach our goals. Unfortunately, despite securing funding during the mid-term presentation, the software we wanted to use was still unhelpful. Initially, we wanted to focus on Twitter alone, but for more sources, we broadened our scope to include other platforms as well. Each member of our group focused on a specific target, who were: Jordan Peterson, Elon Musk, Joe Rogan, Nigel Farage, Fox News and Daily Mail. Our goal was to look into how they perceive the idea of 15-minute cities and understand what their ideal city might look like. Based on our findings, we would generate an AI image of that ideal city.

This project is directed at people who might be on the fence about urbanism projects in their area. Many people are susceptible to dis- and misinformation online, and it's important to reach these people with facts reflecting objective reality instead of preying on their fears about an unknown future. The alt-right and far-right have excellent propaganda machines that run 24/7/365, and it's imperative that good, correct information is readily available to anyone who might have a moment of doubt when watching one of the information sources we've researched during the course of this project.

It is impossible to list the possible ages and number of stakeholders, as this number includes every single person living in a democratic urban environment dominated by cars. However, this is, in fact, the scope of the project. Anyone who lives in a city can benefit from knowing the reality of the stories that are being sold to them. Unfortunately, we simply do not have the reach or the funding of the right-wing propaganda machine, so we must simply hope that someone locates our reports when they go online to find more information about whatever urban revitalization project is going on near them.

More directly, we may include our advisor, Luke Li Stange, who intends to produce an article about this very topic based on our findings. Luke is a PhD candidate at TLU, and while he is already interested in urbanism and sustainable development, our research could help him disseminate this information further than we could on our own. With any luck, his intended article could inspire others to spread the word about the benefits of 15-minute-cities and why we should ignore the protestations of the right.

#### D. Sustainability of the project

The sustainability of our project lives within the intent to publish an article on the topic. If we continue to work with Luke beyond the scope of this project as it currently stands, we should be able to extend our reach to our stakeholders. One benefit of published articles is that they will be accessible for years to come. So long as there are impediments to sustainable progress, our article should stand as a stalwart stone in a stream of disinformation. Alone, it may redirect some flow, and perhaps cause some ripples, but many stones together create a mighty dam, staunching the flow of falsehoods. We do not expect our research alone to change the course of progress, we merely hope to offer our hand in helping to affect change.

## E. Summary

The findings are intended to reach audiences vulnerable to disinformation, offering an alternative narrative grounded in the real benefits of sustainable urban design.

## II. Action plan

<b>Activity and description</b>	<b>Timeframe</b>	<b>Stakeholders</b>	<b>Person (name and study field)</b>
Selection of contemporary alt-right voices	Before the start of the project	Project participants	Luke Li Stange
Research of posts, interviews, and other sources about chosen voices	Sep/2024 - Oct/2024	Urban citizens and democratic societies	Aleksander, Alina, Carola, Diana, George, Julie.
Mid-term report	14/10/2024	ELU project moderators.	George
Filter of relevant information about their perspective on 15-minute-cities and tangent topics such as cars, bikes, and urbanism in general	Oct/2024 - Nov/2024	Urban citizens and democratic societies	Aleksander, Alina, Carola, Diana, George, Julie.
Collection of the main ideas filtered	Nov/2024	Urban citizens and democratic societies	Aleksander, Alina, Carola, Diana, George, Julie.
AI generation of a picture that describes the said main ideas	Nov/2024 - Dec/2024	Urban citizens and democratic societies	Aleksander, Alina, Carola, Diana, George, Julie.
Presentation and report for final-term assessment	14/12/2024 - 15/12/2024	ELU project moderators.	Aleksander, Alina, Carola, Diana, George, Julie.

### III. Communication to stakeholders

Besides the weekly communication with our advisor, the communication with stakeholders overall will happen once our research reaches a broader audience.

### IV. Our analyses

#### A. **JORDAN PETERSON, by Julie Melo**

These are the main points of Jordan Peterson's opinion on 15-minute cities, and the relationship between cars and forms of transportation:

- Preservation of individual freedom;
- Avoidance of bureaucratic control;
- Balanced transportation options;
- Community and cultural spaces;
- Opposite towards 15-minute-cities;
- Rejection of surveillance and control;
- Sustainability without coercion;
- Promotion of autonomy in transportation;
- Critical examination of environmental claims.

Jordan Peterson emphasizes the importance of preserving individual freedom, arguing that residents should have the autonomy to choose how they travel and commute. This includes the use of cars, which he views as symbols of personal freedom. He believes that top-down regulations dictating transportation methods should be minimized to prevent residents from being subjected to restrictive policies regarding car usage or travel.

Peterson advocates for balanced transportation options within cities, suggesting that there should be a mix of transportation methods, including both cars and public transit, without excessively prioritizing one over the other. He points out that city councils must recognize that biking may not be feasible for all demographics, particularly in harsh climates. Peterson promotes the autonomy of transportation by encouraging the use of automobiles as a valid form of transit and advocating for infrastructure that supports their use, recognising their role in individual freedom.

He expresses opposition to the homogenization of urban areas, defending the integration of diverse community spaces within neighbourhoods. He critically assesses initiatives like the "15-minute city" or similar concepts, arguing that they may impose undue limitations on movement and lifestyle, which could negatively impact personal freedom and access.

Furthermore, he rejects the implementation of extensive surveillance systems designed to monitor residents' movements, advocating for the preservation of privacy and reducing the feeling

of being controlled. While he acknowledges the importance of environmental sustainability, he stresses that this should be pursued without punitive measures that disproportionately impact lower-income individuals or limit personal choice.

Lastly, he also calls for a critical examination of environmental claims, urging open discussions about environmental policies and questioning the prevailing narratives surrounding car usage and its impact on the environment without resorting to moralising.

Below is the image generated by *Dall-E Image Generator*. It illustrates the ideal city based on Peterson's perspective.



## **B. FOX NEWS, by Alina**

The critique of the 15-minute cities is a part of a wider discussion over the government proposals for decreasing the amount of emissions as well as covid 19 restrictions. The 'government' in the imaginary of Fox is democratic party members, as Laura Ingraham puts it: "For many years now democrats have realised that the only way to turn their radical plans into reality is to take more power and money from the American people and give it to Washington". She then continues by calling them "Obama's heirs" and "greeniacs" and implies they are trying to implement "mission control". (Ingraham, 2021)

Fox News is villainizing the concept of 15 minute cities as they connect it to the attempt of the government to "tax the poor" and "lock people down".

The channel uses a populist rhetoric by opposing "the people" to the "elites". Politicians are portrayed as demagogues, who promote green living - taxing carbon, taking combustion vehicles off the road, reducing meat consumption (Ingraham, 2021) - and continue enjoying the benefits of the vehicles.

Former Fox host describes Schwarzenegger's visit to Paris to discuss climate action: "I strolled by the Elysee Palace, home of the French president, as a massive black Range Rover pulled up to the door" (Marsden, 2017). Here the palace is being brought up as the status and richness symbol of the "elite" and Range Rover as a polluting vehicle used by the politician, who is a climate activist.

Democratic New York city mayor Bill de Blasio's plan of retrofitting the skyscrapers and making new buildings energy efficient (Mays, 2019) were framed as banning the steel and glass buildings. He is also portrayed as a rich man living in a mansion and driving an SUV: "In the same conversation that he was touting renewable energy and reducing emissions, de Blasio also defended his use of a gas-guzzling SUV for his daily 11-mile trips from Gracie Mansion to his Brooklyn gym." The skyscrapers' descriptions sound positive: "city's most iconic structures", "steel and glass towers that form its [New York's] signature skyline". In the same article, the green deal proposed by democratic party member Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez is criticized and tied to the economy: "The Green New Deal, championed by fellow New Yorker, Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez in Washington, is a radical measure that called for a massive overhaul of the nation's economy and energy use to cut emissions." (Sang, 2019)

Much of the critique is focused on portraying politicians as demagogues, who do not follow their own beliefs exemplified by private jet use, preferring flights for international meetings to zoom calls and using cars.

John Kerry, who negotiated the Parisian Accords for the US is described by Fox as “climate czar” once again referring to his wealth. His income is mentioned in the same article as it criticizes private jet use when going to receive an environmental award: “‘over \$1,000,001’ in assets for the charter company Flying Squirrel LLC through his wife Teresa Heinz Kerry, heir to the Heinz ketchup fortune.” His income is juxtaposed with “Americans” implying the costs rise : “Revelations about Kerry's outsized carbon footprint came as Democrats have considered proposals to overhaul the nation's energy economy, with potentially skyrocketing costs for households and individual Americans.” Other democratic politicians are described in a similar manner, such as Nancy Pelosi: “House Speaker Nancy Pelosi has spent over \$500,000 on private jets since 2020 despite repeatedly describing climate change as an "existential" threat the U.S. has a "moral" obligation to address.” (Chasmar & Cawthorne, 2022). Some of the articles also emphasize the “tax aspect” in private jet use: "A significant number of Biden bureaucrats will be traveling across the globe on the taxpayer's dime, all in an effort to advocate for these anti-fossil fuel initiatives" (Kornick, 2023)

Some articles paint bike lanes and ULEZ policies as heavy-handed restrictions forced onto ordinary citizens, while wealthy politicians supposedly continue to use gas-guzzling vehicles without consequence. By focusing primarily on European cities like London and Paris, the coverage cherry-picks examples and leaves out important details—like which vehicles meet ULEZ standards and are exempt from charges—making it seem as though every car owner is being unfairly taxed whenever they enter these zones. It even implies that charging electric vehicles relies entirely on fossil fuels, hinting that environmental advocates don’t understand how energy is actually produced. French politicians receive the same critique that comes down to plane use: “Rivals accused Hidalgo of trying to rehabilitate her green credentials with the referendum idea after a city-funded trip across the world to Tahiti in French Polynesia that drew wide scorn.” (Associated Press, 2023) Another article names the call for climate action “doomsday warnings” and “over-the-top predictions”, and then continues with ULEZ critique: “praising London’s ultra-low emission zone that forces motorists to pay high fees just to drive through the center of London.”

This type of reporting fuels conspiracy theories about ULEZ and urban planning concepts like 15-minute cities. By framing these efforts as an attack on personal freedoms, it gives credibility to

misleading narratives that stoke fear and suspicion. In doing so, it undermines public trust in policies designed to make cities healthier and more sustainable, creating unnecessary backlash that delays meaningful progress toward human-centered urban development. The concept of cities being more pedestrian and cyclist friendly is being reframed as oppressive towards car owners. “The people” are portrayed as victims through the language use: “they're driving middle-class Americans out of their cars”, “New York and DC are already squeezing out the cars “, “crazy car ban forces drivers to go green”, “a charge just for bringing your car into town”.

Amongst the benefiterers of such pro-car and fossil fuel use is Fox advertiser JPMorgan Chase according to WhoAdvertisesOn. In 2023, the company maintained its position as the world's leading financier of fossil fuels, as highlighted in the 15th “Banking on Climate Chaos” report by a coalition of environmental organizations. Since the Paris Climate Agreement came into force, banks globally have invested nearly \$7 trillion in the fossil fuel industry. (Wells, 2024) The new proposals of New York city mayor of retrofitting the skyscrapers might as well be a negative considering their ownership of Chase Tower built in 1972 on 201 North Central Avenue or JPMorgan Chase Tower on 270 Park Avenue built in 1960s.







Images are generated by Dall-E and ChatGPT Image Generator based on chosen articles by Fox News.

### **C. DAILY MAIL, by Carola**

The concept of 15-minute cities and policies like Ultra Low Emission Zones (ULEZ) have sparked a divide between proponents and critics. Supporters see them as forward-thinking urban

planning measures aimed at reducing traffic, cutting emissions, and enhancing local living convenience. However, opponents, particularly from right-wing media and activist groups, have linked them to conspiracies, alleging these initiatives are precursors to "climate lockdowns" or mechanisms for government control, citing fears of restricted movement, surveillance, and economic penalties for non-compliance.

Daily Mail articles and affiliates have highlighted both practical aspects and conspiratorial narratives, they also often focus on public backlash and potential overreach in planning. The criticism aligns with broader narratives skeptical of progressive urban policies, which are sometimes linked to ideological or political resistance to climate-focused agendas.

These urban plans aim to foster neighborhoods where residents can access essential services within a 15-minute walk or bike ride, enhancing convenience and sustainability. The discussion highlights ongoing tensions between innovative urban planning, autonomy, and the societal impact of these evolving designs.

Imagining a darker evolution of the 15-minute city, urban landscapes transform into restrictive zones underpinned by stringent regulations. These neighborhoods, marketed as hubs of efficiency, devolve into monitored enclaves where movement is scrutinized by pervasive surveillance systems. Residents are segregated into zones influenced by socioeconomic factors, and digital checkpoints enforce compliance. Travel restrictions and penalties for exceeding movement allowances exacerbate inequality, eroding community diversity and spontaneity. This controlled urban model fosters a climate of uniformity, suppressing dissent and reducing individuals to passive participants in a tightly regulated social order, evoking nostalgia for unbounded spaces of the past.

Image is generated by Dall-E Image Generator based on chosen articles on Daily Mail.



#### **D. NIGEL FARAGE, by Aleksander Viks**

So the main point made by Nigel Farage with 15-minute cities in this interview is the idea of control. He seems to be very afraid of the idea that 15-minute cities will enable the government to have more influence on what a person can and cannot do. Nigel Farage does say that he is not exactly opposed to the idea of having shops within walking distance. Mostly he is opposed to the idea of people being fined for going outside of their bounds. In his view, this will enable the government to be able to set up more surveillance. He adds that the government will want every car to have a black box in it, with global positioning system data, that will track your every movement and charge you for a mile. While looking into ULEZ I found that much of what Nigel says seems to be blown out of proportion. "If your vehicle doesn't meet the ULEZ emissions standards and isn't exempt, you need to pay a £12.50 daily charge to drive within the zone. This applies to cars, motorcycles, vans and specialist vehicles (up to and including 3.5 tonnes) and minibuses (up to and including 5 tonnes)."

If someone used low-emission cars like an electric car, or public transport - no one would charge you for "going out of your zone". It is possible to check whether your vehicle meets the standards online, but I'm guessing this also falls into Nigel's idea of the government spying on you. His issue with surveillance must come from the fact that there already is a lot of surveillance in the UK, with over 7.5 Million cameras installed. With many right wingers, the idea of personal freedom is very important. While it may not be problematic at first, Nigel believes that ULEZ is like a gateway for more ways for the government to take away freedom from people. I think with these claims he knows exactly what he is doing. He feeds these ideas to similar like-minded people that are also similarly very anti-government.

Nigel also says that cars, for some people, are definitely a necessity. Though he mentions that using a car in central London is a pain. He has an assumption that because of the circumstances, like centers becoming more retail oriented - people will naturally start moving into city centers. In this way, the kind of 15-minute cities will happen on their own, drawing a parallel to Japan.

Personal sidenote: It's a bit difficult to understand whether Nigel is just uneducated on the topic of 15-minute cities, or he just really wants to use a car. I say this, because his concerns seem to be very car-oriented and he doesn't see the potential of how 15-minute cities may resolve some of the issues he himself does not like. He seems to just believe things will somehow resolve themselves in the long run. He might also do this deliberately because he knows exactly what audience he is catering to, which is the "common folk."







### E. ELON MUSK, by George Boyle

“The future should look like the future,” Elon Musk said in front of an audience of adoring fans, many of whom own Teslas and Tesla stock. It’s a defining statement in his quest to create the world in his own image. It places him in an interesting position regarding the subject of this study,

as Elon Musk owns Tesla, a company that produces electric cars, which are exempt from ULEZ and congestion charges. In addition, he owns the Boring Company which digs tunnels in which



“public” transit systems have been proposed. He’s even building his own towns and cities around Texas to house his many companies and their employees. The question of their design remains to be seen, and whether Elon would latch on to the idea of his employees walking to work seems about as far-fetched as him releasing a product on time and at the originally advertised price. But a lot of what we know must be based on speculation and reading between the lines because Elon walks a fine line between his rabid far-right supporters and his businesses which market products which, until recently, were seen as an emblem of the liberal elite.

Despite his constant presence on Twitter, the social media site he purchased, he very rarely gets into the weeds about pollution or climate change. One may surmise that he avoids this topic in order to not upset his growing fanbase in the alt-right. It may be argued that he has managed to gain this following by strategically avoiding mentioning climate change on Twitter where the internet denizens would be quick to pounce, while touting the benefits of electric cars to shareholders. However, in recent years, the language about these benefits has shifted to a more consumer-minded “cost per mile” as seen in his speech at the RoboCab reveal in October (Tesla, 2024). By shifting the conversation away from carbon emissions and onto the cost-to-operate for the end user, he is able to eschew critique from the increasingly right-wing Twitter posters, while simultaneously maintaining his company’s position as an alternative to petrol- and diesel-powered vehicles.

A search into Elon’s post history on Twitter reveals that he still discusses climate change, but it has recently centered around the idea of preventing it through carbon taxes (Musk, 2024a), something his companies might be more-or-less exempt from. In other posts about climate change, he further aligns himself with the right by decrying regulations on farmers in order to combat CO2 emissions (Musk, 2023), especially when it comes to reducing the production of cattle and their associated emissions.

On the topics of ultra low emission zones and 15 minute cities, however, Musk is completely silent on his social media site. Searches into relevant hashtags and direct language have revealed absolutely zero posts by the billionaire. Both of these topics are quite controversial in Musk’s chosen milieu, so it comes as no surprise that he would shy away from discussing them on Twitter. He doesn’t want to upset his userbase of blue-checked sycophants. He is observant enough to know that they are fickle, and treading unwarily into such topics could lose him the adoration he so desperately needs.

The weird thing is that he actually speaks in favor of some of the talking points centered around 15 minute cities when he talks about Tesla. He doesn’t do this on Twitter, though. Instead, he saves these talking points for public presentations. As an exemplar of his talking points, I have focused on a singular speech Musk delivered at a Tesla event in October, 2024, as it is an excellent



encapsulation of his view on urbanization. In this recent RoboCab and RoboVan reveal event, he spoke about the absurd amount of space that cars take up in our modern world, while



behind him drone videos of packed parking lots punctuated his argument. As an alternative, he suggests “taking the ‘-ing lot’ out of parking lot” and turning these vast lots of land into parks (Tesla, 2024). This is a point supporters of 15 minute cities could get behind: parking lots are bad, and parks are good. However, it does very little to actually affect change as in the AI generated images in Musk’s presentation show, the highways persist (Tesla, 2024). The only change Musk can envision is that parking lots are gone because the self-driving cars drop off a passenger and immediately return to the roadways. Not to downplay the importance of green spaces in people’s daily lives, but Musk sees these green spaces as inhabiting a world that is remarkably similar to the one we currently live in, where access to these green spaces still requires the use of a motorized vehicle. And why wouldn’t he envision a world like that? He sells cars, after all. He would very much like every person in the world to have access to a green space so long as people access that green space by riding in a Tesla product to get there.

And what about the traffic? In 15 minute cities, people don’t have to wait in traffic because they are able to walk wherever they need on a daily basis. Musk largely agrees that traffic is a bane of the modern world. In 2016, he got so fed up with traffic that he essentially started an entirely new company with a tweet reading, “Traffic is driving me nuts. Am going to build a tunnel boring machine and just start digging...” (Musk, 2016). So he acknowledges the problem. It’s something that he and the urbanists can agree on. However, their solutions differ quite drastically.

Here’s the problem: Musk doesn’t like public transportation. He actually hates it. At a public event in 2017, he famously said that “public transportation is painful. It sucks. Why do you want to get on something with a lot of other people...and it doesn’t go all the time[?]” (Marshall, 2017). So he needed to come up with a solution that didn’t involve these problems. His answer, initially, was a hyperloop: a giant underground tunnel with the air removed to reduce air resistance on any vehicle travelling through it. While this never materialized due to exorbitant costs and a loose connection to reality (Moseman 2022), a more down-to-earth method of underground transport was eventually revealed by the Boring Company: a tunnel through which Teslas drive. It solves Musk’s issue with having to share space with other people, but it certainly doesn’t do it very efficiently. While proponents of the project will twist statistics in an attempt to make the project appear better than public transit, the fact is that it’s really not a workable solution. In fact, the project has experienced traffic jams: the exact thing it was built to avoid (Moseman, 2022). But we’ll come back to that.

Returning to that RoboCab reveal presentation, Musk spent a lot of time comparing his RoboCab to public transportation. This seems to obviate the tunnels he’s built in Las Vegas, which makes sense, because why would he spend the time and effort digging a tunnel if he can fill the roads (which have already been built with taxpayer dollars) with your automated taxis? He spent a good portion of his presentation talking about the freedom afforded by self-driving cars, accentuated by a video of children getting in the front seats of a RoboCab with no steering wheel or pedals, indicating that children will be afforded more freedom by not having to rely on



parents or guardians to shuttle them from place to place. He then proceeded to compare the efficiency of his RoboCabs to a public bus, stating that public buses average out to a dollar per mile (1.6km) to operate, noting that the ticket price doesn't reflect this cost because the tickets are subsidized. He then compares that to the cost of operating a RoboCab, which he states *could be* as low as 20 cents per mile, or 40 cents per mile after taxes. But that math doesn't work out very well. The average city bus can carry around 40 seated passengers and another 20-40 standing during high volume times. That averages out to 2.5 cents per mile per passenger. Elon's math simply doesn't work when you consider that the maximum occupancy of a RoboCab is five. That's more than three times the price with absolutely no promise of subsidy, and he's only considering the operating price, not the price that a capitalist would require to make owning and operating a RoboCab financially viable. He says he thinks his solution would lead to "individualized mass-transit" (Tesla, 2024). The only winner in this future is the person with the fleet of RoboCabs. And, yes, that is the stated end goal (Tesla, 2024).

Here is where Elon generally falls apart. For all his bluster and salesmanship, he isn't very good at considering the reality of his ideas. When he originally conceived of the Boring Company, it was to reduce traffic, but the reality of traffic is that one more lane, whether above or below ground, is still not an answer to traffic, and will always result in induced demand. Not to mention, his extant tunnel in Las Vegas, which only operates with individual Tesla models, has already experienced traffic jams, but since the tunnels weren't built with this in mind, there are no escape ledges for people to walk out of the tunnel when things do go wrong. So not only has he created a situation in which traffic can still occur, he's exacerbated the situation by removing the possibility of escape. Not only that, but we already have transportation systems that move large numbers of people quickly underground from point to point: we call them subways. Just like with the RoboCabs, though, the "public" is removed from "public transportation." The tunnel system in Las Vegas is designed for tourists, not the people who live in the city. In a recent tweet, he extolled the system by saying, "In a few years, you will be able to get to all major destinations in the city super fast with electric cars in tunnels" (Musk, 2024b). What he fails to address, or even see as an issue, is that most people don't want to go from hotel to convention center and back again. Certainly the tourists do, but what makes a good public transportation system, or transportation system in general, is the ability for all users to benefit from it. In his 2017 rant about public transit, he decried the fact that it doesn't go where you want it to go, but neither do his tunnels. He hasn't even solved the problem that he, himself, railed against.

When designing the Tesla automation systems, he adamantly opposed the inclusion of LiDAR systems in the cars. "The solution we have is AI and vision," he explained at the Tesla RoboCab event (Tesla, 2024). But the problem is that, when the cameras get dirty, the car can't see anymore. As engineering and computing professor Missy Cummings of George Mason University said, "If you can't see the world correctly, you can't plan and move and actuate to the world correctly" (Krisher, 2024). But Elon doesn't see it that way because LiDAR requires a large external sensor array such as those seen on competing autonomous vehicles, such as those used by Waymo. This doesn't match Elon's futuristic aesthetic, so the idea was nixed.



Yet he continually pushes the idea that his Full Self Driving will not only be working soon (something he's promised for years), but that it will be "10 times safer than a human" driver (Tesla, 2024). As an example, he harkened back to the days when elevators were operated by humans, saying that cars will one day look as odd with a human operator. He then catastrophizes, saying, "every once in a while they get tired...and shear somebody in half" (Tesla, 2024) indicating that his cars would be a safer option, when there are multiple lawsuits in which using the same FSD system in question was directly responsible for decapitation. He seems to recognize this flaw, though he leaves his viewer to complete the thought when he warns his audience that the new RoboCabs driving around have "no people in them... There's no steering wheel or pedals...So, I hope this goes well [laughs nervously] We'll find out..." (Tesla, 2024). While he openly touts a concern for safety, his actions indicate that he's far more concerned with technological advance than the humans who have to experience the world in which these cars are still in beta. This stands very strictly at odds with the human-centered ideals espoused by urbanists in favor of 15 minute cities.

And that's the thing: Elon ignores the human element unless it's other humans bothering him. He hyperbolizes about people on public transit, saying, "there's a bunch of random strangers, one of who might be a serial killer, OK, great" (Marshall, 2017) as if this wasn't the same experience you might have simply existing in a public space. Yes, there are random strangers, because we live in a society. Those random strangers, as it so happens, are also your best defense against harm from a serial killer who is quite unlikely to act in a public setting like the one Musk describes. It's absurd.

But reality seems to be Elon's worst enemy. When confronted with facts presented by academic figures who have spent their lives in study of a topic, he is dismissive, flinging insults in favor of debate or acknowledging a flaw in his logic. When public transit planning consultant Jarrett Walker said "In cities, @elonmusk's hatred of sharing space with strangers is a luxury (or pathology) that only the rich can afford. Letting him design cities is the essence of elite projection" (Walker, 2017), Musk replied "You're an idiot" (Musk, 2017). This seems to be his only retort to experts who confront his flawed plans.

His idea for full self driving is just as lacking in foresight as he suggests that people lend out their personal cars to be used by others as a taxi service when the owner is otherwise engaged (Tesla, 2024). But this ignores the individualistic nature of cars, especially in the US where a car is a defining feature in a lot of people's lives. Most people wouldn't want to lend out their car to strangers full stop.

"Let's not get nuanced here," Elon replied to a question from the audience at the RoboCab event (Tesla 2024), and that epitomizes his view of progress. Elon Musk views the big picture from his ivory tower, and his disdain for the common man shows in every decision he makes. His view of the future with parks instead of parking lots exists because it would make the view from the tower look nicer. They aren't there to be walked in by average people. His view of roadways is that they are there for his products to use, and to use constantly (that's why the parking lots would be unnecessary: the cars are always on the move). He wants those products to look like the future he's seen in movies, even when those movies are depicting dystopian nightmares for all but the super-

wealthy. He doesn't care if his products put people in danger as long as they look cool. "...Imagine walking down the street and this comes toward you? That'd be siiiick!" (Tesla, 2024) he exclaimed about the 16-seater alternative to a public bus. But he doesn't care what the end result of that interaction is, he only cares about the aesthetic feel of an art deco/neo-futurist mashup of a lunchbox on wheels. It doesn't need to be efficient. It doesn't even need to work on a road. It doesn't need to be safe or cost-effective for the masses. It just needs to fit his vision of the future, "an age of abundance, the likes of which... almost no one has envisioned. It will be something special" (Tesla, 2024).

Urbanists are right to be worried about this vision for the future. It has very little in common with 15 minute cities beyond a lack of parking lots. But where the urbanists envision a pedestrian utopia, Elon sees streets covered in Teslas of every shape and color (just kidding, they'll all be black, white and grey). Where urbanists see parks with children playing within earshot of home, Elon sees green spaces scattered sporadically around the city, situated in such a way that they ensure the necessity of using a taxi. Preferably a self-driving one. Where urbanists see bike lanes, Elon sees tunnel entrances. Where urbanists hope for a grocery store close enough to walk to, Elon sees a perfect excuse to hop in another self-driving car at the cost of 40 cents per mile. While the urbanists dream of clean, safe, walkable neighborhoods, Elon dreams of electric cars.

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