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Dear Client:

Counting down: only two more editions of this weekly newsletter remain following this one. We've spent the last 40 years looking at Austin and where it is headed. No reason to stop now. So, let's jump right into this week's insights.

Want to know what Austin streets – especially downtown – will look like in the future? Well, there is a group that says all you need to do is look at certain crowded world cities where the streets are cluttered with bicycles, Mo-Peds, scooters, and pedestrians. Cars will be vastly outnumbered if they are allowed at all. This was the view discussed by some at South by Southwest (SXSW) this week.

Admittedly this would be a drastic departure from this car-centric community. But if you check recent city downtown policies – **reduction of car lanes, expanded bike lanes, pedestrian enhancements, sidewalk widening, parking elimination**, etc. – you might detect a trend. It's important to watch these policies to see if this is truly a trend that will expand.

Speaking of the ubiquitous scooter situation downtown, an interesting explanation for the number of scooter-related accidents emerged at SXSW, courtesy of **Carlos Bloha**, the co-founder of the Flash e-scooter company that is currently active in Europe. According to the *Austin Monitor*, Bloha said **the practice of US scooter companies charging per minute of use leads to reckless behavior.**

“If you start thinking in terms of time, when your need is (covering) space, you engage in **pretty warped behavioral patterns**,” he said. “**If you're billed by time, what is the natural human instinct? It is to hurry up because no one wants to pay more than they should.**”

“Hurrying up on a device leads to some **seriously irresponsible behavior and serious accidents. You have adopted a pricing behavior that is a moral and physical hazard**,” Bloha claimed.

To bolster his theory, he said **scooter riders in Austin had racked up nearly 250 serious accidents in the previous 60 days.**

Of course, scooter scooting hit its peak this week during the SXSW events downtown.

While on the topic of transportation and mobility, it appears Ford is preparing to open an Autonomous Vehicle (AV) program in Austin. There has been no official announcement from Ford – yet – but *TechCrunch.com* is reporting the automaker will come to Austin to ramp up testing ahead of launching a self-driving taxi and delivery service in 2021.

The report from *TechCrunch.com* this week was not based on some “news leak.” It cited a new **job listing for an autonomous vehicles “market specialist” based in Austin.** Ford would only officially say “We are on track to announce the next deployment city in which we plan to expand our self-driving technology and business testing efforts by the end of this year.”

Austin will be the fifth city to join Ford’s testing program which already includes Detroit, Miami, Pittsburgh and Washington, DC. The new job posting by Ford for Austin reads, in part, **“We’re looking for the best and brightest. The role will require critical thinking, problem-solving capabilities, and a ‘get it done’ attitude** to help make strategic decisions that will enable Ford to be a leader in autonomy, connectivity, mobility, analytics and customer experience.”

To figure out what will happen in Austin, you can look to the experience of the four cities where Ford is doing the same thing. Ford developed high-def maps in those cities for Ford’s self-driving vehicles. **And the automaker is testing its go-to-market strategy with partners like Walmart and Domino’s and even some local businesses.**

According to *TechCrunch.com*, Ford will likely institute a similar rollout plan for Austin. **Ford will also probably open a terminal, or operations center, where the AV test vehicles will be stored.** Operation centers also act as light maintenance and data centers.

In the past, Ford launched its mapping and testing before a terminal was completed. *TechCrunch.com* reported **“it’s possible Ford will try to establish the autonomous vehicle operations terminal first, a slight departure from previous launches.”**

A name to watch is Argo AI. Ford invested \$1 billion in this Pittsburgh-based company in 2017. Argo AI is developing the virtual driver system and high-def maps designed for Ford’s self-driving vehicles. When can you expect more info and the official word about Austin? **Ford would only say: “We will provide more details at the appropriate time.”** Stay tuned.

For your long-term anticipation: US Transportation Secretary Elaine Chao said in Austin this week the Fed’s are looking to remove regulatory roadblocks to high-speed transports, such as hyperloop tube trains. Could such an option be considered to connect Austin, Dallas-Fort Worth, Houston, San Antonio and Laredo? Far-fetched? Maybe not.

The ripple effect of former Dem Texas Congressman Beto O'Rourke's official announcement Thursday that he was running for president may turn into a small wave of additional candidates entering other races. Of course, his declaration means there will be two Texans in the crowd of Democrats wanting to be president. Julian Castro is already running. But other Texas names are mulling their own futures.

Castro's twin, Dem Congressman **Joaquin Castro**, is publicly talking about challenging GOP USSenator **John Cornyn**. He is getting encouragement after O'Rourke's closer-than-predicted losing run against GOP USSenator **Ted Cruz**. Right now, while still representing San Antonio in Congress, he has a key role in his twin's campaign.

He's not the only Dem pondering a challenge to Cornyn. **Remember Wendy Davis?** She's the Dem State Senator who gained national notoriety for a filibuster. **She used that as a jumping-off point to run against GOP Gov. Greg Abbott, who defeated her overwhelmingly.** Well, sometime Austinite and Oscar winner **Sandra Bullock** is now said to be planning a movie about Davis. So there is talk **Davis may use that high-profile event -- if it happens -- to run against Cornyn.**

And don't forget about another battle-tested (in more ways than one) Dem female candidate, MJ Hegar, a military veteran who ran a tough, but losing, race against Central Texas GOP Congressman **John Carter**. She is still in the conversation about running against Cornyn.

As for Cornyn, he is running for re-election and running hard. As we reported in our 2.15.19 edition, the silver-haired former Texas Supreme Court Justice had the **largest campaign war chest of any USSenator**. At last count, it was reported to be \$5.8 million in cash. And, as the former head of the USSenate's National Campaign Committee, he can be counted on to call in a number of chits for even bigger bucks.

It's not expected Cornyn's opponent(s) will be able to raise the formidable amount of campaign money the charismatic O'Rourke did for his race against Cruz. And equally important, Cornyn has already built a widely-recognized staff to mount his campaign.

With all this activity, and the fact several Texas GOP Congressional seats flipped to the Dems in the last election, Texas is sure to be in the national spotlight throughout the 2020 presidential election cycle.

If you held off travel due to the airport craziness of SXSW and Spring Break, there are some new amenities to greet you at Austin's airport. The main live music area now has a new stage, bleacher seating and bar. Other newbies include a Saxon Pub area and, wait for it, the first Starbucks in the Austin airport will open soon.

If you have ever been tailgated on an Austin roadway, or if you are a tailgater (please don't brag about this), then you may not quarrel with a study released this week. It reports Austin is in the Top Ten list of major metros with the most aggressive drivers. Los Angeles (surprise, surprise) tops the list, with Philadelphia in second place. Austin is #9 in the nation.

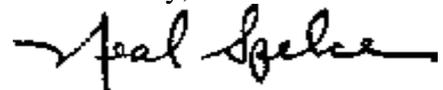
For many years, we told out-of-towners it was **seldom you heard a driver honk a horn in Austin**. It really was a rarity. Such a contrast to places like New York City where horn-honking appears to be an Olympic sport. (We like to tell the story that when we lived in NYC eons ago, we recoiled quickly when we opened a door in the early morning to the heavily traveled East 49th Street. **What caused us to recoil and jump back was – silence. The normal cacophony of street sounds was silenced by a major overnight snowfall.** The stark silence was that rare.) But we digress.

Horn-honking and tailgating are not the only signs of aggressive driving. **Speeding, rapid acceleration and braking are other signs the driver is behaving aggressively.** This and many other actions were taken into account by the GasBuddy app in compiling its list, covering Nov. 2018 – Feb. 2019. Not coincidentally, GasBuddy ranked the metros in order to point out the extent of gas usage by aggressive drivers.

“Frustrated drivers can get agitated quickly, and their aggressive driving habits ... can lower gas mileage by as much as 40%, costing them as much as \$477 per year in additional fuel consumption,” noted GasBuddy in getting its point across. The rapidly-growing Austin area's traffic congestion is becoming notorious. Rankings such as this are not surprising.

In two weeks, as we end 40 years of writing our weekly Austin Letter, we are excited to shift focus to our new book about Austin, due out later this year. As we leave this world of newsletter writing, Dr. Louis Overholster warns us that “some cause happiness wherever they go, others whenever they go.” We hope we are not in the latter category. (By the way, refunds will be sent soon to those whose subscription year extends beyond our end-date of March 29, 2019.)

Sincerely,



Editor/Publisher