

Autonomous cars may spur young adults to hit the road

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The percentage of young adults without driver's licenses has been on the rise for more than 30 years, but self-driving vehicles may reverse that trend.

A new study by Michael Sivak and Brandon Schoettle of the University of Michigan Transportation Research Institute shows that the percentage of adults under age 40 with a driver's license has declined 11 percent since 1983—to 82 percent from about 93 percent. Among those ages 18-19, the drop is even greater—to 66 percent from 84 percent.

However, the availability of fully autonomous vehicles could increase the demand for private road transportation among 18-to-39-year-old drivers by up to 11 percent—the increase in total distance traveled by using self-driving instead of conventional vehicles.

For 18-and-19-year-olds, the increase is nearly 28 percent, the researchers say.

"The basic approach in our study involves combining all reasons for currently not having a driver's license that would no longer be applicable with [self-driving vehicles](#), and calculating the new percentage of persons who would have access to personal transportation with self-driving vehicles," Sivak said. "This new expanded pool of those eligible to use personal transportation is then used to calculate the new amount of travel."

Sivak and Schoettle say that about half the reasons that [young adults](#) give for not having a driver's license would no longer apply to autonomous vehicles, including being too busy or not having enough time to get a license, having a disability that could prevent licensure, or never learning to drive.

Likewise, reasons for not driving would still exist—owning and maintaining a [vehicle](#) is too expensive; preferring to bike, walk or use public transportation; concerned about how driving affects the environment; and able to communicate or conduct business online instead of in person.

Provided by University of Michigan

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