

Thought Leaders Discuss OOH and the Smart City

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In early February OAAA brought together OOH industry leaders, technology professionals, city officials, and think tank reps to attend “Cities Going Digital: Understanding Smart Cities” at the Woodrow Wilson Center in Washington DC. The program and discussion centered around the white paper, [Understanding Smart Cities and the Potential Role of OOH Advertising](#) by Gordon Feller and underwritten by FOARE.

Stephen Freitas, OAAA, said 75 percent of the urban infrastructure that will exist in 2050 has yet to be built - an eye-opening introduction to the importance of smart cities in the future of OOH.

The purpose of smart cities is a focus on improved outcomes that technology can deliver such as greener, cleaner, and safer streets and neighborhoods. Just as the digital revolution has disrupted most industries - think travel, books, and music - now is the time for the urban landscape to be disrupted. Providing a digital overlay on urban systems like transportation and energy can create impressive efficiencies.

A full smart cities revolution will require municipalities to address important questions, such as:

- Financing - what is the best business model to produce new revenue streams for cities?
- Privacy - who owns or governs the data generated by all the forms of technology (data the cities need to solve traffic, safety and energy problems)?

Cities presently collect enormous amounts of data but most struggle with how to fully utilize it. A novel approach initiated by Sacramento to deliver a data-driven city invited technology companies to present ideas to the city absent an RFP process. This resulted in a \$150 million partnership with Verizon that includes electrical vehicle charging stations that also provide free Wi-Fi and two innovation districts in the city.

Kansas City, MO, created a similar innovation district that produced \$2.1 billion in development in just five years, enhancing values of the target areas by a much greater amount and in a much shorter time frame than projected. Developments like these create enhanced revenue streams for the cities.

In examining the future, one important projection shared was that cities will soon become impatient with technology vendors. Cities are looking for turn-key deliverables (not big data or data in the cloud) that help provide solutions and value, and as autonomy happens with vehicles, the public will become more engaged and help guide decisions.

Based on a couple key questions, the discussion progressed to a specific focus on OOH:

- What would the ideal framework be for an OOH build out in the smart city revolution?
- What are opportunities and roadblocks for OOH, considering the many pieces to the puzzle (charging stations, 5G networks, kiosks)?

Sandra Baer, Civiq, stressed the need to think about cities more holistically, considering the vision and persona of a city, and how can it be enhanced with OOH. She said the ultimate smart city outcome is about making people happy or improving results for the benefit of citizens.



Freitas addresses symposium attendees.

Drew Lipsher, Volta, stressed the need to ensure consumers understand why smart city features are a good thing for them and are aware of the companies involved. He said Volta receives much positive feedback from consumers on its electronic vehicle charging stations, but he thinks cities aren't being proactive about communicating the benefits to citizens. The conversation expanded to questioning how well OOH currently contributes to cities, such as bus shelters, are being communicated to residents.

In most cases, government promises of service delivery is deficient because of the variance in resident expectations versus reality. Today, cities are facing personnel talent, financing, and expectations gaps. For example, as autonomous vehicles evolve, cities will face diminished parking revenue.

In the end, the continued evolution of smart cities will be based on a two-way value exchange between governments and technology and business partners. Acknowledging the importance of civic identity, and recognizing how residents live in communities, are critical to understanding how smart city technologies can provide enhancements.

This approach also needs to guide the role OOH can play. Developing integrated communications plans that inform citizens on the benefits, and transparency on how partnerships are funded, will be key to enabling the flow of information and technology to city streets.

[Click here](#) to see interviews with symposium participants.