

# **LONGPATH CITYLAB ROUNDTABLE**

**CITYLAB** / Longpath.

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## Dear Readers:

It has become almost cliché to say that for the first time in human history, the majority of our species lives in cities. We talk about cities as laboratories for democracy, and where we test and build out the innovative communities we believe in. To fully seize on the opportunities of 21st-century urban development, we need to talk about the far-out futures. We need to share our boldest, most audacious visions for the cities of tomorrow.

Longpath and CityLab launched a conversation with leading urban thinkers, practitioners, philanthropists, and mayors on their visions for the futures of cities. We are proud to share our findings in a joint report, which explores the rich narratives and trends shaping U.S. cities over the next 100 years. Beyond a singular focus on the rise of the “Smart City” and self-driving cars, Longpath and CityLab’s report surfaces the many other forces shaping the city of tomorrow: new ways of using space, new ways of building communities, new mindsets.

In moments of uncertainty, it can be difficult to think beyond the urgent challenges of today. For this reason, we have developed a new mindset tailored to the needs of this urban cultural moment. Longpath is a mindset with three dimensions: futures thinking, the capacity to imagine many possible tomorrows; transgenerational empathy, a commitment to acting in the interest of coming generations; and telos, the ability to align one’s actions with broader purpose and vision.

In service,

**ARI WALLACH**, Founder and Executive Director of Longpath Labs

# LONGPATH CITYLAB ROUNDTABLE

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It has become almost cliché to recite the fact that for the first time in the history of our species, the majority of people live in cities. Rarely, however, do we fully investigate the challenges and opportunities emerging from this profound shift. In this critical moment in urban history, how do we envision the far-out futures of our cities? And how do we use our most affirmative visions to catalyze action, taking the steps needed to shape the futures that we believe in?

It is time to surface the third rail questions about our cities, questions that enable us to fundamentally reimagine the urbanist space. To that end, CityLab has partnered with Longpath, an initiative focused on fostering long-term thinking and behavior in the individual, organizational, and societal realms. With this partnership, we will broaden the aperture through which we explore city futures, examining the many rich historical narratives and possible scenarios that inform urban discourse.

The future of humanity is urban, so we asked some of today's leading urbanists—a mix of mayors, thought leaders, and practitioners—to give us the lay of the land of our urban past, present, and futures.

## What do you see as the critical inflection point in the past 100 years of urban history—a historical moment or an event that has had lasting ramifications for the cities of today?

**TONI GRIFFIN (Urban Planning and Design for the American City, Founder; Professor in Practice of Urban Planning at Harvard University):** When the Civil Rights Act of 1964 was signed giving greater access, opportunity, and rights to African-Americans in this country, and they began to dismantle the decades of federal policies and programs of racial segregation. That manifested itself in cities all across the U.S. through racially restrictive covenants, blockbusting policies, redlining, the Federal Highways Act — all programs that were designed to exclude and separate African-Americans from other populations. In turn, it also deeply divided cities — by class, in addition to race. The Civil Rights Act was pretty pivotal.

**GIL PENALOSA (880 Cities, Chairman of the Board):** There are clearly two very important inflection points. One is that we are living much, much longer. That has had many ramifications and implications. About 150 years ago we didn't have any country in the world that had a life expectancy above 45. Today we don't have any with a life expectancy below 45. That has been totally transformational. That's why we're having such large population growth. From the point of view of city-making, I think the car showed up in the last 100 years and we decided to build cities thinking more about car mobility than people's happiness. And that has created mostly bad quality cities for people all over the world, in the developing world but also in the developed world.

**BRUCE KATZ (New Localism Advisers, Co-Founder; Author of *The New Localism: How Cities Can Thrive in the Age of Populism*):** One critical inflection point was the Immigration Act of 1965, which basically opened up America's borders again. That had a rejuvenating effect on cities because it brought a whole new group of residents into many parts of U.S. cities and metropolitan areas that were starting to depopulate. Globally, the most important thing that's happened in the last 100 years is simply the rise of cities. We passed the inflection point with more than half of people in the world living in cities. This is happening in Asia, Africa, Europe, and the Americas. The organizing geography of civilization is shifting. It's ubiquitous. The question is how do you manage that? How do you enable cities to be more livable and higher quality? The United States is essentially a metropolitan nation. When we talk about the urban and rural division, we almost never mention the word metropolitan — which is odd. Half of people who live in rural America actually live within metropolitan areas because our metropolitan areas have sprawled and decentralized in such a profound way. Many rural counties are now captured within the commuter zones of metropolitan areas — so the divide [between rural and urban] is not as pronounced as people think. What we need to do, I think, is create a new narrative to enhance the linkages between the core and the peripheral.

**MICHAEL BERKOWITZ (100 Resilient Cities, President):** Jane Jacobs and her opposition to development in New York, and her victory over traffic engineers was definitely significant and continues to be inspirational. She's become sort of an emblem to new urban thinkers. Her work feels like one of the big inflection points, because it moved us beyond the thinking of the early 20th century, when the industrial revolution was about creating silos for efficiency. The government took an engineering mindset that optimized for efficiency, but because of Jane's work we view cities more holistically. Now you have departments of transportation that are moving away from optimizing for cars to optimizing for people. The value of walkability has certainly changed.

## Who is an urban practitioner or leader from the past that you particularly admire and why?

**DAN DOCTOROFF (Sidewalk Labs, Chairman and CEO):** The more that I have studied Jane Jacobs the more impressed I am with her. She had a worldview about what makes cities great and what makes them not so great. I did not appreciate until studying her in much more detail that she was a little bit of a closet futurist. Jane Jacobs was not one who shied away from the belief that technology actually could be a very powerful force for bringing about her vision of cities. She talked a lot about mobility. She talked a lot about sustainability, even though it wasn't called that at the time. She talked a lot about buildings and the whole sense of how community could be crafted in new and interesting and organic ways — all leveraging future technologies. In a funny way, if you study Jane Jacobs you get a really sophisticated understanding of the future. She was just ahead of her time. One of the misnomers is that she's all about nostalgia. She's not. She's about enabling cities to evolve. She was a big believer that technology could play a role in that evolution by helping to achieve a lot of objectives that she saw as critical for the future success of a city, such as accommodating more people with less infrastructure, particularly roads. On the whole issue of environmental stewardship and energy use, she was just way ahead of the curve. It's kind of remarkable actually. So, I would absolutely put her up there at the very top of the list.

**JONATHAN ROSE (Jonathan Rose Companies, President; Author of *The Well Tempered City*):** The reason why I'm not a Jane Jacobs fan is because even though Jane described very important aspects of neighborhoods, communities, street life, diversity, and all those things which are important parts of cities—at the same time the movement she created undermined planning. It undervalued planning. Sure, you need community-based knowledge. But I actually believe in big visions and big plans. Without them, we're not going to be able to address the issues of the 21st century, such as income inequality and climate change. For example, China is connecting cities with 25,000 miles of high-speed rail. Jane Jacobs thinking doesn't do that. It's a different kind of thinking. What happened post-Jane Jacobs is that planners lost their role as visionaries and they kind of became just public approval processors.

**MICHAEL TUBBS (Mayor of Stockton California, Pioneer of Universal Basic Income):** WEB Dubois. Not only was he the first African-American graduate at Harvard, but he really spoke about cities as more than streets and roads, but full of people and histories and competing interests and ideologies. His work, especially around the lived experiences of African-Americans, about people of color in general, and cities was very exciting. I think he brought a human and also social-political aspect to the ideas of cities and urbanism.

## What do you see as the largest barriers to activating long-term solutions in the urban world?

**MICHAEL BERKOWITZ:** The barrier is that political and budget cycles run short, when real strategic and systematic changes at play are generational. Those two things are massively misaligned.

**SAM LICCARDO (Mayor of San Jose):** The fundamental challenge of any mayor interested in change and implementing big ideas is the widespread perception that change only benefits somebody else and only comes at my expense. As we say in San Jose, “they yell because they love.” We have a lot of passionate advocates for our city and community. But I think quite often that the pace of technological and economic change in Silicon Valley has come at the expense of many who’ve been left behind. We need to hear the voices of those who justifiably and reasonably express concern about how change will impact our community. But at the same time, we need to be able to demonstrate how change can benefit those who have been marginalized. That is the primary task of any mayor.

**SHELLEY POTICHA (NRDC, Urban Solutions Director):** It’s difficult to instill a sense of long-term thinking and an urgency to move toward transformational solutions when everybody is looking at the issues right in front of them every day. We’re so reactive and set in our ways of building our cities and investing in our cities. We need to start acting. We’ve done a lot of talking about a vision of a future that is more resilient. But we really need to move from talking to action. We don’t need to keep arguing about things. A second barrier is that to get to scale on many of the solutions that we know deliver superior outcomes for the people in our communities, we have to look outside our communities. There are lessons that can be drawn from different places. I’ve worked with communities all over the country, and of course there is always something unique and special about every city and every culture in a city. But there are also starting points that we can build on. We too often start from zero when we don’t need to.

**GEORGE ABBOTT (Knight Foundation, Director of Community and National Affairs):** A big barrier to long-term thinking is resistance to change and fear of displacement among people in cities. I think that there is a very, very powerful narrative around gentrification and displacement. There are many places where this is absolutely a problem, when you look at the housing market. But much more of American displacement isn’t happening through gentrification, but through disinvestment. It’s a problem with people moving away for opportunity elsewhere. The fact is that without investment, many cities will continue to decline. And in cities where gentrification is occurring, the reason rent is up is because supply is limited. I think the question of our time is how can we reinvest without displacement? The data suggests that far more people are fleeing areas of poverty than are being priced out. However, what I think is much more common is a form of cultural displacement whereby reinvestment into the neighborhood ignores longtime residents. They they look at it and say “well none of this is being done for me. It doesn’t look like my neighborhood anymore. It doesn’t feel like my neighborhood anymore.” So even though they may not have been physically displaced, they’ve been culturally isolated. We need to be mindful and work with longstanding residents to ensure that they are protected and that they feel like a part of this transformation. We can build a more inclusive and stronger social fabric that way.

## Albert Einstein famously said “We cannot solve our problems with the same thinking that we used when we created them.” What are some shifts in mindset that are needed to achieve your vision of the Future of Cities?

**JONATHAN ROSE:** So this shift from static thinking to dynamic thinking, from linear thinking to systems thinking. Pretty straightforward. It’s where we’re going to move to in the future.

**GEORGE ABBOTT:** We have to embrace the fact that there is no silver bullet solution. There can be a tendency to look at these big things like Amazon HQ2, and think that it will solve all of our problems. But in reality I think you’re much better served by concentrating on the basics, figuring out how to use small scale interventions that don’t need a huge amount of money to make your city a place that is more pleasant to live in. We should focus on providing spaces where people like to be, providing a variety of housing options, providing good education, and good ways for folks to increase their economic opportunity. There are many small things we can be doing, but we go for a 10-year multimillion dollar transformational development opportunity that may or may not exist. I think that the resources you spend chasing that would be better expended doing little things well and having a vision that extends beyond your period of elected office.

**MICHAEL TUBBS:** Our mindset needs to shift from investing just in infrastructure and building, to really investing in people and improving their social capital. I always say the most pointed investment you can make is in our communities. That means especially investing in those who are the hardest to invest in: folks who may have criminal records, folks who may not have money, folks who have immigrated from another country. That’s the shift in mindset we need if we’re planning for 100 years.

**DAN DOCTOROFF:** There are two camps that have to come together to integrate technology into the urban environment. On the one hand there are the urbanists, the people who plan cities, manage cities, think about cities. And on the other hand there are the technologists — the people who understand technology and who are capable of building new products and services. There’s a massive cultural divide between the two. They literally speak completely different languages. They operate in very different time cycles. Obviously in the case of the urbanist it’s a much longer perspective. The expectation is for things to take longer to get done, whereas the technologist is about the fast iterations, prototyping, getting things out in the market, testing very quickly. And getting those two camps to understand each other is a meaningful barrier to the integration of innovation into the urban environment. And I would argue probably the most important goal that has to be bridged in order to be successful. It’s certainly something that Sidewalk Labs has been quite sensitive about since we started building this company almost three years ago. I can’t tell you that we have got the formula exactly right. But I think we have gotten a lot closer than any other attempt that I’m aware of just by virtue of the team that we created.

## In 100 years how would you like humanity to look back at this moment in history?

**TONI GRIFFIN:** I would love for this to be a moment where the role of the urban planner is no longer demonized. I think my profession still suffers from the legacy of mid-century interventions to transform the city that were destructive and oftentimes unjust. I don’t know that we’ve fully recovered the stigma of the planner as the singular scraper of the city. And now I feel like the pendulum has swung the other way. Planners are now just the facilitators of change. A hundred years from now, I’d like them to remember this as a moment when planners came back to the center. I think this is a moment when we need visionaries. We need people who can look beyond current means of problem-solving and put forward progressive or radical ideas.

**CAROL COLETTA (Kresge Foundation, Senior Fellow of American Cities Practice):** I'd like humanity to look back and say that this was the moment when the problems created in the 20th century were recognized and they didn't look for easy solutions. They recognized the hardships but they didn't wait until they had complete consensus to push forward with changes that could be made in the near term, and they figured out how to communicate the choices in effective ways.

**SAM LICCARDO:** I want the readers of those history books to know that we were looking out for them, that we were thinking about the impact of our decisions on our grandchildren, and that this was the moment when we learned how to prosper and bring everyone along with us by creating the world's most successful multicultural community.

## How do you respond to the narratives of The Smart City and The Rise of Autonomous Vehicles as the future of cities?

**DAN DOCTOROFF:** Technological transformation is going to occur in virtually every aspect of urban life and in multiple forms. Self-driving technology is going to reduce costs without sacrificing convenience. It will also have a huge impact on the urban form by dramatically increasing the amount of public open space. Additionally, we are going to see some building technologies that enable us to create far greater flexibility and affordability, which can help us to begin to address the affordability crisis that we have both in the shorter term and over the longer term. We think the public realm itself can be much more usable, and much more engaging for people. People will have the ability to personalize it in new and interesting ways. There are five pillars of the future city: mobility, sustainability, building the public realm, community, and governmental services. Each one of them doesn't act independently. Each one interacts with all of the others, and the opportunity is to think comprehensively about the urban environment. That's what's so exciting about the moment that we're in right now.

**SHELLEY POTICHA:** I appreciate that we have to evolve. Technology is going to shift how we experience our lives and how we get around. But I'm hoping we don't prioritize technology over people. There are going to be efficiencies and benefits of autonomous vehicles, but that doesn't matter if it means a pedestrian can't walk down the street safely because the vehicle can't see them. I worry about reverting to a modernist vision of cities where everything's separated.

**BRUCE KATZ:** I think the smartest cities are the cities with the smartest citizens. We have a lot of technology-led conversations, in the United States in particular. I would rather the conversation be about how do we ensure that we invest in early childhood and expand those investments as children make their way through elementary and secondary schools. The challenge in the United States is not in product innovation or in deploying new technologies. The challenge we have is in diminishing the profound racial and ethnic achievement gap. It's in our inability to educate a citizenry that's capable of participating in the 21st century labor market. I think smart cities really needs to be equated with smart citizens. The 21st century is much more distributed, much more networked, much nimbler, smaller, entrepreneurial, and technologically enhanced. Cities are really at the vanguard of it all.

**CAROL COLETTA:** The narrative around autonomous vehicles makes no sense to me. What is the point of autonomous vehicles if they are going to be used the same way vehicles have been used in the last 50 years? What is magic about that? I don't get it. In terms of narratives I like, I see a new focus on inequality and shared prosperity. I think we don't know what to do about it yet, but the fact that we recognize it is the first step. The other thing that's positive is that there is clearly a strong appetite for people to live in cities. As someone who has been working on trying to get people to move back into the city for decades, that hasn't always been the case.

**SAM LICCARDO:** The narrative of the city as a laboratory is critically important for us. Along many dimensions, cities certainly become social laboratories. That's not a new phenomenon. This is the place where diversity happens. We need to demonstrate that to an awful lot of folks in this country that are skeptical and perhaps fearful of diversity. We have to show that cities are where diversity propels communities to flourish. We are also a laboratory for innovations of various kinds. In San Jose, we've been very deliberate about allowing ourselves to become the guinea pig for innovators in our impressive community to demonstrate technologies that have civic impact. For instance, Facebook is launching free gigabit speed Wi-Fi service within the city, and a couple of local engineers decided to create a drone that paints over graffiti on freeway overpasses.

**MICHAEL TUBBS:** The narratives I'm excited about are things like basic income and tuition-free college. Moving toward affordable healthcare and free health care as a right. We believe we can help take care of people's basic needs. Every generation has huge technological advances and that's inevitable. And I think that's why so much of my focus is on people, because we spend a lot of time innovating around technology, apps, and profits. I think it's time to embrace the fact that we have an opportunity to actually shape the future with the choices we make today. I'm excited about that.

## If the city of the past was built on the foundation of waterways and transport corridors. What do you think is the foundation of the city of the future?

**MICHAEL BERKOWITZ:** It's going to be about this local-global connection. What that means is that people will be organized around a tight-knit community, but they will be able to tap into things at massive scale. The city of 100 million people is coming. And yet, that will be a city of neighborhoods. I also think information technology and the pace of innovation will make the future be built around connectivity. People will be looking globally for the good ideas, and communities will make these big concepts personal and interconnected.

**MICHAEL TUBBS:** The foundation of the city of the future is in being intentional about the folks who live in the city. It's in connecting those folks to skills and opportunities. It's about creating a true community where people feel that they are their brothers' and their sisters' keepers. It's in creating positive design for cities, so folks aren't sprawled out. If folks are living in proximity to each other, there are ways for people to bump into each other. I think that helps. I think it's true integration along lines of class, race, and everything else. The city of the future will be full of mixed income communities and workplaces.

**JONATHAN ROSE:** Cities are built on connectivity, and they will continue to be. It happens to be that waterways were how they were connected in the past, because cities were part of networks of trade. Networks evolve out of connected diversity. For cities to thrive, they need to be differentiated. They need to have something of excellence to offer the network and they need to be connected. Water connections became land connections, which became high-speed rail and airport connections, and now there are internet connections. The key now is to interconnect humanely.

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR: CITYLAB X LONGPATH

CityLab x Longpath is a collaboration exploring and investigating the deeper futures of cities. Interviews and research conducted by Chad Rochkind, Longpath Urban Fellow.

## Virtual Roundtable Participants

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