

## Comments by Via on the Digital Economy Consultation Paper

### Background on Via

Via was founded with the goal of offering efficient, affordable, sustainable, and convenient shared rides to everyone, everywhere. Our technology enables multiple passengers headed in the same direction to seamlessly share their ride, rerouting vehicles in real time in response to demand. Using advanced algorithms, we manage fleets of dynamic shuttles with extremely high efficiency, making the best use of every seat in every vehicle.

Via's technology is being used to operate vehicles in a wide variety of contexts across the globe. In New York, Chicago, and Washington, DC, we provide 1.5 million rides a month by operating our own platform and directly connecting drivers and passengers at the tap of smartphone. As part of a new [joint venture with Daimler/Mercedes-Benz](#), we are preparing to begin operations in London, with other European cities to follow. In addition, in New Zealand, France, the UK, and the United States, we are sharing our technology with a growing number of government and private sector partners to improve their transportation services and operate more efficiently. This will soon include Australia as we plan to launch an on-demand service in conjunction with a private operator and a state transport authority in early 2018 (this project is not yet public, but we would be happy to discuss it with you in detail once it is).

In each instance, our technology and operational experience are increasing mobility in communities while reducing the number of single passenger vehicles on our roads, and their attendant congestion and pollution.

### Comments

Advances in the digital economy and technology are transforming transportation across the world. The growth of app-based mobility services is changing the way individuals move around their communities, and cities are turning to new technologies to improve public transportation. We believe Australia has an enormous opportunity to increase economic and social mobility, while reducing congestion and greenhouse gas emissions, by fostering and encouraging the deployment of these new technologies and transportation options.

In recent months, Via has launched a number of partnerships aimed at tackling different problems through the efficient sharing of vehicles that are dynamically routed in real time. We hope that these partnership models prove instructive as you consider ways for Australia to realize the promise of the digital economy:

- **Improving underperforming bus routes and paratransit:** In partnership with the transit agency in Austin, Texas, Via [launched Pickup](#), a service providing on-demand, dynamically routed shuttles in the northeast part of the city. The city uses its own buses and drivers, along with Via's technology, to transport Austinites who request rides on their smartphones (or who call in) anywhere in the service area. The shuttles are wheelchair accessible and had previously been used as a dial-a-ride service.

- **Solving the first/last-mile problem:**

- In the UK, Via has partnered with Arriva, an international operator of public transit, to [launch ArrivaClick](#). The service provides on-demand, dynamic shuttles in and around the town of Sittingbourne making it easy and affordable for commuters to get to the city's rail station and from the rail station to major employment centers in the area.
- The transit agency in [Los Angeles](#) is partnering with Via to provide better connections to transit stops. The project is funded by the largest federal grant of its kind – \$1.35 million from a competitive grant program run by the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) – and will also be supported by significant local government funds.

- **Creating new public transportation options:**

- In two U.S. cities – West Sacramento, CA, and Arlington, TX – Via will [soon launch](#) a comprehensive on-demand public transit solution, financed by public funds (both federal funds and local funds). Via will be working closely with the cities to develop and customize every aspect of the services, from operating hours and service zones to fare structure and wheelchair accessibility, and will share data with the cities to help inform future planning and investments.
- We have partnered with Go Bus to launch [Savy](#), a new service in Queenstown and the first on-demand ridesharing transport solution of its kind in New Zealand. Users simply book a ride through an app and are instantly matched with others going their way in a dynamically-routed vehicle.

These partnerships have been made possible by governments creating a regulatory climate that fosters innovation, and through both federal and local governments providing funds to support the deployment of our services, especially in places where it might not make economic sense for a private company to otherwise enter the market.

Successful collaboration between governments and technology companies are not only important for improving transportation and economic mobility in our communities today. They also help prepare cities for the eventual deployment of electric, autonomous vehicles. A recent [paper](#) by UC Davis' Institute of Transportation Studies explained that in order to most effectively reduce congestion, free up parking and other spaces for better land uses, cut greenhouse gas emissions, and improve livability in our communities, it is not enough to electrify vehicles and make them autonomous – we also must use them on a shared basis. As a result, we believe it is important for government at all levels to implement policies that incentivize the efficient sharing of vehicles, for example, through tax policy or the establishment of high occupancy lanes.

As you continue to work through how Australia can best take advantage of and foster the growth of the digital economy, we encourage you to consider the various ways that government can

speed the deployment of new technologies in shared transportation in ways that advance the public interest.

If it would be helpful for us to discuss any these comments further or otherwise help in the important work you are doing, please do not hesitate to contact me at [andrei@ridewithvia.com](mailto:andrei@ridewithvia.com).

**Submitted By**

Andrei Greenawalt is the Vice President for Public Policy at Via. He previously worked on regulatory and policy issues at the White House between 2009 and 2014, including as the Associate Administrator of the Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs, and as Policy Advisor in the Office of the Chief of Staff. He is a graduate of Princeton University and Yale Law School. [linkedin.com/in/agreenawalt](https://www.linkedin.com/in/agreenawalt)