The Toyota Mobility Foundation Aims Its Problem-Solving Skills Toward Indianapolis

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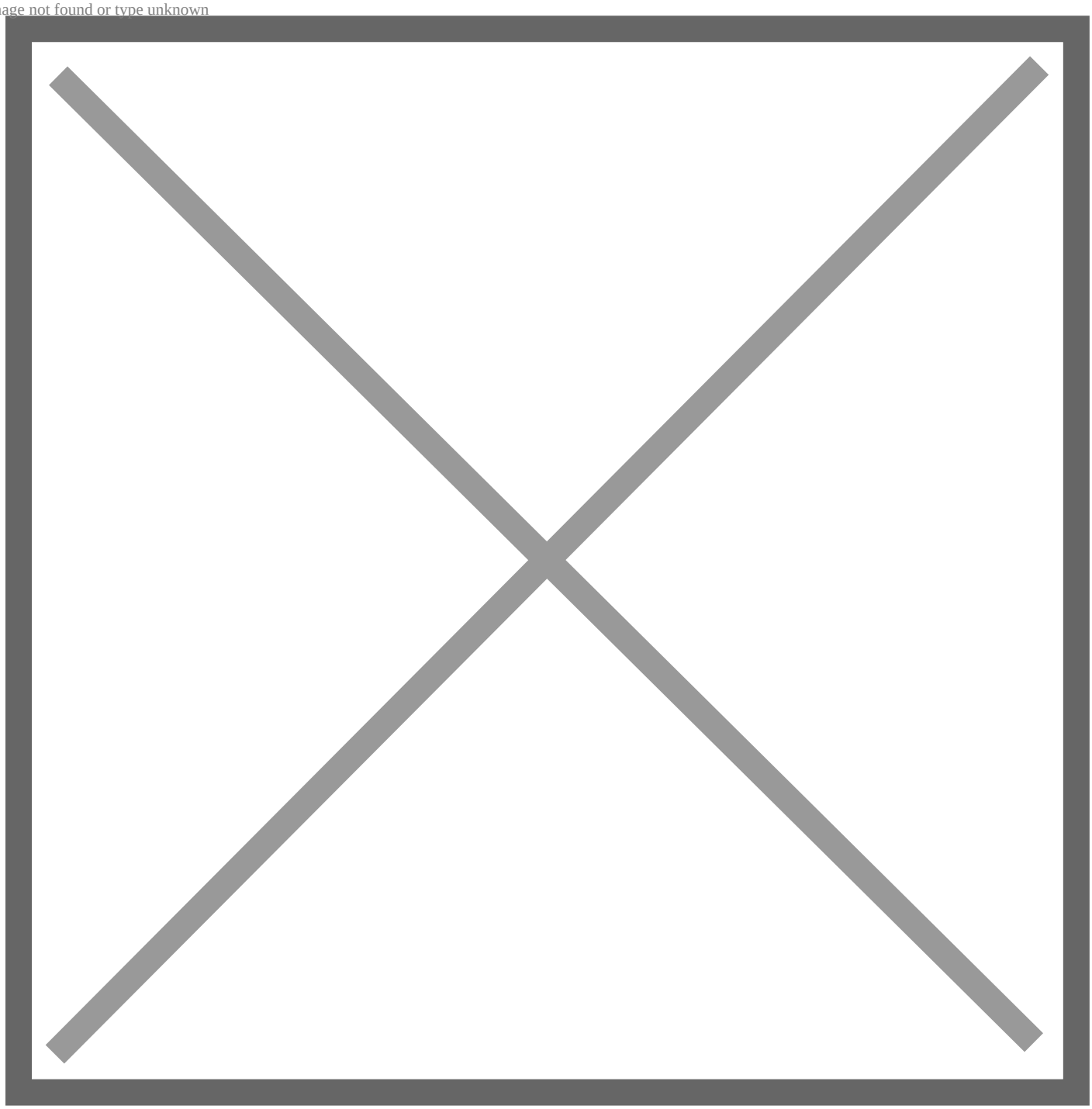

The way people move is changing all over the world.

From small electric cars winding down tiny countryside roads in Japan, to ridesharing tandem bicycles in Brazil, solutions to overcome mobility challenges are being implemented, but more awaits. The Toyota Mobility Foundation (TMF) is ready and committed to driving mobility initiatives forward. Providing people across the globe with the liberty to move safely and freely is paramount for the nonprofit organization that prioritizes "mobility for all" — a concept that stretches far beyond vehicles.

Founded in 2014, TMF understands that transit is a major artery of society, responsible for pumping the lifeblood into communities and its economy. The belief that mobility unleashes a person's full potential and promotes connectivity in immeasurable ways, is at the cornerstone of the organization.

Whether it's a mother who wants to spend quality time with her child while in transit, or an older adult who takes a rideshare service to attend socially enriching local activities, TMF shares funding, know-how and access to a multitude of resources within communities, to help make these opportunities possible. But these ideas can't flourish without a test run.

The future of mobility requires strategic thinking, creativity and a conducive environment where ideas can be executed and analyzed. TMF selects forward-thinking cities — called Together in Motion Initiatives — where leaders can collaborate on advanced mobility technologies, services and innovations. This allows a network of collaborators to focus on changing the overall mobility ecosystem using a human-centered framework. Initiatives are implemented on a smaller scale before they're integrated and accelerated in wider regions.

"We're not really an incubator for new business ideas," says Trey Ingram, project manager for TMF in North America. "What we're looking to do is help cities answer questions about the new technologies and services that are likely to come on the scene over the next 5 to 10 years. We do that by collaborating with local stakeholders in the movement of people and goods."

A Test Run

In the U.S., that work is now taking hold with the Together in Motion Indiana initiative, which is a joint effort between TMF and Energy Systems Network. In February, TMF embarked on initial strategic alignments with the following two pioneers in mobility:

May Mobility — This company that specializes in autonomous vehicle (AV) technology and shuttle operations will conduct two six-month pilots of an automated service that will transport people across the Indianapolis area. The first deployment, which began in June, will serve a station used by students at multiple university campuses in the heart of the city. The AV shuttle will run from an existing Bus Rapid Transit station to the western side of downtown Indianapolis. The second service will focus on a station in suburban Indianapolis. In all, May Mobility will deploy a fleet of five hybrid-electric Lexus RX 450h vehicles — purchased from a Lexus dealership — and one wheelchair-accessible Polaris GEM shuttle, all of which will be specially fitted with autonomous technology.

Udelv — This company is known for breaking new ground with its innovative Delivery Management System. Comprising an automated cargo pod and a cloud-based operating system, Udelv's technology offers the promise of delivering goods to customers without requiring any interaction with the vehicles' drivers. Udelv is adapting a Toyota Sienna, also purchased independently, for this test. It's scheduled to launch late summer.

"We are vehicle agnostic when it comes to these types of projects," says Ingram. "It just so happens that Toyota and Lexus vehicles will be used in both of these deployments."

Preparing for the Future

Ingram says TMF chose Indianapolis as the setting for these studies as its size and scope mirror that of many other cities across the country. That's important, because the true value of these projects will be the lessons learned and the opportunities to incorporate them elsewhere.

"This will be a learning exercise for us and our collaboration partners," says Ingram. "On the back end, there will be a period of reflection to understand how we can apply the results to future mobility projects in Indianapolis, as well as other similar cities. In the end, we are all about trying to solve mobility problems."

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