“If you build it, they will come.”

We’re not talking about the 1989 classic *Field of Dreams*, where an Iowa farmer played by Kevin Costner builds a baseball field for the ghosts of the 1919 Chicago White Sox players because he hears voices from his cornfields.

This paper is about today’s real life opportunity in how neighborhoods and regions could be planned to meet the needs of current and future generations. It’s about demographic trends and the dynamics of a generation positioned to make a huge impact on how and where we live. It’s about using a generational lens to understand a new tool in urban design. This paper looks at three reasons why the youngest generation - Generation Y - will drive this trend into the future and why enlightened planners should embrace them as a lens into the future. Their actions will help planners form strategies to help communities grow in ways that strengthen the economy, protect the environment, and improve the quality of life for many generations to come.

**Generation Y - There Are So Many of Them**

Born between 1982 and 2001 (age 11 - 30), Generation Y – also known as the Millennials or Generation Next – is the youngest generation (children age 10 and under have yet to be classified into a named generation). Although the end marks can be fuzzy at first, demographers generationally agree that it takes about 10 years after the end of an age group to determine where that generation stops. Generation Y is also the largest of the generations.
At 80 million members, they even surpass the Baby Boomers (78 million) in size. For comparison, the group between the two, Generation X, has only 65 million members.

Those figures alone should make you stop and think. That’s 80 million people who will shape current and future community planning. We watched America cater to the Baby Boomers because of their sheer size. That’s happening all over again with Gen Ys. They’ve already had a huge impact on our government. They are about to have a huge impact on the future of our cities - the way they are designed and laid out. Secondly, there is no question that future generations will be more like them than Baby Boomers or Gen Xers. This is the reason why they offer the greatest lens into the future of where we are headed. Enlightened communities are charting new courses based on how this generation does things differently.

**Gen Y Will Do It Differently Because They Are Wired Differently**

Connectivity, or hyper-connectivity, is the key factor for Gen Ys. It’s what separates them most from previous generations. Gen Ys are digital natives. Seventy-five percent use Facebook or another social networking site, according to a recent Pew Research Survey. Eighty-three percent take their cell phones to bed - staying connected 24/7. Time spent in carpools, vanpools or riding the bus, while a challenge for older generations, is a benefit for the youngest generations because it allows them to stay hyper-connected.

Alternatives to single occupancy vehicle commuting such as carpooling, riding transit, biking or walking and even the total car free diet – have already influenced the direction of community design in many areas like Arlington County, VA, just across the Potomac River from Washington, DC. Carfreediet.com, Arlington’s web site all about the car free diet, offers tips and explanations for each of Arlington’s non-car ways to get around. And they have a lot of them. From the Metrorail to the Metrobus, carsharing to bikesharing, and the Arlington Transit bus system to just plain walking, Arlington’s younger residents are not only saving a ton of personal money and helping to keep the air clean by saying “no” to the car. They are also helping to maintain an incredible standard of mobility for the rest of the County. Carfreediet.com has a ticker that updates every second showing exactly how much alternative transportation users have saved Arlington. In FY2011, Arlington’s commuter programs reduced 40,100 vehicle trips daily resulting in 672,600 vehicle miles not traveled each day. This equated to an annual savings of 7.2 million gallons of gas and 79,750 tons of carbon dioxide (CO2).

Along with Carfreediet.com, there are many other web sites already out there helping people get around. Many of these resources even focus on the tools that keep Gen Ys so connected.
Online resources like NuRide, GoLoco, ZimRide and Avego have harnessed this demand for real time dynamic solutions for this wired generation.

**Gen Y Will Do It Differently Because They Are Less Car-Centric**

Generation Y is less car-centric than any other generation. They see little need to buy a car, or even to get a driver’s license. In 2008, 46.3 percent of potential drivers 19 years old and younger had drivers’ licenses, compared with 64.4 percent in 1998, according to the Federal Highway Administration, and drivers ages 21 to 30 drove 12 percent fewer miles in 2009 than they did in 1995.¹ This is not just a local or American trend, but it’s true all over the world. In Australia, the NSW Bureau of Transport Statistics found that despite increasing levels of license-holding over the total population, the percentage of young people getting their licenses is actually dropping. In 2009, only 74 percent of 25 year olds in Sydney had a driver’s license, compared to 84 percent in 1998.²

When the Southeastern Institute of Research, Inc. (SIR), a 43-year-old marketing research firm that specializes in transportation research, asked Gen Ys how important it was for them to own their own car, 13% percent said it was not at all important. 13% percent! For previous generations, automobile ownership was a rite of passage; it defined who we were. Buying that first car, that first house, was a milestone. But for Generation Y, the dream car or the dream is instead the dream *lifestyle*. Ridematching services are especially effective for this cohort because they can still use a car or get a ride without having to buy or own one. Getaround.com has taken advantage of this emerging trend of less demand for car ownership to the next level. At getaround.com, people all around the country put up their cars for rent at an hourly rate. All you have to do is sign up for the car nearby, pay the owner and then the car is yours to use for the agreed upon time. Enlightened planners have partnered with carsharing organizations like Zipcar to help facilitate this growing trend in their communities.

**Gen Y Will Do It Differently Because They Are More Urban-Centric**

Generation Y cares more about living the right experience than buying the right home. Eighty-eight percent want to live in an urban setting.³ If that means living in a smaller apartment and not owning a car, so be it. Every year, young professionals fresh out of college flock to such urban centers like Austin, TX, Boston, MA and Arlington County, VA. These communities are made up of urban villages that have walkable transit oriented neighborhoods complete with

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grocery stores, bars, restaurants, laundry spots and adequate housing -- everything anyone could need all in the same small area. And the best part for Gen Ys, everyone else they work with, hang out with and went to college with lives there too!

Census data shows a shift to urban living; from 2000 to 2010, the biggest population increases were in the cities. Specifically, people are grouping in these urban villages, exurbia neighborhoods just outside the city. One of the major drivers of this shift is the preference of the young Gen Ys to live in the gritty urban center, again so they can stay hyper-connected and in the middle of it all.

**Conclusion: Gen Ys Are Already Making An Impact In Community Design and Systems Support**

According to BIGresearch®, Gen Y is clearly headed for a big increase in public transportation use. Gen Y respondents were, as a group, almost twice as likely to switch to public transit because of gas prices. The BIGresearch® Consumer Intentions & Actions® Survey monitors over 8,000 consumers each month providing unique insights and identifying opportunities in a fragmented and transitory marketplace.

The BIGresearch® study also found similar results with carpooling. Across the USA, a steady 15 percent of Millennials over the past four years made the move to carpooling. That number was even higher for the top 20 MSA data.
Of course, part of this willingness to carpool and use public transit stems from the fact that Gen Ys don’t have much money. Young and inexperienced, they are smacked with college debt and 30 percent unemployment. Thus, many say the move to carpooling and public transit is rooted in the current recession and merely age appropriate behavior. But our research points to an underlying, more generational phenomena as the impetus for such change.

Gen Ys are the window into the future of urban design. And we’re already beginning to see their impact because there are so many of them. First, because their mobility needs are different because they are hyper-connected. Second, as a consequence, they are also less car-centric. Third, they are more urban-centric.

If you want to figure out how to design cities of the future, you ought to be designing them for generations of the future. Generations of the future are going to look more like Gen Y than suburban-centric Boomers and Silent generation folks. Really understanding Gen Ys is the key to understanding how to design future communities.

If you build it (for them), they will come.