



Leading the comeback

INTERVIEW BY [PAUL HUTTON](#)

Michigan is the home of Motor Town, Detroit, which has been the world's carmaking capital but suffered a huge decline from the heights of the 1950s when its population was nearly two million to around a third of that in 2015. However the population is now growing again and crime rates have declined all century, giving it the nickname "America's Comeback City." The state is home to a lot of the world's innovation in ITS, so when its Governor, Rick Snyder, came to Britain, Paul Hutton met up with him to chat about his support for ITS among all the work he's had to do during his tenure.

"The citizens deserve better services, that's the simplest way to look at it, and I'm proud to say that we took some tough actions but now we're seeing good services being provided, the comeback's wonderful"



First things first, I'm going to congratulate you on a transformation of Detroit... I first visited for the ITS World Congress in 2014

and have to admit I wasn't sure about it, but fast forward three and a half years and the difference is jaw dropping...

Detroit's comeback is truly exciting. It's tremendous. And it's still going very quickly. As you said, in a short period of time you saw tremendous changes but I can tell you that even though you have been recently,

when you come again you will see new restaurants and hotels have opened, more young people wanting to be in Downtown Detroit,



so it's fabulous to see. Detroit was once one of the world's great cities and then became the largest urban challenge in our country for decades and now to see it coming back is wonderful, and it's right at the centre of this whole topic of smart cities and mobility, so I think this is going to be a marvellous opportunity for Michigan to continue our world leadership in these new fields.

Q After all the years of decline in Michigan, it's no surprise given Detroit's history as Motown that automotive was one of the key industries you concentrated on in the state's economic comeback.

The industry's been reconsolidating and growing in Michigan for the last few years and we're now the number one in the country for the creation of manufacturing jobs. But in addition to making things, one of the things I'm proudest of for the auto industry is that 76 per cent of all the US Research and Development for the auto industry happens in Michigan. Think about that – that's a gigantic percentage. And in today's world it's even more important than it was historically because if you look at the advancement of technology and you want to eventually be part of making things, it's important to be on the design and engineering forefront of that because that's where the exciting collaborations happen.

Q When you think of technology in the US, everyone thinks of Silicon Valley but that statistic seems to show that you've got all the big thinkers.

Yes, with respect to the auto industry. And we are seeing the mobility industry really be the convergence of the IT industry and the auto industry coming together. But I don't see it as a versus necessarily. I view it as "how do we be the best partner with places around



The economic renaissance in Detroit means the city is very different to that depicted in Eminem's 2003 film *8 Mile*

the world," including the UK and also Silicon Valley. So we're seeing a lot of Silicon Valley companies now put a presence in Michigan because they want that interaction. If you think about it, they have wonderful electrical engineers and computer engineers but we have the industrial engineers, the mechanical engineers, the industrial designers, so I think there's a lot of room for collaboration which is hopefully to the benefit of everyone.

Q We'll come to a specific collaboration in a moment, but first talking Intelligent Transportation Systems, I was talking to your Director of Transport Kirk Steudle recently and he told me how important it was to the State, not just building roads and vehicles. How have you supported that?

Well it is very important. We've done a lot. We hosted the ITS World Congress in 2014, we have the ITS America meeting very soon and these are very important events. But it's really important what we're doing on a daily basis. We'll have 350 miles of connected roads by the end of this year, 500 miles next year. That's a significant amount of roads, and we're using those roads. In Ann Arbor we've got a pilot with the Federal Government and the University of Michigan that's been going on for several years where they have literally thousands of vehicles talking to traffic lights and infrastructure. We just did a smart highway on US23 utilising the shoulders but adding communications to it. These things all add up to "how do we work that out?"

The other thing I would share with you, Paul, is the social issues. It's not just about the technology. I'm proud that we've created a council of future mobility to talk about insurance issues, the legal issues, the other considerations that are important to our society.

What I didn't fully appreciate when I first got immersed in this field is the importance of

vehicle-to-infrastructure. It's going to happen in terms of intelligent vehicles but the issue is, are we going to have a world of have and have nots where you are going to have many more unconnected for a long period of time. If you think about it, if the unconnected don't see any value for a long period of time, I think you're going to see the resistance level to this technology being adopted be much higher, and that could show up in the political world and other places.

So how do people not connected see any value to this? It's V2I. It's how we take information out of the smart vehicles and share it through the infrastructure. Whether through signs, or other communications, how they can benefit before they get that smart vehicle themselves. So I have become more proactive to think collectively. It's not just about the people getting the initial benefits but how do we get some of those benefits transferred to as many people as fast as possible.

Q Michigan Council on Future Mobility report to you on State's Path to Safe Mobility Implementation. I was reading that one of its goals is "identifying opportunities to develop and brand Michigan as the epicentre of mobility technology and policy development." Is that what attracted you and your advisers to supporting the testing and validation grounds for connected and automated transportation?

It's bigger than just the testing. Historically we've been a world leader in a lot of fields, we've just elected not to tell anyone! We have this Midwestern American humility. You just go and do good stuff, you just don't tell anyone how good you are.

In many cases I believe it's been a disservice to us. You have other parts of the world probably promoting themselves beyond their true capabilities, we haven't

“ One thing I learned with all the transformations we had to make in Michigan where we’ve reinvented our state and it’s gone well, is that even when you have challenging times, a lot of people resist change ”

been promoting the great stuff we’re doing. So I’ve told people in our state that we need to be louder and prouder. We don’t have to be arrogant, but to be factual about the good things we’re doing and how it’s not just about us but how we can be that great partner.

ITS is an area which we do need to promote more to people. Showing them value in simple things that they may already be seeing. The simplest is GPS alone. Then look at blind spot detectors, automatic cruise controls, the stopping capacities, reversing detectors, parking assistance, these are all features which will be combined but right now we should be promoting their benefits and within the cities themselves it should be the smart traffic management systems, the signage about upcoming accidents or construction. There’s a lot of good information not only in a vehicle context but also a community context if you have the infrastructure.

It’s important what you are doing here, Paul, in terms of, as you said, we need to promote intelligent transport systems more. We need to continue to break it down into things people not in this field can appreciate and see value.

Q We talked about collaboration and partnerships and of course you’re in London to sign an MoU on cooperation with the UK on transport technology... Now I did have a wry smile; this interview was delayed because you got stuck in traffic, although it is London Marathon day so we have an excuse. London has worked hard to keep traffic moving and push people onto public transit. Is that why you are here, because there is stuff you can learn from us too?

Yes, and I would reinforce some of the visits we have made during this trip – the Manufacturing and Technology Centre, going to Milbrook, the proving grounds, the University of Warwick, these are all great places to see wonderful things going on. The heritage is great – we went to the British Motor Museum. These are opportunities to grow and share ideas. Let’s keep it up.

Q What would you like to see accomplished in the next year or so in regards to ITS and testing?

It’s how we build these networks and about

signing these agreements. But not just making agreements but tangibly seeing how we can make benefits happen. One of the demos we saw was for shuttles for last mile connections or on a campus with a closed loop course. So can we start deploying those already? We’re doing it at the University of Michigan and between parking lots and buildings in Detroit. I’d like to see it in Michigan around our state capital. These are true demos that lead to us thinking how can they assist and partner with public transportation? This starts getting to disadvantaged people, people with disabilities, about how they can get to transportation faster and better.

Q And you personally – you’re coming to the end of your second term as governor... what’s next for you?

Whatever my wife says! I mean that, I owe her a couple of vacations. I won’t be in elected office but this field of mobility is one where I think I’ve got a good background and I would be happy to see how I can help in some capacity, being involved in organisations and such because it is transforming our society. I think we need to make sure we are being balanced in how we describe this.

There are going to be so many different jobs. Think how this affects the job of mobility technician, the lidar repairer or radar repairer. We’ve actually got a community college with the world’s first programme.

At the same time if you’re a truck driver or delivery driver then over the long term you probably are getting some degree of concern that your position may not be there 30 years from now. That’s a long time, but in our culture particularly in America we tend to wait until these things become a crisis before we address them, and we should be having responsible discussions today.

That’s not to cause people to panic over it, but how do we make sure we’re doing the right training and retraining and career opportunity planning to find new opportunities for a challenge for the field they are already in?

One thing I’ve launched is a five year programme I call the Marshall Plan for Talent. It’s looking at how we can better provide competency-based certificate learning for these new fields, but not just while they’re in the younger phase of their lives when they go through higher education but how do we do life-long learning?

I don’t think we’re well prepared, at least in America, for life-long learning. Even if you stay in your field there are not many positions today where you won’t have to go through major retraining at least two or three times during the course of a career.

Q And talking of career, you’ll be, what 66 come the 2024 US election, you’ve been talked about as either a presidential or vice-presidential candidate in the past, do you fancy a shot at the White House?

I’m keeping it simple right now that if you think about priorities in your life, when I’m done being Governor, my wife Sue is the top priority along with my kids for a little while. I owe her vacations. But then I’ll be active again because she won’t want me to stay around too much after a certain period of time!

The newly opened American Center for Mobility facility in Michigan is a key place for testing of Connected and Autonomous Vehicles

