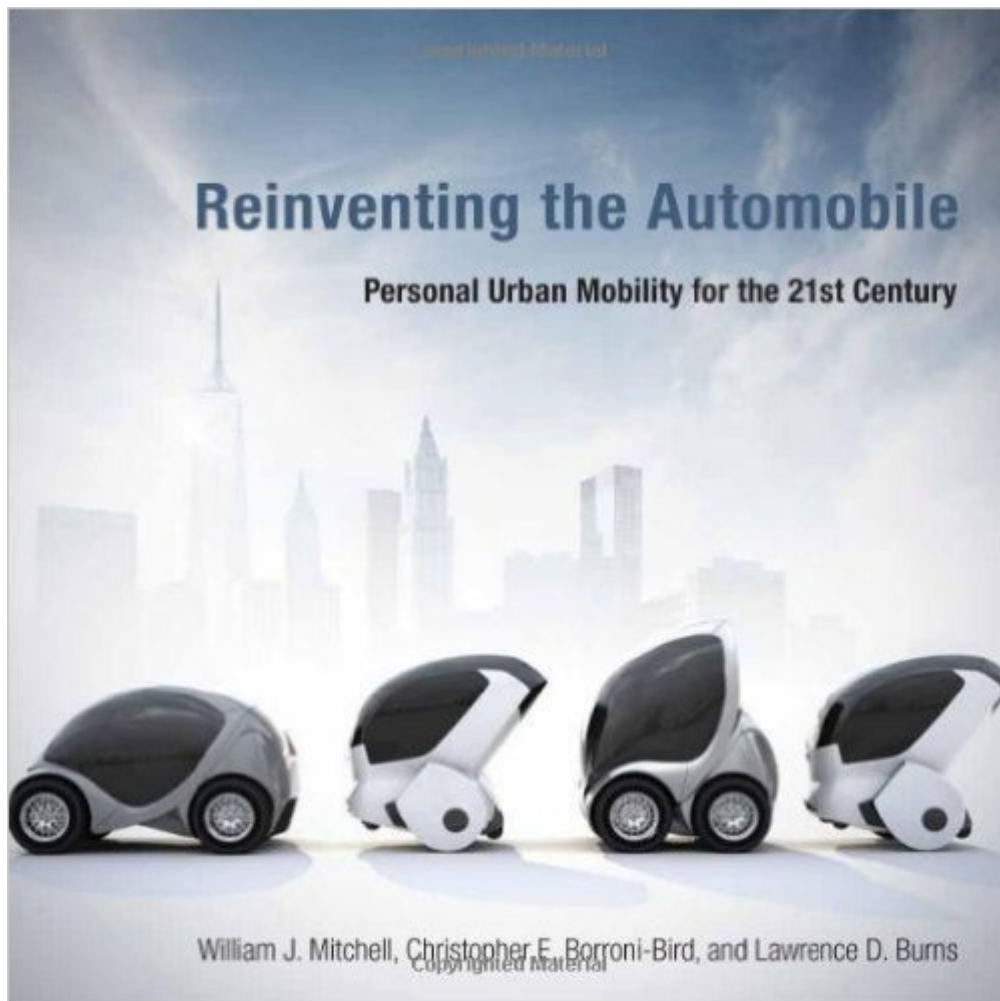


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# Reinventing The Automobile: Personal Urban Mobility For The 21st Century (MIT Press)



## Synopsis

This book provides a long-overdue vision for a new automobile era. The cars we drive today follow the same underlying design principles as the Model Ts of a hundred years ago and the tail-finned sedans of fifty years ago. In the twenty-first century, cars are still made for twentieth-century purposes. They are inefficient for providing personal mobility within cities -- where most of the world's people now live. In this pathbreaking book, William Mitchell and two industry experts reimagine the automobile, describing vehicles of the near future that are green, smart, connected, and fun to drive. They roll out four big ideas that will make this both feasible and timely. The fundamental reinvention of the automobile won't be easy, but it is an urgent necessity -- to make urban mobility more convenient and sustainable, to make cities more livable, and to help bring the automobile industry out of crisis.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

This is a wonderful book to stimulate one's thinking about the future of the automobile and urban transportation. Even if you are skeptical about some elements of the authors' vision, it is likely to enrich your understanding of how technology, design, functionality, and economics interact. Reinventing the Automobile is clearly written, supported with ample attractive and helpful graphics. There is a bit of repetition, though it is probably desirable to help explain synergies among several of the key concepts. The authors explore four principal ideas: a radical new "DNA" in the design of

small urban vehicles (driven by wheel motors, for example); a "Mobility Internet" to help manage traffic flows and promote safety; clean energy, with vehicles powered by electricity and hydrogen; and dynamically priced markets. Most of their discussion centers on two-seaters, either "neighborhood electric vehicles" or "electric city cars" with more range. These vehicles will not be designed to achieve high speeds, which permits greater flexibility in structure, surfaces, and glazing. Elimination of the engine and the application of "by-wire" technology make it possible to imagine new shapes, and in one design even possible to "fold-up" the vehicles so that they occupy less parking space. Based on an electric "skateboard" chassis the vehicles are modular with relatively few parts, easier to construct and repair. The authors suggest several applications of information technology to aid drivers, some of which can and do work quite well in cars today (GPS-based navigation systems, devices that receive information about traffic to assist routing, and safety sensors, for instance). More futuristic is their vision that eventually vehicles will be safely self-guided.

Reinventing the Automobile fails as a work of fiction because it was impossible for me to "suspend disbelief" long enough to take the book seriously. It also fails as a work of non-fiction because it is too lacking in technical details to satisfy anyone interested in the details of what the authors are proposing. Let me get the good part out of the way first. As a commuter in Boston, I travel 10 miles each way at speeds not exceeding 30 mph and most of the time spent sitting completely still. The CityCar concepts (AKA hiriko) seems like a very sensible alternative to me. The electric drive in a lightweight vehicle means very efficient commuting, and the folding design might allow me to share by \$1200/year parking bill with another commuter (perhaps two others). I'm sold on the concept for the inner city. But if you think you will learn anything about the details of this car design (the in-hub motors, the suspension, the folding design), think again. No technical details are presented on the engineering of the car. ONLY IN THE CITY. The other aspect of this book that must be made clear is that they are only trying to solve the problem of city traffic. If you travel outside of the city, even occasionally, the solutions proposed in the book are not realistic. I'm OK with that approach in general, because EVs work best in cities and at low speed, but you can't help but feel that the authors have written-off the needs of a lot of Americans. THE VISION IS GRAND, TOO GRAND. The vision of the authors is sweeping. They envision a future with many USV (Ultra small vehicles) that roam the city streets. They can even pilot themselves, aided by vehicle to vehicle, vehicle to signal light, vehicle to pedestrian communications.

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