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The Race to Code the Curb.

Everyone—from ride-hailing cars to delivery trucks to bikes and scooters—wants a piece of the curb. How can smart cities map and manage this precious resource?



The humble curb is increasingly contested space. *Mike Blake/Reuters*

By **Laura Bliss and Andrew Small**

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LINK: <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2019-04-02/the-startups-tracking-how-cities-use-curb-space>

The curb is hot. No longer just a home for parked cars and cigarette butts, this is where the action is in the 21st century city. It's where electric scooters and bikes congregate, where delivery drivers drop off Amazon boxes, where Uber and Lyft cars scoop riders. Someday, it may be where driverless cars await their human cargo. Accordingly, this increasingly contested space has become a focus of serious attention from some of the world's leading technology companies.

Today, a startup is announcing an open-access platform that maps points of interest where the sidewalk meets the street. Coord, a spinoff of "smart city" developer Sidewalk Labs, launched "Open Curbs," which pins the locations of wheelchair cuts, fire hydrants, bus stops, and other physical assets that define the curb to digital maps, available to anyone who's interested in using them.

The hope is that this tool can help curb-curious local officials, mobility companies, and researchers can reach a common understanding of the physical environment they're all operating in. That way, rules can be equitably enforced and companies can more easily comply with them. Right now, neighborhoods in Santa Monica, Denver, Paris, Milan, L.A., and San Francisco have been mapped; other cities, including San Diego, are on the way.

"One of the reasons cities and fleets want to work with us is that they frankly struggle to get that information," Stephen Smyth, the CEO of Coord, told CityLab. "We want to be the broadcast channel for all the regulations on using this particular land."

Startups flock to the curb

Open Curbs is one of many new data-driven curb-related products that have emerged in recent months, and not only from Coord. To manage mushrooming demand for this valuable public resource, regulators are racing to adapt to the smartphone-powered present and future of transportation. And new startups are pitching them with an array of savvy solutions. Most cities don't currently have digital maps that would allow them to regulate curb users in anything approaching real time.

Traditionally, a local department of transportation might take an annual inventory of curb features for planning purposes, or researchers might study a block for a day or a week. Different departments may have disparate information. None of this is fast enough to keep track of the rapid changes happening at street level. The closest thing Smyth says they could find was Seattle's annual on-street occupancy report. "We realized that curb space was relatively un-digitized," he said.

Coord's latest effort is free and open-access, but much of the curb data built into its maps comes from another tool that Coord markets to local governments, called Surveyor. Local governments can also publish their own survey data on it. It uses augmented reality to identify objects on the curb, such as fire hydrants, parking signs, bus shelters, and curb cuts. The result is a continual inventory of a given curb's available features.

Apart from providing an authoritative catalogue of a city's assets, bringing all this information together could help cities measure the revenue generation potential of their curbs—useful as cities evaluate how to shift revenue away from car parking to newer options like scooters and ride-hailing. "It's like a shopkeeper taking inventory before setting prices," said Smyth. A dynamic map of curb data can also be key for cities to achieve other goals, like sidewalk compliance or equitable access.

Read the full article with photos at LINK:

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