The responses after the July 29 Birmingham City Council vote creating a classification for digital services like Lyft and Uber in the city's transportation ordinance have been varied and loud. The day the changes were passed, Mike Smith of AL.com filed this report explaining the definition of ridesharing in Alabama compared to how the companies had been using it. The report included the potential issues for existing options if Uber's requests had been granted (issues currently being looked at and considered throughout the country). Today's planned public beta launch of a new offering by Uber (UberPool) — on the heels of a similar one offered by Lyft (LyftLine) — may help provide a clearer picture of what's next — and a chance to expand the practice of ridesharing in the metro area.

New York Magazine published a story on August 6 via its Daily Intelligencer explaining the latest offerings by the two visible players in the marketplace. (Note another company, Sidecar, announced a similar ride sharing service that same day.) The post pointed out Lyft's purchase in April of a transit-focused app called Rover; the suggested rush to get announcements up suggest the plans were well underway well before the City Council vote. Now, the services offered by the first two haven't exactly launched without problems (as a report filed on*GigaOm* from August 12 points out), but their potential long term impact is one being watched by livery service industry insiders, with some media outlets like *Vox* suggesting it could have an impact on public transit as we know it. They allow users to be matched with either other based on whether or not a driver was headed close to their destination. The passengers would share in the cost of the ride, resulting in it being less than a regular ride and slightly more than a similar journey via transit (though with door to door service available). It potentially makes it even more palatable as an option for residents here with complaints about transit and existing taxi options driving much of the support for the introduction of another option.

Long before the emergence of "ride sharing" apps for smartphones, the term was normally used interchangeably with carpooling by many cities, including those in Birmingham's metropolitan area. Other companies, like Hitch (in San Francisco) and Carma, have long offered versions of the new services being launched by Lyft and Uber, with their emergence providing an opportunity for carpooling to expand rapidly. It could potentially lead to increased participation in programs like CommuteSmart — the one highlighted in Smith's piece. One question that still remains is whether or not their entries into the ridesharing ecosystem would affect funding for the programs now or in the future. This website has reached out to the Regional Planning Commission of Greater Birmingham, the local organization responsible for the ridesharing service, for comment and we will update this post when it is received.

While both new carpooling offerings are in their earliest stages elsewhere in the country, both provide the opportunity for the companies involved to enter the market in a different way than originally anticipated. It could lead to what *The Verge* suggests could be a new form of public

transportation or a dimmer view similar to one shared by Wired — that of neither one of the current industry giants surviving.