



## Why Silicon Valley Matters To Ford Motor Company

BY AARON BIRCH — FEB 2, 2017



It's no great secret that global automakers are in the midst of a tech-driven renaissance. Where five years ago, the word "mobility" was typically followed promptly by "scooter," today, it's on the lips of just about every high-ranking automotive executive in the world.

That includes Ford, whose "[Smart Mobility](#)" endeavors might be at least partly to blame for the word's newfound popularity.

Speaking with [Business Insider](#) recently, [Ford CEO Mark Fields](#) explained why the shift in thinking has seen the automaker open up shop in Silicon Valley. "To me it was really important to be part of the ecosystem there — for our people to be rubbing elbows with somebody in line at the Starbucks and striking up a conversation and saying, 'Hey, I'm working on this,' and 'I'm working on that,'" he said.

Mr. Fields himself has been traveling out to Silicon Valley for about three years now, reports [Business Insider](#), even though its Palo Alto Research and Innovation Center only [opened in January, 2015](#). "One [reason] is to learn," he explained. "Two is to create relationships. And three is to send the message to our team out there that you're not an outpost — you are a part of our network."

Last year, Ford announced that it will [double its Silicon Valley staff](#) by the end of this year, at the same time that it announced investments in [Velodyne LiDAR](#) and [Civil Maps](#), both of which are Silicon Valley-based companies working on technologies that could help enable self-driving automobiles. It also purchased [San Francisco startup Chariot](#) — a crowdsourced van shuttle service. Having a presence in the area might be seen as critical to making such deals work.

"People know that Ford's there, so these small companies can have access to us, versus, 'Oh, how would I ever get in touch with big old Ford Motor Company in Dearborn, Michigan?'" said Fields. "So it's worked really well."

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