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INTERVIEW

## Autonomous vehicles will completely transform mobility

Interview with Maud Simon, Corporate Operations Manager at BestMile

BestMile is a start-up based on the EPFL Campus which has developed the first cloud platform to operate and optimize autonomous vehicle fleets. Created in 2014, BestMile has three offices in Lausanne, San Francisco and London, and 30 employees. The company's platform can be used with any autonomous vehicles regardless of their brand or type and allows optimized fixed-route and on-demand services. Ms Maud Simon, Corporate Operations Manager answers our questions in the company headquarters in the EPFL Innovation Park.

*Could you briefly introduce BestMile?*

BestMile was founded in 2014 by Mr Raphael Gindrat (CEO) and Ms Anne Mellano (VP of Operations EMEA). Both founders participated actively in the field of smart mobility in Europe. BestMile's starting point was EPFL's application to CityMobil2, a European project on autonomous mobility. As part of CityMobil2, EPFL received six shuttles, but at that time no one had the tool to operate them as a mobility service. It led BestMile to develop the first platform for the operation and optimization of autonomous mobility services



The two founders: Raphael Gindrat and Anne Mellano

in the world. Mobility services requires autonomous vehicles to be coordinated by a "control tower", and this is what we offer. Communication, coordination and optimization increase the overall efficiency of the mobility services and are mandatory for operating autonomous vehicles.

*What is the added value that you offer in the field of autonomous vehicles?*

Today, low-speed level 4 autonomous vehicles are commercialized and driving on public roads. In parallel, all around the world, high-speed level 4 & 5 autonomous vehicles are being piloted. As a result, hesitations about the future of autonomous vehicles have faded and almost every car-

maker has announced a planned commercial release of fully autonomous vehicles in the 2020/21 horizon.

Yet, with autonomous vehicles it is not only vehicles' technology which changes, but also mobility services. They will completely transform mobility and are aligned with the current shift towards mobility as a service (MaaS) that we've been witnessing for the past years. MaaS requires extreme coordination and optimization and it's even more true with autonomous vehicles. To this day, BestMile is providing the only platform for mobility services catering to autonomous vehicles specificities and full potential to enable the operation of autonomous mobility services.

## 会見

INTERVIEW

### “Human Rights are privileges that we have to use”

*Are you working more with car manufacturers or mobility providers?*

Both, but for different reasons.

On the one hand, our customers are mobility providers. We offer them the tool to efficiently operated autonomous mobility services.

On the other hand, we work in closely with vehicle manufacturers to ensure our technologies are compatible. There is no set standard today, meaning everyone is using their own data format and communication protocols. Currently, many manufacturers are also starting to offer mobility services. In this case, they are both potential partners and clients for us.

*How many vehicles are currently running your product?*

Since we started in 2014, our technology enabled the operation of 13 autonomous vehicles' fleets. Currently, we have 6 fleets using our platform with 2 to 6 vehicles per fleet. Two other projects are on the way in Switzerland and some others abroad so we should very shortly double those figures.

*How is the project in Sion doing (PostAuto has been running two autonomous shuttles in the city over the past year using BestMile's platform)?*

The project is doing very well. The reactions of the public are positive and we have collected a lot of data. People are coming from all around the world to test the shuttles. Running autonomous vehicles in a public space is very challenging but

also very instructive. In Sion, the Postal shuttles are transporting people partly in a pedestrian area, which is surprisingly challenging due to the unpredictable behaviour of pedestrians. The next step of the deployment could be to extend the range of the shuttles and we might add an on-demand service.

*Most of the existing autonomous cars still require the presence of a human. Are you not too much in advance regarding the industry?*

Mobility services need to be coordinated and optimized even with drivers and it is even more true with autonomous vehicles. As always with innovation, market explosion can take a couple of years. It is important for BestMile to be on the market today to work closely both with mobility providers and vehicles manufacturers deploying the first autonomous mobility services in order to build the best product possible.

*On which markets are you focusing the most? Have you any projects in Japan?*

BestMile targets a global market. Currently, we have more project in Europe, mainly in Switzerland, France and Germany, but also in the US. We are in discussion for projects in Asia and one particularly in Japan. You will certainly hear about it soon.

*What are the next steps for BestMile?*

We are currently in the process of raising funds as our next step is to scale up. We are going to increase our presence in the US through our office in Silicon Valley. However, our headquarters and the research and development team will remain here in Lausanne. For autonomous mobility, Silicon Valley is the place to be, but Switzerland is where we come from.

We are also considering opening an office in Asia.



One of the two shuttles in Sion

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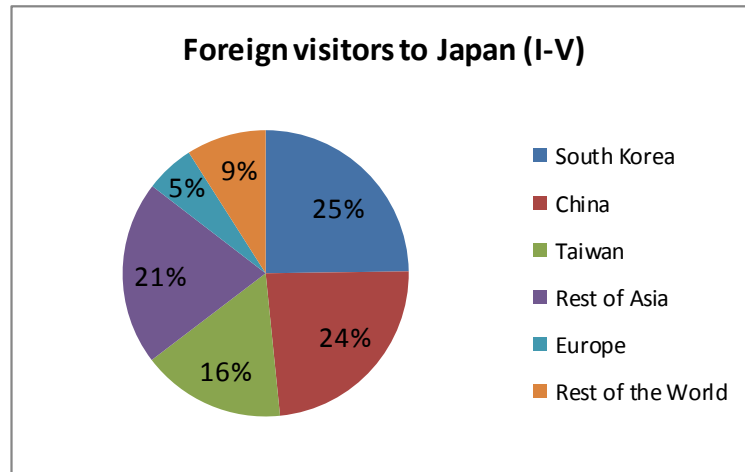
## Tourism is booming in Japan

According to the Japan National Tourism Organization, the number of tourists visiting Japan is strongly increasing. During the first half year (January-June), the number of tourists reached a record high level of 13.76 million (17.4% increase compared to the same period last year). During this period, most of the tourists came from South Korea, China Taiwan and Hong Kong. South Korean represented almost one quarter of the foreign tourists (3.4 million) and the figures are rapidly growing (+42.5%). While Asian tourists remain by far the most numerous, European ones tend to spend more in average during their holidays in Japan. From

April to June, Britons spend in average CHF 2,204 and Italians CHF 2,045. Unlike the previous year, Chinese reached only the third position with CHF 1'979. From January

to May, more than 11 million tourists visited Japan (+17.3%). European tourists (including Switzerland) represented 5.5% of the total and Swiss tourists 0.2%.

**動向**  
SITUATION



Source: Japan National Tourism Organization / From January to May

## Start-ups in Switzerland: what could be improved?

Our interview with BestMile was the perfect occasion to get the point of view of a Start-up about innovation in Switzerland and what could be improved.

*The number of start-ups in Switzerland is impressively high regarding to the size of the country. How would you explain it?*

Switzerland is a very innovative country. We have in a small space several universities among the best in the world, big companies and a very dynamic economy. The Swiss system makes it easy for talented people to meet the right companies.

I could also add that for us, the Swiss market is very interesting. Switzerland has a strong reputation for transports. The market is interested in innovation and when we go abroad, people associate Switzerland with efficiency and quality, which is of course very good for us.

*What could be improved to make Switzerland even more attractive for start-ups?*

One thing that could be improved is investments. In Switzerland, so as in Europe, we are more cautious when it comes to investments. Swiss investors are sometimes re-

luctant to invest too much in early -stage start-ups, whereas in the US, for example, it is part of the investors' culture. In the US, start-ups can sometimes raise twice more funds than what they could raise in Europe. The paradox is that we have a lot of investors looking for interesting opportunities and a lot of small companies looking for investors, it is just sometimes difficult for them to be aligned.

Also, it can be challenging to hire people from outside Switzerland or Europe and it can impact startups' development.

**会見**  
INTERVIEW

**革新**

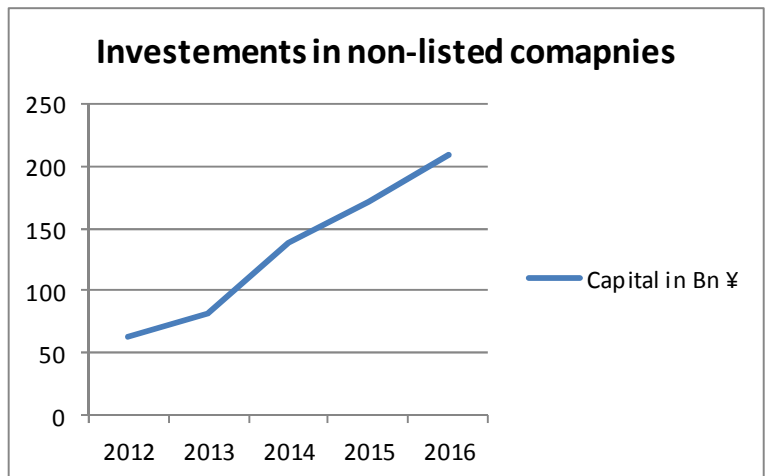
INNOVATION

## Japanese investments in non-listed companies are increasing

After several years of low investments in non-listed companies, venture capital financing is recovering in Japan. According to a study conducted by Japan Venture Research Co., LTD, investments in non-listed companies are record high with more than ¥200 Bn (CHF 1.85 Bn) invested. Constantly increasing since 2012 (¥63 Bn), venture capital investments have exceeded the pre-crisis level last year. According to the same study, a consolidation of the market can be observed with a reduction of the number of venture companies. Start-ups are an important part of the strategy of the Japanese government to revitalize the economy. The government is investing in

innovation by supporting small disruptive companies. In June, “Cool Japan Fund”, a public-based found, contributes \$10 million in another found called “Japan-

focused fund”. It is an American venture fund focusing on early-stage investments in Japanese companies.



Source: Japan Venture Research Co., LTD

## Agenda

**日程**

AGENDA

- ✓ TECHINASIA Tokyo 2017  
Startups meeting investors.  
Date: September 27-28, 2017, Bellesalle Shibuya Garden, Tokyo  
<https://www.techinasia.com/events/tokyo>

JETRO is a government-related organization that works to promote mutual trade and investment between Japan and the rest of the world. Originally established in 1958 to promote Japanese exports abroad, JETRO's core focus in the 21st century has shifted toward promoting foreign direct investment into Japan and helping small to medium size Japanese firms maximize their global export potential.

The JETRO Switzerland Newsletter can also be viewed and/or downloaded online:  
<http://www.jetro.go.jp/switzerland/newsletter>



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