PART 3

Read the text below and answer questions 27–40.

THE SHARING ECONOMY AND URBAN SPACE

The “sharing economy” is commonly presented as a digital fix for inefficiency: platforms match underused assets with people who need them, promising less waste and more access. In cities, however, these services operate less like neutral marketplaces and more like powerful intermediaries that reorganise daily life. By inserting algorithmic coordination into routine transactions—mobility, accommodation, delivery, and casual labour—platforms reshape urban morphology: they influence how streets function, how buildings are used, and how people and goods circulate through neighbourhoods. The result is not simply a change in consumption, but a reallocation of urban space and a redefinition of who gets to use it, when, and at what price.

Mobility platforms provide the most visible example of this spatial reordering. Car-sharing can reduce private car ownership for some residents, particularly where public transport is viable and parking is scarce. Fewer privately owned vehicles can release kerbside land previously devoted to storage, allowing cities to repurpose space for trees, cycle lanes, or bus priority. Yet ride-hailing introduces a different dynamic: when passengers shift away from public transport, total vehicle kilometres can rise even if occupancy increases slightly. The platform’s optimisation logic—minimising wait times and maximising driver utilisation—can concentrate traffic at certain nodes and times, producing new congestion “hotspots” that spill into residential streets. In response, some cities have created designated pick-up zones to reduce dangerous stopping and to channel flows away from intersections and bus stops.

Housing platforms have generated even sharper controversy because they operate at the intersection of property rights and collective urban needs. Short-term rental systems enable owners to monetise spare rooms or entire dwellings, converting residential space into quasi-hotel capacity. In tight and constrained markets, where vacancy rates are low and rents are already rising, this conversion can reduce long-term rental supply and intensify affordability pressures. Municipalities have responded with licensing, caps on rental nights, taxation, and zoning restrictions, but enforcement often lags behind platform innovation. Hosts may shift listings across accounts or use informal management companies, a form of regulatory arbitrage that exploits gaps between local rules and platform design.

The competition for urban space is not confined to housing. Logistics platforms—food delivery, rapid grocery fulfilment, peer-to-peer parcels—generate a constant demand for

loading bays and short stopping. At the same time, micromobility services broaden short-trip options by providing shared bikes and scooters, yet they also impose a physical footprint on pavements. Where parking rules are weak, devices can clutter sidewalks and impede pedestrians, especially wheelchair users and parents with prams. Cities increasingly treat the kerb as a contested interface: buses, deliveries, cyclists, ride-hailing vehicles, and pedestrians all demand access. This “curb politics” reveals how a finite strip of land can become a site of spatial friction when platforms scale faster than street design can adapt.

Platform work further reshapes the city by reorganising labour geographies. On-demand systems draw people into flexible jobs—driving, delivery, cleaning, short-term tasks—but the work is unevenly distributed. Drivers may cluster near airports, nightlife districts, or event venues where algorithmic pricing surges; delivery riders concentrate along restaurant corridors; couriers hover around dense commercial areas. These patterns can intensify localised emissions, noise, and safety conflicts, particularly where infrastructure was built for lower volumes of stopping and turning. The city experiences a subtle shift from predictable commuting to punctuated peaks of pick-ups and drop-offs, with public space increasingly managed around platform rhythms rather than civic schedules.

Governance becomes especially complex because the informational balance of power tilts toward platforms. Companies routinely collect fine-grained data on trips, dwell times, routes, demand peaks, and user behaviour—information that could help cities manage congestion, set pricing, and enforce rules. Yet platforms often regard such data as proprietary: a commercial asset or trade secret that underpins competitive advantage. When city authorities request access, companies may offer limited aggregates, impose restrictive terms, or resist disclosure altogether. Even when data is shared, privacy concerns arise if datasets can be re-identified or used to monitor individuals. Algorithmic governance therefore becomes a negotiation over transparency, accountability, and safeguards, rather than a straightforward technical exchange.

Equity effects are mixed and often spatially concentrated. Shared services can expand access for residents without cars, and platform labour can provide income opportunities with low barriers to entry. However, benefits may accrue disproportionately to affluent users with smartphones, bank accounts, and the flexibility to pay for convenience. Meanwhile, the costs—noise, congestion, displacement, and the crowding of public space—may be concentrated in specific neighbourhoods where pickups, tourist stays, or delivery demand is highest. Socioeconomic stratification can also be reinforced by algorithmic pricing: peak-time surges can make rides or rentals less affordable precisely when demand is greatest, effectively rationing access by willingness and ability to pay.

Over time, many cities have moved from reactive regulation to proactive design, recognising that platform services are now embedded in transport and housing systems rather than operating at their margins. Authorities are redesigning curbs, creating protected lanes, and clarifying rules for short-term rentals and scooter parking, often with pricing mechanisms that reflect the scarcity of street space. The deeper ethical question is whether efficiency gains justify the incremental privatisation of public space: when platforms manage who can stop, load, sleep, or earn in the city, they risk substituting corporate optimisation for democratic planning. The most durable policies therefore aim to harness innovation while ensuring that the allocation of scarce urban space remains a public decision.

Questions 27–31

Choose **TRUE** if the statement agrees with the information given in the text, choose **FALSE** if the statement contradicts the information, or choose **NOT GIVEN** if there is no information on this.

27 The passage suggests that sharing-economy platforms can affect streets, housing and public space, not only patterns of consumption.

28 The passage suggests that ride-hailing may increase vehicle kilometres in cities by attracting passengers away from public transport.

29 The passage states that, in cities with ample housing, short-term rentals have no impact on long-term supply.

30 The passage suggests that weak parking rules can lead to shared bikes or scooters cluttering pavements.

31 The passage states that platforms are always willing to share detailed trip data with city authorities.

Questions 32–36

Select the correct answer.

32 What does the passage suggest is one effect of car-sharing for some residents?

A It increases dependence on private car ownership across the city
B It can reduce private car ownership and free up parking space
C It mainly shifts commuters from cycling to driving
D It removes the need for designated pick-up zones

33 Why have some cities introduced caps or licensing for short-term rentals?

A Because short-term rentals generally improve affordability in tight markets
B Because platforms cannot operate without zoning permission in any city
C Because they may reduce long-term rental supply and raise prices where housing is scarce
D Because these policies guarantee enforcement is straightforward

34 According to the passage, what has increased demand for loading bays and kerb access?

A Growth in food and parcel delivery services
B A decline in online shopping
C Limits on micromobility use in city centres
D Replacement of buses by ride-hailing vehicles

35 What difficulty is mentioned in relation to platform data?

A Platforms collect too little information to be useful for planning
B Cities cannot use shared data to manage congestion or enforce rules
C Data-sharing removes the need to consider privacy safeguards
D Cities may want access, but companies treat data as proprietary and privacy concerns arise

36 What point is made about equity effects of the sharing economy?

A Benefits and costs are distributed evenly across all neighbourhoods
B Benefits may accrue to affluent users while costs are concentrated in certain areas
C Algorithmic pricing lowers prices during peak periods for most residents
D Shared services reduce displacement pressures in tight housing markets

Questions 37–40

Complete the sentences below. Choose **NO MORE THAN TWO WORDS** from the text for each answer.

37 Some cities have introduced designated ..... for ride-hailing vehicles.

38 In cities with scarce housing, short-term rentals can reduce long-term rental .....

39 Platforms may resist disclosure because they consider the data ..... .

40 Some cities are redesigning ..... to manage competing demands for street space.

Answer Key

27. TRUE

28. TRUE

29. NOT GIVEN

30. TRUE

31. FALSE

32. B

33. C

34. A

35. D

36. B

37. pick-up zones

38. supply

39. proprietary

40. curbs