

Elon Musk firm tapped to build Chicago high-speed transit

June 15 2018



Chicago is the first US city willing to bank on Elon Musk's vision of the future of mass transit

Elon Musk's The Boring Company has been tapped to build a high-speed underground transportation system for Chicago—the first US city to

bank on the entrepreneur's futuristic concept for mass transit.

The project, announced Thursday, would employ underground tunnels and autonomous electric vehicles called "skates." They would reach speeds as high as 150 miles per hour (240 kilometers per hour), zipping passengers between the Midwestern city's downtown core and its O'Hare airport, one of the nation's busiest.

Details remained to be hammered out, including the exact route of The Chicago Express Loop. But Musk told a news conference that the project could break ground as early as four months from now, pending regulatory reviews, and be completed in three years or less.

If successful, it would be a significant step forward for Musk's The Boring Company, which until now had yet to convince any American city to deploy its new transportation technology.

"Chicago is giving us the opportunity to show that it can be useful and economically viable on a large scale," Musk said.

"One of the hardest thing to do with any new technology is... to show people that it can indeed be useful."

The company's proposal—one of two finalist bids to create high-speed transport from the airport to Chicago's business district—promised to reduce the duration of the 20-mile journey to just 12 minutes. A taxi ride currently can take as much as an hour or more with traffic.

The privately-funded project, which will reportedly cost \$1 billion, will require an injection of capital into the company. It has raised only a fraction of that amount to date.

'A tremendous opportunity'

Among the other obstacles ahead for the company will be to prove that it can employ innovations to reduce the cost of tunneling by as much as tenfold, as it has predicted.

Musk alluded to his other ventures, saying he will borrow technologies from SpaceX and Tesla. The high-speed vehicles are to be built on a modified Tesla Model X chassis and are expected to carry eight to 16 passengers at a time.

Chicago is the first to gamble on Musk's vision. But Mayor Rahm Emanuel said there was relatively little risk since no public financing was involved.

"We have a tremendous opportunity," Emanuel said. "We get the upside with no financial risk at all."

Musk in May pitched a similar underground tunnel system in Los Angeles, and has proposed another that would link Washington DC and Baltimore.

The idea for the Loop is that it would be a slowed-down and simplified version of the hyperloop concept—a system of pods traveling through vacuum tubes that eliminate air friction and theoretically allow for speeds reaching 600 miles per hour.

The Chicago project would not require a vacuum, because of the shorter route and slower speed. But Musk hinted at his eventual goal of combining the two systems.

"We think that the loop system, which will ultimately transition to the hyperloop system, there's the potential here for a revolutionary transport system," Musk said.

Others are also working on the idea.

Dubai's giant port operator DP World in April teamed up with billionaire Richard Branson's Virgin Hyperloop to create a new company focused on tube-based cargo transport systems that would link roads, rail lines and airports.

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Citation: Elon Musk firm tapped to build Chicago high-speed transit (2018, June 15) retrieved 6 May 2024 from <https://techxplore.com/news/2018-06-elon-musk-firm-chicago-high-speed.html>

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