

Fast track to the future

Dubai's Sky Pods overpass project shows that innovation is just the ticket

Despite their near ubiquitous presence for decades in science fiction, the real-life sight in cities of silent, driver-less, overhead transport pods (what we used to call monorails) is still a rare one. But this flight of fantasy is about to become reality in that most futuristic of cities.

Dubai Sky Pods were unveiled by the city's Road and Transport Authority (RTA) at the World Government Summit in February as part of a project to develop a sleek, fast and energy-efficient overpass system for a quick and enjoyable transit around Dubai.

Developed alongside Skyway Technologies, an engineering company based in Belarus, the rolling stock comes in two models: the two-seater Unibike and the a six-seater Unicar. Each is driverless, electric and capable of speeds of up to 150km/h. At the summit – hosted by Dubai – the RTA presented the project to Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice-President and Prime Minister of the UAE, revealing that the system occupies much less space than

more conventional overpass developments, and uses five times less power than electric vehicles.

"The Unibike is characterised by its small size and light weight," says Mattar Al Tayer, the RTA's Director-General. "[The Unicar] is designed for long-haul journeys. It features a design compatible with the urban setting of Dubai. These innovative systems have the potential of enhancing smooth mobility through the construction of an elevated network connecting high-rise buildings."

Dubai is famed for its stylish architecture, epitomised by landmarks such as the world's tallest skyscraper, the Burj Khalifa, and this forward-thinking attitude is one reason why this state-of-the-art transport system will well suit it.

"One of the key aims of the Dubai Autonomous Transportation Strategy is to make 25 per cent of journeys in Dubai autonomous by 2030," says Al Tayer. "The Sky Pods initiative is part of RTA's efforts."

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