THESE FUTURISTIC FLYING PODS COULD MAKE DRIVING HISTORY

News / Manufacturer

Imagine if instead of wasting hours in traffic, you could one day fly above it for a price only slightly higher than a subway ride.

That's the idea behind SkyTran, a self-driving monorail designed to hover 20 feet above roads and travel up to 155 mph. The system would turn a two-hour car commute into a 10-minute trip, SkyTran CEO Jerry Sanders tells Tech Insider.

The company just announced that it will launch its first-ever track in Lagos, Nigeria by 2020. The World Bank commissioned Systra, a global transportation consulting firm, to find a railway that could help alleviate traffic in the city, and SkyTran was chosen.

Lagos has some of the worst traffic jams in the world, due largely to its island-locked financial hub and exponential population growth. To put things in perspective, the city has more than twice the population as New York City but roughly the same land area.

"Everyone hates commuting, but there are no solutions," Sanders tells Tech Insider. "The only way

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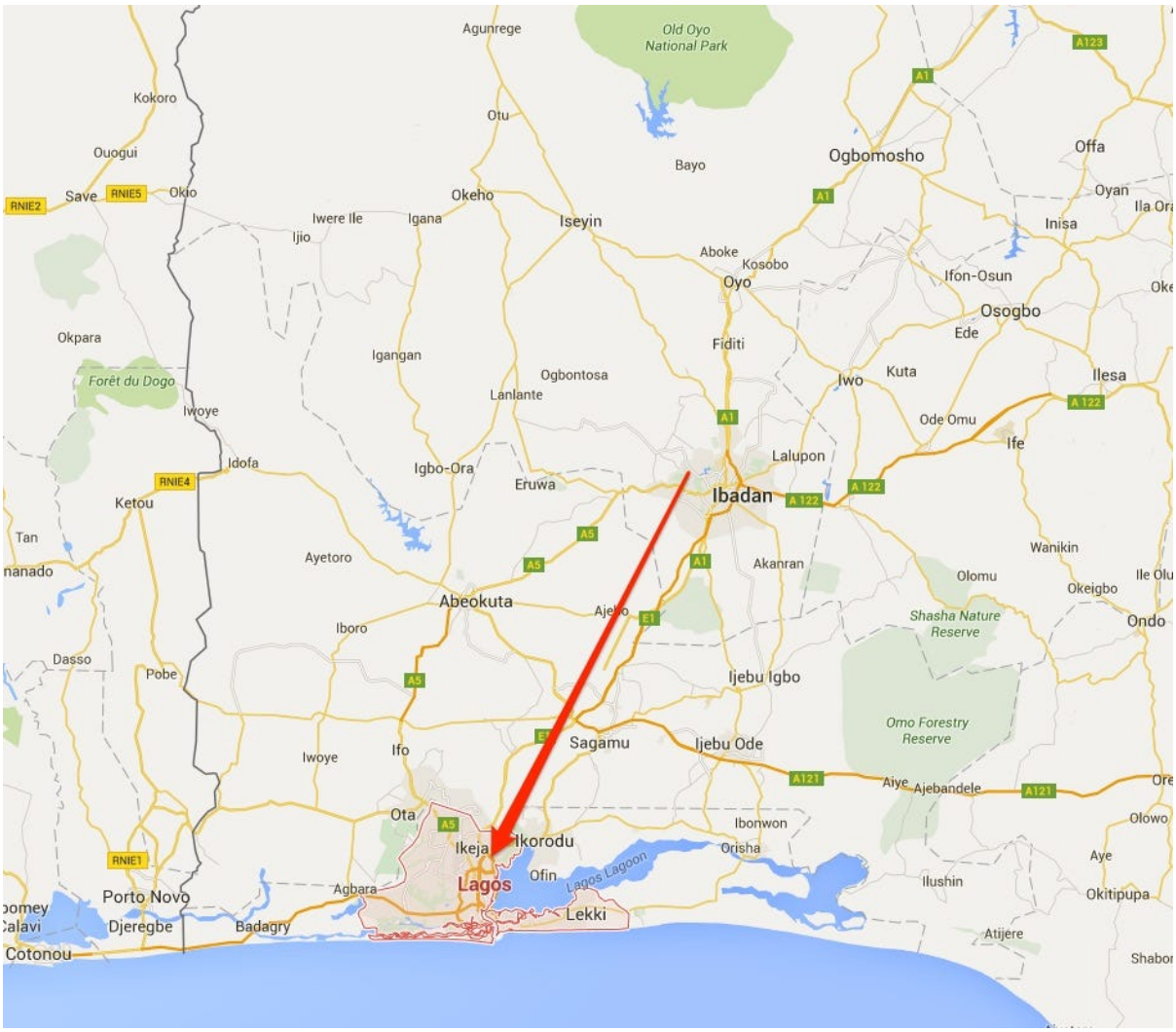
to get around traffic is to literally go above it."

Take a look.

SkyTran opened a 900-foot test station on the campus of Israel Aerospace Industries near Tel Aviv in late 2015. By the end of 2016, it will start construction of a 25-mile track in Lagos (An exact route in the city has not yet been planned).



Developed by Doug Malewicki, an engineer at NASA's Ames Research Center, the 300-pound pods use magnets to hang from slender rails.

NASA and SkyTran designed four different types of steel and aluminum pods: one that seats two people, one that seats four, one for the disabled, and one for larger cargo. Here's the latest prototype:

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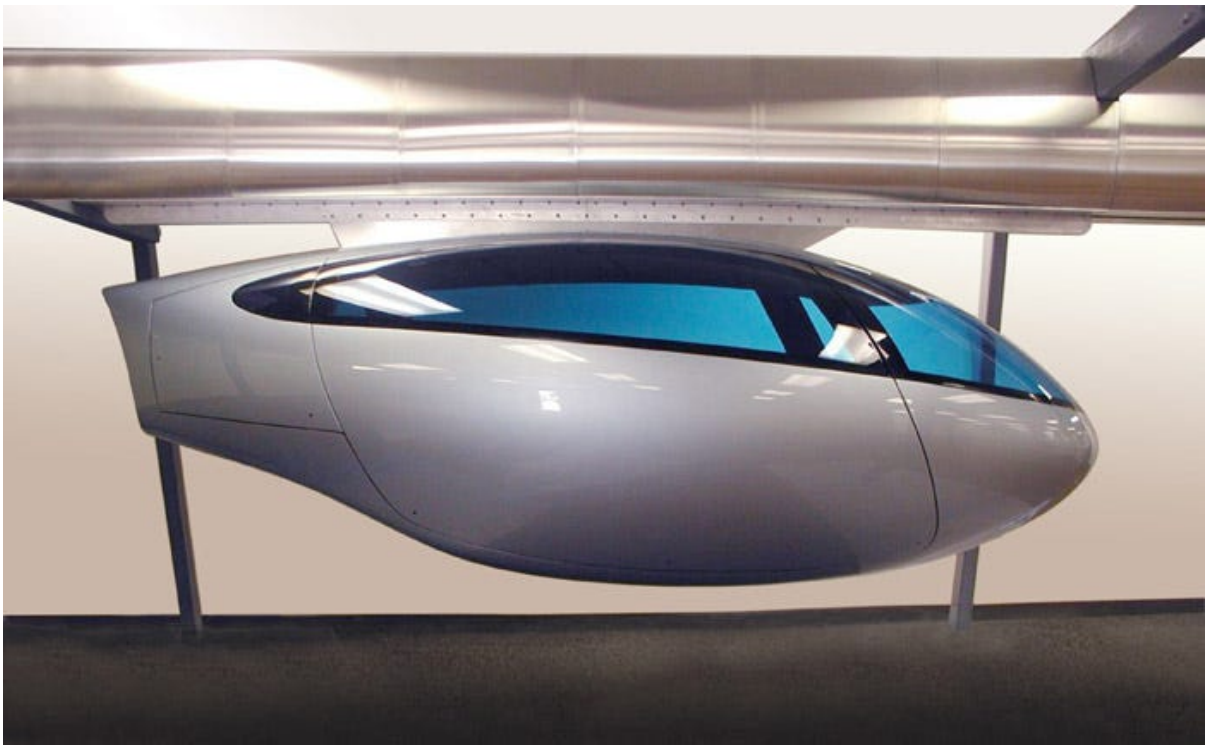
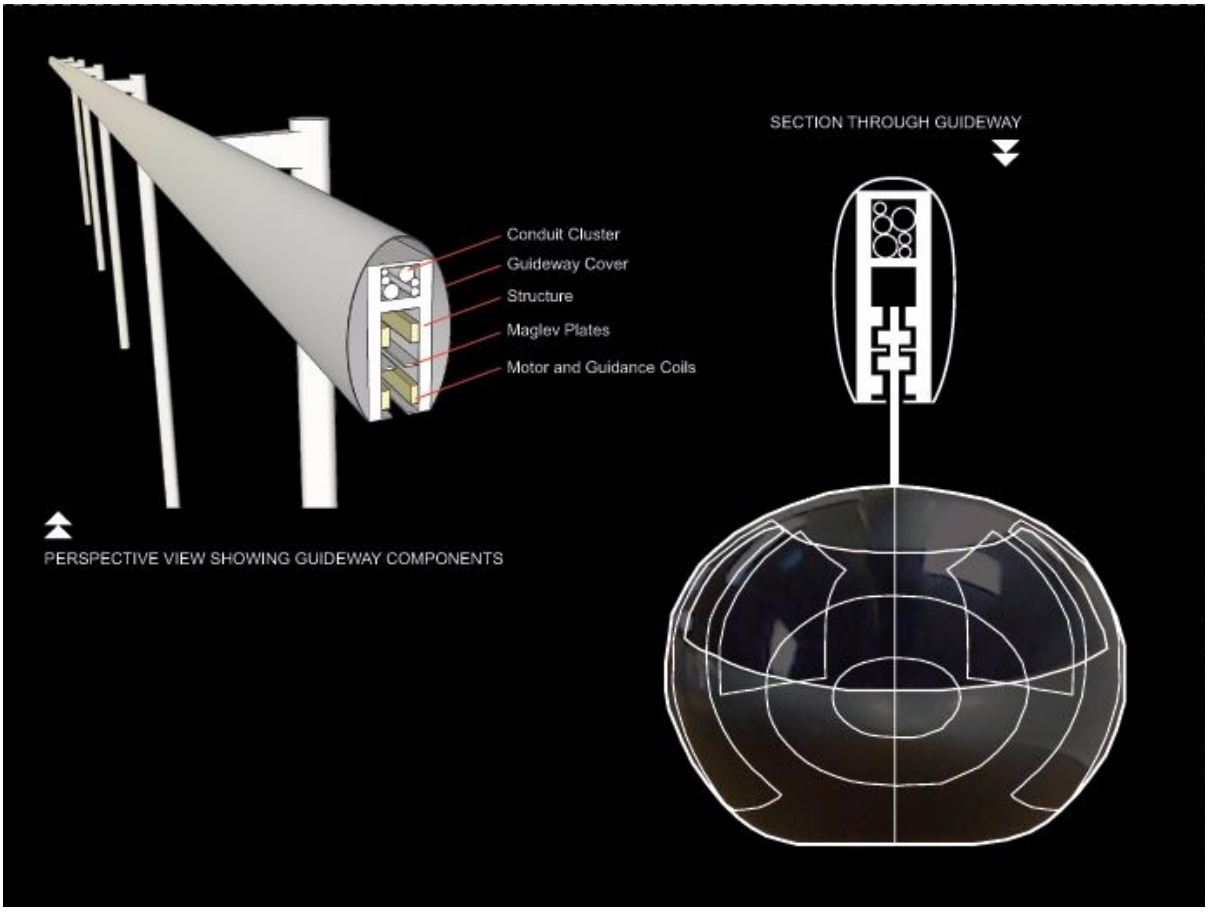


SkyTrans' aluminum rail levitates with help from gravity, a magnet, and a short burst of electricity. Once the pod reaches 10 mph, it continues to glide and accelerate without any additional power. Skytran uses the same amount of electricity as two hair dryers, Sanders says.



It's capable of traveling 155 mph, but the pods in Lagos will likely travel 45 to 65 mph to start, Sanders says. Based on need, the city may increase the system's speed.

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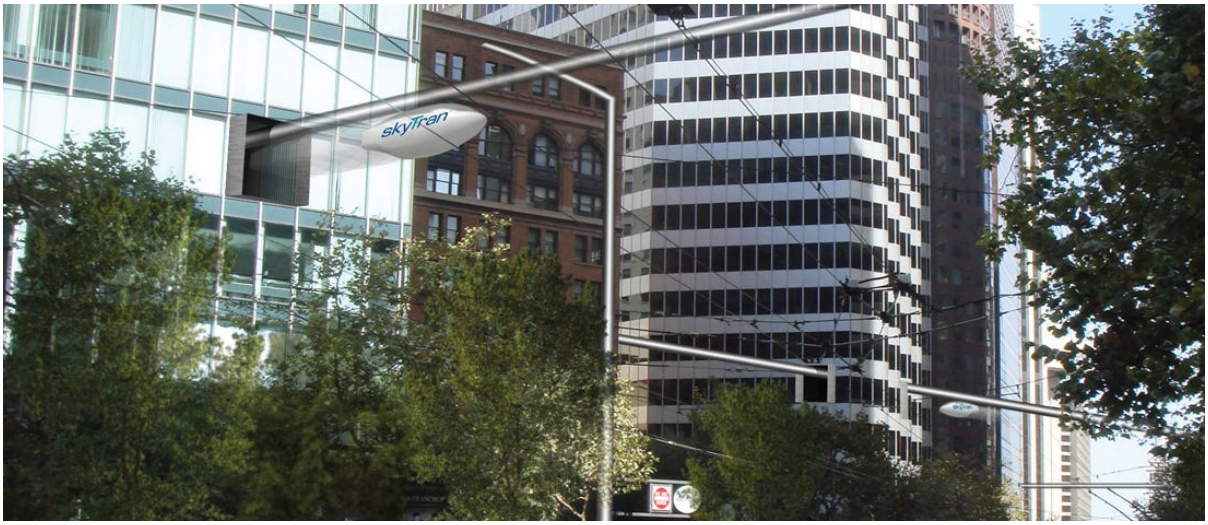
The company says it will only cost about $13 million per mile to build, whereas a subway system can cost at least $160 million for the same distance.

The tracks could run through universities and offices in Lagos, Sanders says. The small stations could even be built in apartment lobbies.



Like normal public transportation, SkyTran could have stations around the city. Sanders estimates that a pod ride would cost only slightly more than Lagos trains.

To request a pod, riders enter their pick-up location and destination in the SkyTran app (assuming they have a smartphone). Unlike a typical light rail or subway system, SkyTran also won't have a schedule — Passengers will just get in the first pod that shows up.

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SkyTran's system will then send passengers automatically to their destinations. If the pod needs to stop at a station, it will move to another rail so that the one behind it can pass. The pods theoretically never need to stop for traffic.

The company will spend the next few months planning the route and securing labor and supplies for construction. Sanders hopes to expand to other countries, like India, France, and the US within the next decade.

The ultimate goal is to make driving in cities history, Sanders says. "Countries can't afford to have people spend hours a day stuck in traffic." In congested cities, it may just be the transit alternative we need.

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