

Getting "loopy" in Texas

How likely is a hyperloop in the Lone Star State?

BY BRANDI SMITH



Imagine being able to make the trip between Houston and Dallas in 30 minutes. We're not talking about a super-speed flight or even a high-speed train. It would take a hyperloop, a pod traveling at supersonic speeds through a series of pneumatic tubes, to make it happen.

Before you write the idea off as science fiction, Elon Musk - the man behind Tesla and Space X - is promising to make it a reality. The billionaire entrepreneur who's already changed how we approach auto and rocket travel now seems to have his sights set on this new mode of transportation.

In late July, Musk wrote a series of tweets, starting with, "Just received verbal gov't. approval for The Boring Company to build an underground NY-Phil-Balt-DC Hyperloop. NY-DC in 29 mins." He went on to explain that this was a very preliminary step, but encouraged supporters to reach out to their local leaders.

When one of his followers asked Musk if Texas is part of his plans, his response was "For sure. First set of tunnels are to alleviate greater LA urban congestion. Will start NY-DC in parallel. Then prob LA-SF and a TX loop."

While the goal may be there, its feasibility may be more of a challenge. Over the years here in Texas, many people have pitched plans to build high-speed trains that would speed up the travel between the Lone Star State's largest cities. As yet, none of those plans have materialized on the ground.

An obvious issue that crops up revolves around private property rights and eminent domain. A series of tunnels large enough to transport thousands of people each day would require significant amounts of land. Though the tubes would be underground, initial construction would necessitate above-ground disruption.

That brings up the matter of mineral reserves. An extensive network of underground tunnels and tubes would have to navigate a challenging Texas landscape dotted with oil reserves and other resources. Careful consideration would need to be given throughout construction to preserving those.

Before those concerns can even be addressed, there is a more pressing one: technology. Though the concept of a hyperloop has been floated by several different organizations, Musk's included, teams across the country are still working to develop a sustainable approach to a hyperloop. At the end of last month, for example, two teams from the University of Texas (including Guadalupe) submitted their ideas in Space X's Hyperloop Pod Competition II, where groups from all over the world raced their hyperloop pods to test efficacy.

While the fledgling technology is there, many experts predict it could take a decade or more before all of the



kinks are ironed out and the transportation option is safe for humans.

Only after that time comes will Texans need to start evaluating whether high-speed travel is enough of a public interest to warrant using the private property it would no doubt require. ■