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## **Aerial Cableways in Our Future? Cameron on Transportation**

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How would you like to commute above the traffic by aerial cableway? Thousands do it daily in cities around the world and more places are looking at this technology as a solution.

Many Americans have used aerial cableways — small, enclosed cabins carried up and over the terrain, attached to moving cables — at DisneyWorld or ski resorts. But here we're talking about much bigger transit

Maybe you've ridden on the Roosevelt Island Tramway in New York City. Opened in 1976 to connect the island's residents to the Upper East Side, it once carried 5,500 passengers daily, though ridership has dropped since a new subway station opened. It was the first such system in the country, but has been plagued by problems, breaking down for weeks at a time.

In Portland, Oregon, an aerial tram carries 10,000 passengers each day up a steep hill to the Oregon Health & Science University campus. A transit-friendly city, the tram connects with trolleys and light rail at a base station next to a 250-space bicycle parking lot.

But both these systems are limited, only offering what's known as point-to-point service with no stops in between.

In Latin America, you'll find aerial trams on steroids. Like the La Paz Bolivia Teleferico, which covers 19 miles with 27 stations on three separate lines. On opening day, the first line carried 41,000 passengers in 10-person gondolas.

In Medellin, Colombia, the MetroCable Medellin has reduced commuting times from an hour to just 10 minutes, whisking 40,000 passengers at 10 miles an hour up and down a 1,300-foot incline. The Medellin system now offers six miles of cable connecting nine stations on three lines.

Both of the South American systems use their trams to overcome serious terrain challenges. But would this tech work in flatter areas?

### **Over the River**

The folks in the Williamsburg section of Brooklyn think so. They are facing 18 months without subway service to Manhattan starting next April when the L train is shut down for repairs. That's going to leave 100,000 residents scrambling for buses across an already crowded bridge to 14th Street in Manhattan.

That's why they're pushing for what they call The East River Skyway, offering a 10-minute ride to Delancey Street from two stations in Brooklyn. One concept calls for 38-person gondolas departing every 30 to 40 seconds, adding up to 5,000 passengers an hour. Estimated construction cost: \$75 million to \$100 million, probably with private money.

### **Costs and Downsides**

Aerial tramways have serious cost advantages over street-based or subway systems. All you're really building are towers to carry the cable, so estimates are \$50 million to \$60 million per mile with construction time of just 12 to 18 months.

Operating costs are also lower as the system uses much less energy, creating fewer greenhouse gas emissions. Real estate folks also like the system for its novelty and potential transit-oriented development

possibilities near the stations.

The downsides? You'd have to obtain air rights along the path, and the system would be far more susceptible to weather than one on the ground. High winds and thunderstorms would shut down the system and strand passengers.

As our roads and rails reach gridlock, maybe going up and over will be an interesting solution in the future.

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