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Elon Musk's Idea of 'Hyperloop' Trains a Bit Too Loopy: Cameron on Transportation

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Is Elon Musk a brilliant innovator, or is he just smoking dope?

Well, we know the answer to the second question as a viral video [has shown him puffing \(legal\) weed](#) on a talk show. The man is under a lot of stress, right?

There's no doubt that Musk's privately funded ventures in space travel and electric cars are prescient, maybe even profitable someday. But his transportation vision for the Hyperloop has yet to be proven viable.

Hyperloop is Musk's 2013 vision of high-speed underground tube-travel in a near-vacuum using linear

induction motors akin to Maglev. The concept has already gained traction with private companies like Virgin Hyperloop One and HyperloopTT, which are looking to commercialize Musk's idea.

They've signed deals in South Korea, India, the United Arab Emirates, China, Indonesia and Ukraine. In the U.S., Virgin is working with state officials in Missouri and Colorado on projects, envisioning things like a 250-mile run from St. Louis to Kansas City in 28 minutes (compared to three-and-a-half hours by car). They say development costs would be 40 percent less than those for high-speed rail.

Even some in Connecticut are thinking about tube travel in the Northeast. State Rep. Tom O'Dea, R-New Canaan, has been in touch with Musk's Boring Company (that's its name, not an adjective). The company says its "literally on board with the idea of Hyperloop" between New York and Boston.

Musk's only demonstration project so far has been a bumpy ride in a Tesla on a short 1.14-mile stretch of a tunnel in California that cost him \$10 million to drill. Reporters who tried the system in December [seemed underwhelmed as speeds hit only 49 mph](#) in a self-driving Tesla with special guide-wheels. Musk told skeptics he could get speeds up to 150 mph over time. But to me, the whole thing looks sketchy.

First, you have to use a Tesla that has to go underground on an elevator. Imagine the lines you'll wait in for that. What happens if there's a derailment or crash, or worse yet, a fire? There are no escape hatches. And this demonstration project hasn't even touched on the issues of running in a sealed pod, in a vacuum using Maglev technology.

At his Las Vegas test track, a scaled-back model of a Hyperloop "pod" hit 230 mph, a far cry from rumored speeds of 700 mph. Clearly, this technology is not for those who are claustrophobic.

In fact, Musk's tube-travel idea isn't all that new.

In 1904, Robert Goddard, the father of American rocketry, wrote a paper as a freshman at Worcester Polytechnic Institute describing a system almost identical to Musk's plan.

He predicted a high-speed "[Vactrain.](#)" suspended by magnetic levitation, hurtling through underground tunnels in a near vacuum. Passengers would be strapped in for a speedy but [exhilarating ride at about 1,200 mph](#), hurtling you from New York to Boston in 10 minutes.

[Pneumatic tube subways were running](#), at least on a trial basis, in New York City as early as 1870. The city also [used smaller vacuum tubes to deliver mail](#) over a 27-mile network.

So put that bit of history in your pipe and smoke it, Elon!