

Future-ish



keeping tabs on the science, design, and culture shaping our future

HOME | ABOUT | SCIENCE | DESIGN | CULTURE | 50 FUTURE-ISH CITIES | FAB FINDS | NEXT CENTURY CITIZENS | STYLISH SCIENTISTS
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Musk Matters | The Boring Company

THE BORING COMPANY

If you enjoy hearing about Elon Musk, dig on this: One of the intrepid entrepreneur's lesser known ventures is entitled "The Boring Company." But, **aside from a double entendre, what is it?** by Drue Johnson

Take a glimpse at the the company's website, and you'll see a surprisingly uncomplicated, almost concerningly vague, homepage featuring a single video. Watch it, and you'll see a stark red car (almost looks like a Tesla Model S, doesn't it?) pull into an odd looking parking spot. The vehicle stops, and then sinks directly into the street. Panning downward into the earth, we see the Model eS-que descend down an elevator, travel along a metal track, and then converge onto a freeway system floating in a dark abyss. Seconds later it rises back up to a new street, heading to destinations unknown.

Confused enough? Stumble upon the FAQ page, and you'll probably find the answers you're looking for. The Boring Company wants to

"solve the problem of soul-destroying traffic" by creating "Fast to dig, low cost tunnels... and enable rapid transit across densely populated regions, enabling travel from New York to Washington DC in less than 30 minutes."

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Cocktail Astronomy | Brahe's Marvelous Moustache

Image credit: Mads Nissen for Politiken.dk Here at Future-ish, we love astronomy and we love cocktails. So to prep our fans (and ourselves)...



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About Future-ish

The traffic issue that currently plagues many cities across the United States has been getting worse as populations rise, and stands to get much worse in the near future. Musk started the Boring Company to help solve this issue, and as a way to push alternative transport systems.

The company's site points to sheer cost as one of the largest issues with implementation, explaining "tunnels are really expensive to dig, with some projects costing as much as \$1 billion per mile." At the same time, it notes that current tunneling systems are highly inefficient, and that through improvements in both technology as well as technique, the Boring Company hopes to make tunnel systems become a much more feasible mode of transport.

As can be seen from the concept video, vehicles using the tunnel system will pull onto car-sized skates. Once reaching the tunnel road, each skate will be electrically guided to any number of stops that may be placed on the way. The Boring Company site notes that "passengers travel directly to their final destination without stopping," so travel will remain close to top speed at all times. While decreasing travel times, the electrically powered system reduces reliance on fossil fuels, as each car will only need to travel to the nearest skate station, where the tunnelway handles the rest of the work. The skates are also said to increase safety and increase maximum payload per trip.

Just last week, Musk shared a behind the scenes look at the Boring Company's LA project with his twitter followers. Most of the testing of the venture has been occurring beneath the SpaceX facility in Los Angeles, where the project has been awarded a test permit by the local government.

"But what about earthquakes?" you might ask. Don't worry. The Boring Company's got you covered. The site makes sure to note that, when earthquakes do occur, tunnels happen to be one of the safest locations to be at. While above-ground structures tend to crumble and crack with the stress, an underground "tunnel moves uniformly with the ground" as shock waves emanate from the epicenter. As evidence, the company cites 3 earthquakes: two in Los Angeles, and one in Mexico City. In near all cases, no damage to tunnel systems was detected after the fact, and the very same tunnels were often used to transport emergency personnel just after the quake.

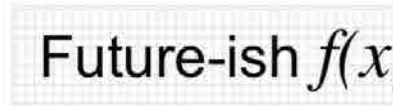
Now at just a tenth of a mile, Musk says that he hopes to have bored a 17 mile stretch of tunnel underneath Los Angeles by next year. Once that's done, a nearly hour long commute would be reduced to just 8 minutes. All thanks to underground electric car skates hurtling underneath Los Angeles at 125 mph.

Labels: druajohnson, Elon Musk, Hyperloop, Musk Matters, SpaceX, The Boring Company, Tunneling

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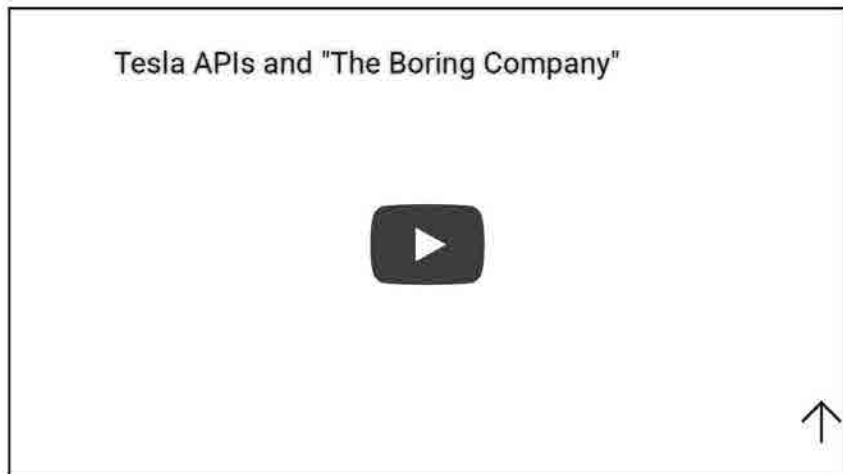
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Tesla APIs and “The Boring Company”
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(video re-posted)

Video transcript:

What's up it's Danielle talking about tech, coding, doing vlogs, reading and reviewing self development books, so subscribe to the channel. But what I want to talk about right now, I just found out Tesla cars have APIs. I might be late but I just found this out 😊 Tesla cars have APIs and let me tell you this is one of the flyest things I ever heard. Let me just look at this... This Internet of Things (IoT) space is no joke. So it says just by using the API you can remotely start and stop charging, flash the lights, honk the horn, check its charge level, and you can even set it at a certain time, like for example when you wake up, to check the temperature outside and then it then it will set the temperature inside the car to whatever you want. **And another thing. While we're on the subject of Elon Musk companies, another thing is the double entendre of the name "The Boring Company."** At first I thought he was being sarcastic, you know, with that name until I remembered that the company was building hyper-speed transportation, in tunnels. So boring is another word for digging. "Boring" tunnels. Get it? yeah lol... So they weren't being sarcastic with "The Boring Company." That's actually quite clever. So all this space age transportation (The Boring Company, Tesla, SpaceX), I'm just trying to keep up. So that's the vlog for now. Subscribe to the channel, get more tech, coding tutorials, vlogs, self-development, subscribe, like. Talk to you later, bye.

—

Love & Peace,



2017's Most Mind-Boggling Futuristic Tech

It's our annual look at the tech that's so new it sets trends for the future.

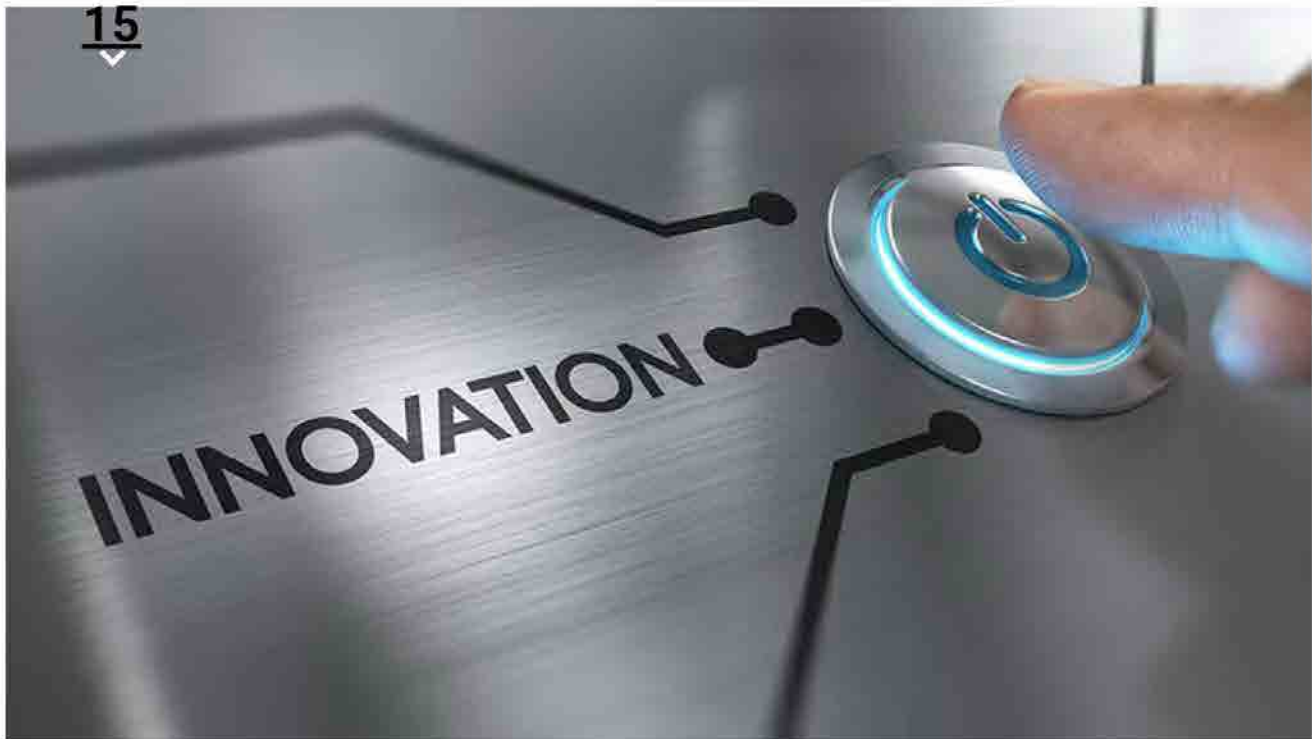


By Eric Griffith December 28, 2017 8:00AM EST December 28, 2017

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(augmented reality). But that doesn't mean they weren't/aren't breakthrough tech that will continue to inform our unseen future.

Below is a look at what the staff picked as tech most likely to have a major impact in the years and decades ahead. Some may be so inside-baseball you'll never even know if you're using it, but chances are it will touch your life in some way, as long as you're in touch with technology.

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1 FACE DETECTION: TrueDepth Camera and Face ID

The iPhone X ditches the home button and comes with a hefty price tag, but its most notable feature is the facial recognition used to unlock the phone. Apple calls it Face ID and for the most part, it works very well.

Face ID uses a TrueDepth camera on the front of the phone, found in that notorious notch at the top. It's more than a camera—it's a projector that displays 30,000 infrared dots on your face, so the front camera can unlock the iPhone X even in the dark.

We've seen similar things tried before, like Intel's RealSense, but Apple is kicking off what promises to be facial recognition mania. It's already being used (sans the cool infrared dots) in airports, and Qualcomm has a similar camera in development that's likely to hit Android phones in 2018.

Eventually, it'll migrate to the rear cameras and be used for much more than recognizing faces. We could be doing full 3D scans on handsets before we know it.

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2 TECH FOR MOM: Willow Wearable Breast Pump

Breastfeeding is not easy, especially needing to be available to the baby whenever the kid is hungry. That's why breast pumps exist, so parents can build up a supply for feeding as needed. While pumps have come a long, long way, they're still noisy machines that attach to breasts and stick out while filling collection bottles—not exactly subtle.

The Willow breast pumps revealed at CES 2017 are trying to change that. They're battery-powered inserts that go inside a shirt or bra and collect precious breast milk in proprietary, leak-proof bags. There is, of course, an app that helps you run the Willow pump(s), even tracking the amount pumped. It's not cheap (pushing \$500), and probably not covered by your insurance (yet), and is in fact still very much in beta. But new moms may want to try it now and help perfect it for the future, so those air-horn-shaped pumps become a thing of the past.

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3 CLIMATE CHANGER: Climeworks' CarbFix2 Direct Air Capture Plant

Just as it feels like Earth may be on its final legs thanks to mankind's stupidity, one faction of humanity renews your faith a bit. Climeworks AG opened a pilot plant in Zurich for industrial-scale capture of CO₂—the chemical culprit of climate change—right out of the air.

The planet is only pulling 900 tons per year—the equivalent of 200 cars' emissions, which is not a lot. We'd need 250,000 more Climeworks plants to even get 1 percent of the global emissions. But maybe it'll happen since Climeworks is taking CO₂ and selling it to businesses, like food and beverage makers. Money talks, after all. For now, it's a step in the right direction.



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4 **SPACE TRAVEL: SpaceX Reusable Rockets**

Reusing the same craft to go to the stars has long been the sci-fi dream, and certainly came true with the space shuttle program. But the one thing that wasn't reusable were the rockets that propelled that craft into the air. Until now. SpaceX—one of the many companies headed by Elon Musk—has managed it, after already proving it could *land* a rocket.

In December, SpaceX reused the Dragon capsule *and* the Falcon 9 rocket, which were both used previously in separate flights. It saved millions of dollars, which SpaceX probably needs since it lost a lot of rockets in the past. But even if it didn't, recycling such super-expensive engines and equipment is a must.

Reusing Falcon 9 is just the start. Next year, SpaceX will try a new rocket called Falcon Heavy. Also reusable, this is a 2-stager with 27 first stage liquid-oxygen engines, and a single second stage—that's like three Falcon 9s strapped together. With 5.1 million pounds of thrust at lift-off, it's meant to be enough to take 37,000 pounds to Mars, and almost four times that into low-Earth orbit.



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The Boring Company | Tunnels

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5 TERRESTRIAL TRAVEL: The Boring Company's Skate Tunnels

Elon Musk again? His companies certainly embrace the futuristic, even if that means being...Boring. We will never get sick of using the pun in the name of the Boring Company, a firm Musk established to build underground tunnels in a bid to improve transportation, starting (probably) with Los Angeles.

These tunnels would be smaller than usual (14 feet in diameter instead of the usual 28 feet), so tunnel boring machines (TBMs) could cut through things faster and cheaper. They'd also be entirely electric rather than using diesel.

Cars access the tunnels via elevators, which lower vehicles onto a "sled" that skates along metal tracks at speed up to 125mph. Ideally, this would rocket you from LAX to Culver City (the first proposed route) in five minutes instead of 45. The Boring Company is also in the running to build something similar from O'Hare Airport to downtown Chicago.

The concept is equal parts magnificent and madness. A tunnel is already being bored at the SpaceX HQ in Hawthorne, not far from LAX, because that doesn't require approval from the **POLYCM** any think it's just a trial run for

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Musk's real goal: colonizing under the surface of Mars. Maybe best of all: the Boring Company is financing some of this by [selling hats](#).



6 VIRTUAL ASSISTANTS: Voice Recognition

Having a voice assistant—a conversational AI—you can chat with is about as commonplace as seeing a screen today. In fact, we singled out Siri for kudos way back in 2011, after Apple bought it and incorporated the disembodied voice into iOS 5. But one thing Siri couldn't do at the time was tell different voices apart.

That's now changing. Siri can tell your voice apart enough to ignore other people saying "Hey, Siri." Google's Assistant can differentiate up to six voices using Voice Match, as can Amazon's Alexa.

What does that mean exactly? A unique response to the user. Asking "Alexa, play my favorite music," or "Hey Google, what meetings are on my calendar?" should produce different results depending on who's asking.

To make recognition work, users have to build a voice profile. On Alexa, you read aloud 10 phrases that display in the Alexa app, for example—it's that simple. The personalization options have hardly begun, but expect to see the voice assistant devices differentiating you and your housemates even more in the future. Apple's already got a patent, for example, to use Siri as a voice biometric, much like you'd use a fingerprint or your face today.

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7 **COMPUTING: IBM 50-qubit Quantum Computer**

Not long after IBM announced it would make its 5 quantum bits (qubits) universal quantum computer available to developers—with a simulator that could model 20 qubits—Big Blue upped the ante in November to become the first company with a quantum computer that handles 50 qubits.

Both systems can hold a quantum state for about 90 microseconds. That doesn't sound like a lot, but it's a veritable eternity in quantum computing. Even Google says it could put quantum computers ahead of today's supercomputers. IBM, meanwhile, is already thinking about some mathematics that would help it simulate more than 50.

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8 SIGHT FOR THE BLIND: eSight 3

There are millions of legally blind or low-vision (20/200 or less vision in their better eye) individuals who cannot navigate the world, let alone a PC or phone, as easily as the sighted. The eSight 3 may be a solution for many, if they can afford the \$10,000 price tag.

ESight's third-generation device sits like a visor on the user's forehead, over the eyes, and takes in video of the surroundings. It shows that same video back to the wearer using algorithms that increase the contrast and magnification, enough so eSight says the (legally) blind can actually see. It even supports Wi-Fi, Bluetooth, and HDMI for content streaming from digital devices.

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9 **GAMING: Nintendo Switch**

Think of the Nintendo Switch as the console game system you can truly take anywhere. With sales already topping 10 million units, the Switch is certainly a hit with gamers, and there's a reason for that: it's a perfect hybrid of mobile gaming and traditional consoles—sometimes seamlessly going between the two in the same game. The Joy-Con wireless controllers alone are a great mix of what made it fun to use the controls on the old Nintendo Wii. They work perfectly in the Switch's tablet mode with its 6-inch, 720p capacitive touch screen. It's a PCMag Editors' Choice, and one of our [Best Products of 2017](#) because it's disrupting gaming in a way the competition hasn't in a long time.

\$299.00
at Amazon



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10 **SCREENS: Self-Healing Glass**

University of Tokyo grad student Yu Yanagisawa was trying to make a glue. But the glass-like polymer he created—called "polyether-thioureas"—was instead found to have self-healing properties when cut or cracked. Just holding them together for around 30 seconds would let the cracks heal, all from the heat of his hand.

According to *The Guardian*, the Japanese researchers are not alone, as others at the University of California formulated a polymer that will stretch and heal breaks. So maybe in 10 years your friend's smashed-up smartphone screen could be repaired by the heat in the room.



11 BUSINESS: Oracle Autonomous Database 18c

Oracle is a bit behind in the whole "owning the cloud" thing, but stepped up its game by providing a database that takes care of itself. Without human intervention, Database 18c should be self-repairing when corruption

problems occur (providing a supposed 99.996 percent up-time, meaning **PRIVACY POLICY** and **COOKIE POLICY**).



only a half hour of downtime per year), potentially the biggest change to databases since the cloud.



12 PHOTOGRAPHY: Sony A9 Camera Sensor

There's no doubt the Sony A9 mirrorless camera is a magnificent photography tool. And most of that boils down to the full-frame 24.2-megapixel stacked CMOS sensor design it has inside. PCMag's camera analyst, Jim Fisher, says it lets the camera do things that others just can't: The burst mode, the full view of action while shooting, and the silent operation—they're all unique to the A9 because of the sensor.

It's not the biggest sensor out there (Sony also has one that's 42MP), but this one has the speed and performance photographers will really crave, letting them push images to an ISO of 204,800. Nothing else has a sensor that shoots this quickly. But if more adopt it, it bodes well for the future of photography.

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\$4,498.00
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13 **MACHINE LEARNING: Google AlphaZero**

In the years since Google (now Alphabet) acquired DeepMind Technologies Unlimited, the neural network company has created AI that plays the hardest games with the same skill as a human.

AlphaGo beat a few human Go champions, and now the follow-up, AlphaGo Zero (aka AlphaZero) has won at Go, chess, and Japanese chess (shogi)—without any programming. It used reinforcement learning by playing the game by itself, and figured out how to improve. Most notably: AlphaZero learned everything it needed to beat its opponent in only a few *hours*.

One of those digital opponents it beat: AlphaGo. (It also beat 18-time Go champion of the world Lee Sedol over the course of 100 matches). Imagine that learning process put to work on more than just pawns and you can see

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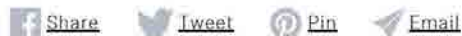
the implications.



14 WIRELESS: 5G NR

It's officially here! 5G NR (for New Radio) has its first official specification from the 3GPP, the consortium that binds all the organizations that want a hand in the (hopefully fully interoperable) wireless future. This is the first step to the launch of 5G networks.

5G isn't necessarily aimed at mobile phone users—it will play a big part in the continued explosion of the Internet of Things (IoT), for example, and won't be defined by one single technology or one single stretch of spectrum. That's what makes it so important for the coming decade. Still, that doesn't mean it won't hit some phones early on for testing; a few are already out in the wild.



15 ENERGY: Hot Solar Cells

You know what's super inefficient? Solar collection. Traditional, single-layer photovoltaic panels for taking in the energy of the sun have been traditionally limited by what's called the Shockley-Queisser Limit—which is about 32 percent. But researchers at MIT think that converting the solar to heat before it turns to electricity, using *thermophotovoltaics*, will crack through that limit. It would require adding extra layers to a cell that could handle it, but the theoretical limit could potentially double. (*Image: MIT News.*)

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Elon Musk's Venture is Really Boring, But His Twitter is Amazing

BY DANIEL STARKEY (HTTPS://WWW.GEEK.COM/AUTHOR/DSTARKEY/) 06.30.2017
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(via The Boring Company)

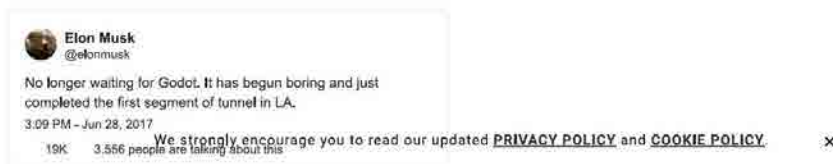
Oh, those eccentric billionaires! How they do get up to things! Mr. Musk is, of course, at it again. This time, it's not Tesla or Space X that's making news, but his boring company, The Boring Company. See, the boring company [The Boring Company](https://cc.zdnc.app/v1/otc/05YcxvrJv7bM0tkN3ualbHd?vener=dynamic&url=http%3A%2F%2Ftheboringcompany.com%2F) (yes I'm going to milk this joke, deal with it, because if it's good enough for Musk, it's good enough for me), is a tunnel boring company. It makes giant-ass machines that can drill through miles and miles of rock to make new tunnels for transit or utilities or sewage or anything.

STAY ON TARGET

[More Elon Musk Video Game Analogies](https://www.geek.com/games/more-elon-musk-video-game-analogies-1757374/) (HTTPS://WWW.GEEK.COM/GAMES/MORE-ELON-MUSK-VIDEO-GAME-ANALOGIES-1757374/)

[Porn Site Offers Elon Musk 'Non-Sex' Role](https://www.geek.com/culture/porn-site-offers-elon-musk-non-sex-role-1752056/) (HTTPS://WWW.GEEK.COM/CULTURE/PORN-SITE-OFFERS-ELON-MUSK-NON-SEX-ROLE-1752056/)

Musk took to Twitter to announce that the tunneling machine his company has built, codenamed, "Godot," has finished its first section of tunnel. That's pretty damned rad, eh?



That might sound boring, but, keeping in line with Musk's broadly altruistic vision, The Boring Company's tunnel borers are clean, efficient machines that can dramatically cut the cost of building out new and vital infrastructure in major metropolitan areas.

More specifically, Musk is hoping to revolutionize transportation. Over the past few months, he's been positively giddy about the possibilities. Back in April, the company launched a promotional video that demonstrated what a new tunnel network could do for overcrowded cities. Musk envisioned a future where cars could be lowered into secondary traffic systems and moved about a city with a high-speed electromagnetic cart. In May he posted videos of a new system that could potentially transport vehicles well over 120 miles per hour.

It seems a bit wacky, yeah, but Musk is committed to a lot of ideas that people think are... pretty out there. He manages to meet or exceed his goals often enough though, that it's clear he's doing something right. As of right now, there's no telling what these tunnels will actually be for, but the fact that the project is going so well and so fast means that he's probably got something big cooking. And we know he's done all the paperwork with the city of L.A. So now they have a two million pound monster churning up rock and spitting out slurry as it snakes its way from LAX to Culver City.

Even with these monstrous machines, bedrock is really tough. It'll probably be quite some time before Godot finishes up, but it'll be exciting to see what our favorite wacky billionaire gets up to next. Whatever it is though, I'm sure it'll bring us plenty of hilarious tweets. Because not long after that announcement, Musk said that "loved floors" and that they "underappreciated" and then closed by saying "not as much as tunnels though." Say what you will about the guy, but he's usually entertaining, at least.

Let us know what you like about Geek by taking our survey (<https://cc.zdvc.app/v1/otc/05YcxvrJv7bM0tkN3ualbHd?veneer=dynamic&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.research.net%2F%2Fgeeksocnps>).

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Everything you need to know about the Boring Co's Flamethrower:

After creating massive companies, like PayPal, SpaceX, Tesla, SolarCity, Neuralink, and OpenAI, entrepreneur Elon Musk has turned his sights on selling hats (<https://www.boringcompany.com/hats/>) and flamethrowers (<https://www.boringcompany.com/flamethrower/>). Yep. It's an actual flamethrower for civilian use and sale.

Perfect for all of your flamethrowing needs! Whether you're looking to get rid of that spider in the corner, you're tired of plowing your driveway in the winter, or you're just looking to liven up the party, Elon Musk has a flamethrower for you! He even guarantees that it'll be effective against the zombie horde — or your money back!

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Elon Musk
@elonmusk

When the zombie apocalypse happens, you'll be glad you bought a flamethrower. Works against hordes of the undead or your money back!

9:35 PM - Jan 27, 2018

146K 31.4K people are talking about this

All jokes aside, the flamethrower is part of a tongue-in-cheek promise he made, stating he could sell 50,000 hats to raise awareness for The Boring Company. The name "Boring Company" is a play on words, since the company is actually focused on 'boring (<http://www.dictionary.com/browse/bore>)' tunnels for trains and his proposed Hyperloop. Their mission statement is to increase the speed of tunneling at a fraction of current cost. Since everyone is talking about his flamethrowers, it's well on its way to success.

The Boring Company only plans on selling 20,000 flamethrowers, which are set to ship in spring. They are compliant with most local laws (<https://www.consumerproductmatters.com/2015/08/are-personal-flamethrowers-under-the-jurisdiction-of-the-cpsc/>), except in Maryland and Warren, MI (and California without a license). Since their flame is under 10ft, it's not classified as a weapon and isn't regulated by the ATF.



Elon Musk's not-so-Boring plans

February 20, 2018



The Boring Company is an infrastructure initiative owned by Elon Musk. Despite its unusual name, the company has some very dynamic plans. One of these elaborate plots (there is always drama where Musk is) involve building an underground hyperloop between New York and Washington DC.

The Department of Transportation in Washington, D.C., has given preliminary permission to start digging at an abandoned lot in the northeast part of the city.

A Hyperloop is a mode of transportation that uses pods to carry passengers and cars in a tube with a partial vacuum at speeds of around 800 miles per hour, reducing travel time to a fraction of current levels. The stations in a hyperloop system are smaller in size and very different from the regular train terminals.



Courtesy: The Boring Company

The proposed project by Musk to build an underground hyperloop between New York City and Washington DC is said to have received government approvals. The Department of Transportation, Washington DC, has given preliminary permission to start digging at an abandoned lot in the northeast part of the city.

The Boring Company is collaborating with an unnamed organization, presumed to be Hyperloop One, to build the Hyperloop between NYC and Washington DC. The line, which will have stops at Philadelphia and Baltimore, is expected to reduce travel time to around 30 mins.

Further details of construction plans are unclear, and the project is still in the stage of infancy. Needless to say, this would be a colossal leap in the area of transportation.

Elon Musk, bored in traffic, came up with a boring company idea

Amazing · December 17, 2016

Ever wonder what kinds of ideas the SpaceX founder is dreaming up when he's bored? Bad traffic caused the inventor to give everyone a glimpse into his psyche.

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@elonmusk · 17 Dec 2016

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Traffic is driving me nuts. Am going to build a tunnel boring machine and just start digging...

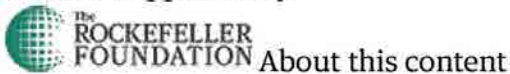
The Guardian



Is Elon Musk's plan for a road network beneath LA more than a pipe dream?

Cities attract wild ideas, from Qinhuangdao's straddling bus to London's bike lanes in the sky. As Musk's Boring Company starts tunnelling, could his plans for underground roads and Hyperloop trains prove the doubters wrong?

Cities is supported by



Nate Berg in Los Angeles

Mon 4 Sep 2017 05:13 EDT

In early August, the city council of Hawthorne, California, held a special meeting. It had set aside this time to discuss a major construction project proposed by a high profile company based there in the sprawling Los Angeles basin.

The company was Space Exploration Technologies Corporation, or SpaceX, the rocket-building offshoot of the electric car company Tesla, run by the billionaire entrepreneur Elon Musk. SpaceX had recently spun off another entity, this one aimed at disrupting the tunnel boring

business, cheekily named the Boring Company - and it needed the City of Hawthorne's cooperation.

"We want to prove our technology," Brett Horton, senior director of facilities and construction at SpaceX, told the city council. The company had recently purchased a used tunnel boring machine from another California city and had begun testing its capabilities below its parking lot. But SpaceX wants to go further, tunnelling a roughly two-mile path beyond its property line and under the streets of Hawthorne. It's a fairly quotidian infrastructural endeavour, but one tied to a grand vision.

Musk wants to build a vast network of tunnels below cities like Los Angeles in which cars and people will be whisked across town on electrically driven platforms at speeds of 125mph. Like the swooping and merging lanes of an interstate highway, the tunnels would criss-cross the metropolis, far below ground level. Elevators would bring cars, cargo and other vehicles down into tunnels and into the system of tubes on what the Boring Company calls an "electric skate", then back up another elevator at the desired destination - apparently bypassing all traffic above ground.



Musk's boring machine has already started tunnelling. Photograph: Instagram

"Traffic is driving me nuts," Musk tweeted in December. "Am going to build a tunnel boring machine and just start digging ..."

The digging has begun. The company has bored about 160 feet under its own property, with no reported complications. The proposed two-mile extension is being presented as a laboratory for increasing the speed and reducing the cost of tunnelling. It's a new frontier for a parent organisation that has already developed transformative automobile and rocket technologies.

"The next step is to use what we learn to make stronger, faster tunnel boring machines, to make a safe transportation system, and then to figure out where we want to go next," Horton told the city council. "If you've had the opportunity to look at the videos online, it's not a secret. We want these tunnels to be everywhere. We want to duplicate the road network in LA underground.

"We want to prove that we can solve traffic once and for all," he said.

From the aspirational to the absurd

Usually these types of proposed projects don't get built. Sometimes they're mere marketing or self-promotion, other times they're earnest suggestions for a better world - either way, they're

almost always able to generate a conversation.

“Visionary proposals are an essential way to come together in discussion about the city,” says Nicholas de Monchaux, an associate professor of architecture and urban design at the University of California, Berkeley. Big ideas for the future city are nothing new, and although these schemes can sometimes seem preposterous in their ambitions, de Monchaux says they have a power to inspire.



The SpaceX headquarters in Hawthorne, California. Photograph: Alamy

One of the earliest and most enduring visions of an ideal society is presented in the book *Utopia*, published in 1516 by the lawyer and philosopher Thomas More. “Utopia literally described an island of cities that didn’t exist and couldn’t exist,” says de Monchaux. “But utopias help us think about the world as it actually is and ways we might want to change it - or not.”

Perhaps because of its role in modern life and its impact on urban form, transportation has long been the starting point for these thought experiments. And as technology evolves, these ideas have taken on a variety of new forms, ranging from the aspirational to the absurd.

Near the far end of that spectrum, a company in China gathered global attention in 2016 with plans to build a lane-straddling bus - a novel contraption designed to carry hundreds of passengers over two lanes of traffic, theoretically bypassing congestion. The prototype of a sort of double-wide subway car on stilts, was completed a few months later and given a test run, with regular passenger vehicles driving underneath. But within days the project was stalled, and was abandoned less than a year later after it was accused of being little more than an investment scam. The founder of the company behind the project and 31 employees were recently arrested on suspicion of illegal fundraising.

Although criminal futurism apparently does exist, most of these types of proposals are typically altruistic. In London, a series of aspirational projects have rolled out in recent years presenting new forms of infrastructure aimed at improving the city for cyclists. The London Underline proposes repurposing disused tube tunnels into cross-city bike routes - a scheme for which its designer, the global architecture firm Gensler, was awarded the Best Conceptual Project at the 2015 London Planning Awards.

SkyCycle, a slightly less realistic idea from Foster + Partners, suggests adding 220km of bike lanes atop the alignments of suburban rail lines. And then there’s the £600m proposal to build a floating pontoon bike path on the Thames. These projects have gathered accolades and interest, but

they've also been criticised as distracting policymakers from pursuing more achievable cycling improvements.

Similar concerns have been raised about another Musk idea, the pneumatic tube-based intercity transit system known as the Hyperloop. Though still in early test phases and with significant hurdles in the way of even a small-scale rollout, the proposed technology has spurred the launch of multiple companies and coverage by media around the world.

Some worry it's diverting investment from proven and existing transportation technologies like high speed rail. But for the private companies competing to build the first viable Hyperloop system, traditional high speed rail can't beat a 700mph tube.



Elon Musk at SpaceX Hyperloop Pod II competition in Hawthorne, California. Photograph: Mike Blake/Reuters

Musk seems to agree. Although he originally released the Hyperloop idea to the global community in 2013 in the hope that someone else would bring it to reality, now that Musk has his own tunnelling company he has apparently decided to merge the Hyperloop with his underground tunnel traffic solution. “Just received verbal govt approval for The Boring Company to build an underground NY-Phil-Balt-DC Hyperloop,” Musk tweeted in July. “NY-DC in 29 mins.”

While Thomas More sought to use his imagined cities to raise questions and inspire new ways of building society, Musk is looking to put shovels - and tunnel boring machines - in the ground.

Construction ‘within weeks’

On 22 August, officials from the Boring Company were back at Hawthorne City Hall, a squat concrete building where a scale model of a SpaceX rocket sits on display in the central atrium. The company was seeking city council approval of an easement allowing it to use subterranean land beneath public property for its two-mile test tunnel, and affirming its exemption from review under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA).

Lawyers for the Boring Company explained the tunnel's proposed path: an L-shaped route that would mostly run beneath city streets at depths ranging from 22ft to 44ft below the surface. An environmental consultant explained that a lack of significant impacts to traffic, air, water or noise enables the tunnel to avoid CEQA review under an exemption typically used to streamline infill urban development.

Aside from one member of the public voicing concern about a tunnel collapse and a few questions from council members about the environmental review process, the project was not controversial. The council voted 4-1 to approve the easement.

A few details are still to be decided before a final permit can be issued, but strong city support is likely to ease that process. "We want this to be an awesome project that propels us into the future," Hawthorne mayor Alex Vargas said.

Horton, through a communications official, declined to comment after the vote.

The tunnel is expected to take five months to build, and construction could begin within weeks.

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