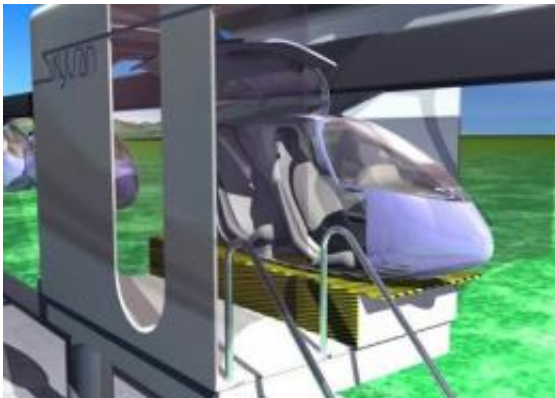


Are Magnetically Levitating 'Sky Pods' the Future of Travel?

September 23 2009, by Miranda Marquit



(PhysOrg.com) -- As a society, we are increasingly interested in finding new ways of transportation that are cleaner for the environment. New concepts in mass transit seem to be one of the main ways to move toward this future. However, many people (especially in the U.S.) don't want to give up the privacy of individual travel. As a result, it might be that so-called "sky pods" may provide the answer.

A company in California, called Unimodal Systems, has designed a [transport system](#) that allows individualized travel, but that is also a form of mass transit. The key lies in the use of "sky pods" that magnetically levitate from their rails. [Discover Magazine](#) reports on how the concept would work:



A passenger would enter a pod, type in where he or she wants to go, and the computer system would do the navigating (and driving). The pods would carry up to three people and travel up to 150 mph. The system would be computerized to deploy the pods to crowded areas, and smart enough to re-route to avoid [traffic jams](#).

The idea is to eventually reduce the reliance our society has on cars. The system could at first work in airports and crowded downtown urban areas. From there, Unimodal wants to expand systems that would be able to provide transportation on a wider basis.

The name of the system is [SkyTran](#), and it does have the potential to reduce traffic and some of the problems, including [pollution](#), that come with it. Unimodal's web site also claims that systems are inexpensive, and can be built quickly and with only a small amount of the cost that goes into building freeways. And the kicker? The company claims that

SkyTran can work using technology we already have.



Unimodal has been trying to get this project really moving over the better part of two years. Things seem to be making progress now that transportation is getting a little more focus, and now that the company has a contract with [NASA's Ames Research Center](#). Unimodal will work on helping NASA to understand how use control software to enhance its activities in space and aeronautics. In return, SkyTran can get the resources it needs to develop into a viable form of urban transport. The vehicle is on display at the Ames Research Park.

While there is rarely anything that can be considered a truly perfect solution, Unimodal seems to think that SkyTran comes pretty close. Even if SkyTran only fulfills a portion of its promises, however, it is still worth looking into. After all, one of our biggest problems in transportation has been a reliance on outdated technology from the last century. Maybe its time to start looking into the technology of the 21st century.



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