Hyperloop startup moves closer to near-supersonic rail

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A tube which is part of the test system for high-speed rail startup Hyperloop One is seen in a 2016 photo. The company said Wednesday it completed its first successful full-systems test in the Nevada desert

US startup Hyperloop One on Wednesday announced the first successful full-systems test of its near-supersonic rail transit system.

The test took place in May at the company's development track in the

Nevada desert near Las Vegas, and involved a vehicle coasting above tracks for slightly more than five seconds using magnetic levitation, according to the startup.

The test vehicle accelerated to a speed of 70 miles (112 kilometers) per hour during the test, and the company's next goal is to ramp the speed to 250 mph (400 kph), Hyperloop One said in a release.

"Hyperloop One has accomplished what no one has done before by successfully testing the first full scale Hyperloop system," said startup co-founder and executive chairman Shervin Pishevar.

"By achieving full vacuum, we essentially invented our own sky in a tube, as if you're flying at 200,000 feet (60,000 meters) in the air."

Hyperloop One had originally promised a full-scale demonstration by the end of 2016, after a successful test of the propulsion system.

Systems tested in May included the motor, vacuum pumping, magnetic levitation, and electromagnetic braking, according to the company.

Hyperloop One also announced on Wednesday that it has built a prototype pod designed to carry people or cargo through the systems low-pressure tubes.

Hyperloop One early this year disclosed a list of locations around the world vying to put near-supersonic rail transit system to the test.

Viable submissions had to be condoned by government agencies that would likely be involved in regulating and, ideally, funding the futuristic rail.

Hyperloop One wants to get three systems underway, chief executive

Rob Lloyd told AFP at the time.

Hyperloop One, which has raised more than $160 million, was set on an idea laid out by billionaire Elon Musk, the entrepreneur behind electric car company Tesla and private space exploration endeavor SpaceX.

Pods would rocket along rails through reduced-pressure tubes at speeds of 1,200 kilometers (750 miles) per hour.

Hyperloop One says the system offers better safety than passenger jets, lower build and maintenance costs than high-speed trains, and energy usage, per person, that is similar to a bicycle.

Port colossus DP World Group of Dubai last year invested in the concept, joining backers including French national rail company SNCF, US industrial conglomerate General Electric and Russian state fund RDIF.