

# I rode the Elon Musk Vegas Loop, the worst transit system on Earth

Column: SFGATE managing editor Katie Dowd takes a trip on the least efficient form of transit on the Vegas Strip

In 1863, the world's first underground railway opened in London. On its first day, nearly 40,000 thrilled Brits made the short, speedy journey between Paddington and Farringdon. The future of transportation had arrived.

One hundred and sixty-three years later, I was at my desk in San Francisco, clicking around the [Vegas Loop](#) map, trying to figure out where the world's dumbest form of transportation could take me.

In 2016, billionaire Elon Musk [decided he was sick of traffic](#). Because Musk believes every thought he's ever had is the first of its kind, he decided to revolutionize transportation. His mission was to build underground highways, creating a tunnel system below surface streets that would zip people around in a way that congested, outdated freeways could not. Las Vegas, which has never seen a gimmick it didn't love, signed on to become the first American city with a Loop.

The scale is ambitious to the point of stupidity. Once its 104 stations and 68 miles of tunnels are complete, the [Vegas Loop site](#) says it "will serve up to 90,000 passengers per hour." About 642,000 people live in Las Vegas, plus an additional 110,000 tourists on any given day. That means every single resident and tourist need to ride the Loop multiple times per day to average 90,000 passengers an hour. For reference, the Tokyo Metro moves 6.5 million people a day around an area with [33 million residents](#). You do the math.

So far, the Vegas Loop has opened just nine stations, five of which connect the Las Vegas Convention Center. From a sixth station, Encore, travelers can go only to the convention center. Three more stations serve Westgate, Resorts World and Fontainebleau. As it turns out, the ground below cities is not a vast, empty space. It's already full of infrastructure like sewer systems, electrical lines, gas pipelines, flood-control tunnels — there's a reason you call 811 before you start digging around in your yard. Musk, who's no fan of regulation, holds the stance that it's better to pay for penalties than follow the rules. As a result, the Loop has been plagued by issues, including allegations of worker injuries, chemical burns and “ankle-deep” water in the tunnels.

To supplement this sad little system, the Loop added \$12.50 rides to the airport. But because there's no tunnel there yet, it's just a regular route on regular surface streets. Oh sorry, were you imagining a train? Autonomous cars? Nope. The Loop is operated by human drivers in Teslas. Elon Musk is creating a race of mole people driving endless circles below Las Vegas.

I was in Vegas the last week of May, so I figured I'd give the Loop a try. On its site, you can prebook tickets; despite the fact Tesla has an app, the Loop does not. When I clicked on “ride the Loop,” I was informed that six of the stations were closed because there was nothing going on at the convention center that day. Westgate, Resorts World and Fontainebleau, however, were open from 7 a.m. to 9 p.m., a completely reasonable schedule given most Vegas tourists are tucked back in their beds by 8:30 p.m.

A quick glance at the map showed that there are no loops. There are lines that largely do not connect with one another. Unless you book an airport ride, the farthest south you can go is the Encore, which, if you know anything about the geography of the Strip, is not far. The only logical way to test the system was

by booking a \$4.50 one-way ticket from Resorts World — misspelled Resort World on the Loop map — to Westgate, a trip of about a mile. Adding insult to injury, I was warned that my “ride may be shared.” After paying with a credit card, I was texted a QR code with no further information on how to hail a car. “Enjoy the ride on the Vegas Loop!” the text said. But ... how?

Because almost no lines, let alone loops, of the system exist yet, my Loop adventure began with a Lyft from my hotel on the south end of the Strip. After being dropped off at Resorts World, I followed signs pointing to VEGAS LOOP. An elevator took me down to Basement Level 2, and I found myself in the service sector of a parking garage. Delivery trucks rumbled by while I looked for a place to scan my QR code. Instead, I found a sign with a station map. At the bottom of the sign was the text “Press button to request a ride” with an arrow pointing down. There was a silver button. Surely it wasn’t this stupid, I thought. But with no other option, I pressed it. Luckily, I looked up quickly enough to notice the bottom of the screen now said my ride would be arriving at approximately 9:59 a.m. I was, once again, given no additional information.

I took a seat on a bench, stunned. What happened when a car drove up? How would I know if it was mine? What if a dozen other people showed up and pressed the button a dozen more times? Would we all behave honorably and take our rides in the order we pressed the button? There were four small benches and one button. Ninety thousand people AN HOUR were going to do this? While waiting, I thought about how people complain that billionaires are wasting money trying to go to space. I disagree. Put them all in a rocket and send them to Mars.

At 9:59, a white Tesla Model Y pulled up. “Um, hi,” I said, awkwardly showing my phone to the driver. “Is this QR code OK?”

He said it was, and I hopped in. I went to show him my phone again, and he took it out of my hand without asking permission. As he lifted it to a scanner on his console, he turned on the camera and snapped a photo of the floor. Both of us now flustered, I had to pull up the code a second time, praying that none of the friends I'd texted about my day so far responded: "loop looks stupid lol."

Code scanned, we took off. And then stopped. The thing about the 12-foot-wide tunnels is that they can't accommodate two lanes of traffic. So we paused for over a minute, waiting for the car coming in the opposite direction to clear the tunnel. The driver, who was, to be fair, absolutely lovely, cheerfully explained to me that the tunnels are wider than they appear. This did the opposite of reassure me. I've seen the claustrophobic videos of Teslas lined up in the tunnel during busy conventions. "Wider than they appear" seemed extremely relative.

Finally given the all-clear, we took off into the void. As we went through a rainbow light-up tube, all I could think about was a crash. If the Tesla clipped the wall, if a battery caught fire, I was toast. A crash would block the entire tunnel. God forbid there were any other cars behind us; they'd have to back out to avoid it. After a minute or so, we reached a junction where several tunnels branched off in different directions. It looked exactly like the sewer system in "Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles." And based on the appearance of a "mystery green pond" at one of the dig sites, it's possible they really are growing a new Donatello down there.

Although the lights made it seem like we were speeding, a quick look at the dashboard revealed we hovered around 35 mph — a far cry from Musk's initial concept of a pneumatic tube system where humans would be flung 700 mph through the tubes. A quick check of Google Maps showed the route we were

taking, on city streets, took 6 minutes. As we emerged into the sunshine at Westgate, I checked my timer. Six minutes. I'd saved zero minutes.

I bid farewell to my friendly driver — there's no tip system on the Loop, so that does save a few dollars — and stepped out of the car. I was once again astonished to see what the Loop considers a "station." At Westgate, there were no benches and no shade. Waiting for a ride in the heat of summer would be torture, and considering it was just a stretch of sidewalk near the Westgate hotel porte-cochere, the prospect of hundreds of Loop riders an hour getting into and out of cars in an organized fashion was unimaginable.

The monorail passes over the open-air Westgate Vegas Loop station on May 27, 2026.  
Katie Dowd/SFGATE

Ready to be done with this insultingly stupid system, I walked over to the nearby Westgate monorail station. I purchased a ticket at a kiosk, headed up to the platform and waited a few minutes for the next train. The area was covered and cool, with clearly marked doors. When the train arrived, dozens of us loaded into it in seconds.

As we glided over the sad Loop station, I could see new tunnels being built. One will someday connect to Harry Reid International Airport, which, at least, is a place people want to go. The train continued, stopping at various convenient points along the Strip. My train was driverless. It was filled with people.

As I looked out onto the Spring Mountains, ancient and magnificent, I thought about how true wisdom is knowing when innovation is unnecessary. Some things, like subways, are fundamental for a reason. We figured them out in 1863, and there's simply no reason to start from scratch. But I suppose there are two types of people in this world: those who gaze at the mountains and see their beauty, and the ones who think, "I could drill a hole through that."