

LOS ANGELES

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9

## The far-out future 1960s planners envisioned for LA transit

*Had these projects been built, we wouldn't be driving to LAX*

By **Jenna Chandler** | @jennakchandler | Sep 22, 2017, 3:00pm PDT | 9 comments



One crazy idea was to build a freeway over the ocean in Santa Monica. | Via [A+D Architecture and Design Museum](#)

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### Transportation Week

This story was originally published as part of Curbed's transportation week, which was devoted to exploring how we get around cities. We ranked the [public transportation projects](#) that will transform Los Angeles neighborhoods, investigated the [conspiracy theory](#) behind LA's old streetcars, and hosted a friendly competition among NYC, San Francisco, and Los Angeles to determine which has the best public transit. All aboard!

If midcentury planners and architects had their way, we'd be whizzing around Los Angeles in monorails and flying buses. Southern California's population and economy were booming in the 1950s and '60s, driving up the demand for practical infrastructure, says architect and historian Alan Hess.

But, in that time, architects, who "like to think of themselves as visionaries," were pushing the limits, he says.

"There do seem to be far-out ideas during this time that were in the spirit of excitement and 'anything is possible,'" Hess says.

Except, some of them weren't possible. Below, we've rounded up the far-out and never-built ideas for transportation in LA that came out of the late '50s and '60s.

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## **A monorail from Downtown Los Angeles to LAX**



Via Metro's Dorothy Peyton Gray Transportation Library and Archive

One of the biggest criticisms levied against LA is that navigating LAX is a nightmare. It's true. We have some decent transit options, but a quick and efficient direct route to one of the largest airports in the world has eluded us.

It didn't have to be that way.

In 1959, Goodell Monorail Systems [proposed](#) a monorail that would have traveled from DTLA to LAX in 12 minutes, with stops at the Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum, Hollywood Park, Century and Western, and Crenshaw. Each of the monorail cars would have been equipped with air conditioning, heating, TV monitors and “quickly detachable porter-operated mobile baggage pods for baggage.”

## The Santa Monica Island Airport



Courtesy of Los Angeles Public Library photo collection

The [\*Washington Post\*](#) says that in the 1960s, “an age of affordable supersonic flight seemed inevitable, promising U.S. coast-to-coast travel in just 90 minutes.” To plan for it, an architect named Donald Jaye drew up plans for an airport island in the Pacific Ocean, directly across from LAX. It would have been large enough to accommodate the [\*U.S. Supersonic Transport\*](#) (SST) and far enough away from homes that the noise apparently wouldn’t be as bothersome to residents.

Travelers would be able to access to the airport island via a causeway, bridge, and subway. Once there, they’d find not only terminals, runways, and hangars, but a mini city with a convention center, commercial area, hotels, art center, apartments, aerospace university, and parks and beaches.

Jaye, by the way, also sketched out [this](#) townhouse for bachelors, or as he described them: "unattached, affluent young man happily wedded to the infinite advantages of

urbia.”

## Flying buses



A woman inspects a model of a “flying bus” in 1965. | Los Angeles Times photographic archive / UCLA digital collections

After the monorail idea, the city, in 1965, unveiled a plan to use “flying buses” to ferry travelers from Union Station to LAX. [According to blogger Eric Richardson](#), the idea was to clip buses—big enough to hold about 60 to 70 passengers—to the bellies of giant [crane](#)

helicopters. The trip would take just nine minutes. City officials even won a federal grant to study the idea, but it obviously never panned out.

## A freeway on the ocean



Courtesy of Santa Monica History Museum

One of the most astonishing transportation proposals in the history of Los Angeles was for a freeway that would have floated above the Pacific Ocean in the Santa Monica Bay.

It was supposed to be a solution for the gridlocked Pacific Coast Highway. The idea was to build a six-mile highway surrounded by a “chain of small man-made islands with housing and marinas, similar to the Florida Keys.”

To build the land mass, the *Santa Monica LookOut* says the plan was to remove 97 million cubic yards of dirt from the Santa Monica Mountains and dump it into the ocean.

The plan appeared destined for approval until environmentalists mounted a strong opposition campaign.