

LOS ANGELES

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# Don't build a streetcar in Downtown LA, use the buses, but gussy 'em up a bit

*Oh, the money LA would save...*

By **Bianca Barragan** | Jul 27, 2018, 2:35pm PDT | 58 comments



Los Angeles is gearing up to drop about \$291 million on a streetcar that will serve Downtown. It's a bad idea.

Not only will the streetcar be wildly expensive and slow-moving, DTLA doesn't need it. It already has the bus.

City officials say the streetcar is needed to help people get around and “support the growth and revitalization of downtown Los Angeles.”

Streetcars are sometimes worth their expense—when they “signal government investment in an underperforming neighborhood,” and are paired with policy changes and improvements that support the streetcar, says Juan Matute, associate director of UCLA's transportation studies institute.

Downtown Los Angeles is hardly “underperforming.”

Adaptive reuse is blowing up, as existing buildings are restored to become epic mixed-users, weed-focused business centers, and an Apple store. Plans are in place to slowly but surely overtake parking lot after parking lot like an incredibly slow game of Hungry Hungry Hippos.

And, Matute says, “if mobility is the primary criteria for the investment, a bus will always perform better.”

The majority of the planned streetcar route is on Hill and Broadway—two thoroughfares already covered by buses.


The bus gets a bad rap. It's slow, and service has been cut.

Putting in dedicated lanes in Downtown for buses to travel could solve those problems, and it'd be far cheaper and less intrusive than laying rails for a streetcar.


But for most Angelenos, the issue is that the bus has an image problem. For many, buses are devastatingly plebeian—*anybody* can ride them—and that makes them unappealing.

Maybe the solution, then, is not just to give buses their own space on the road, but to give buses some pizzazz. Below are five examples of show-stopping public transport that people would line up to ride through Downtown.

## Double-decker buses

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Guess what is officially coming to LA? Stretching the [#electric](#) bus paradigm, we're super proud to announce we're the first agency in the U.S. to purchase [#zeroemission](#), all-electric [#doubledecker](#) buses from Alexander Dennis! [#WelcomeToTheTop!](#)

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‘Allo gov’nor! Double-decker buses are all the rage overseas, so why not have them run through DTLA? The San Gabriel Valley’s Foothill Transit already has plans to add a few

to its fleet—they'll be [North America's first all-electric, double-decker transit buses](#).

The buses are expected to hit the road next year, and commenters on Foothill Transit's Instagram seem pretty excited to hop on. Why not have some of these sweet rides cruising the streetcar route instead?

It wouldn't be unprecedented: LA has experimented with double-decker buses before, as this 1982 photo of [a double decker bus from a pre-Metro transit agency on Flower Street](#) in Downtown shows.

## **Neighborhood-inspired buses**



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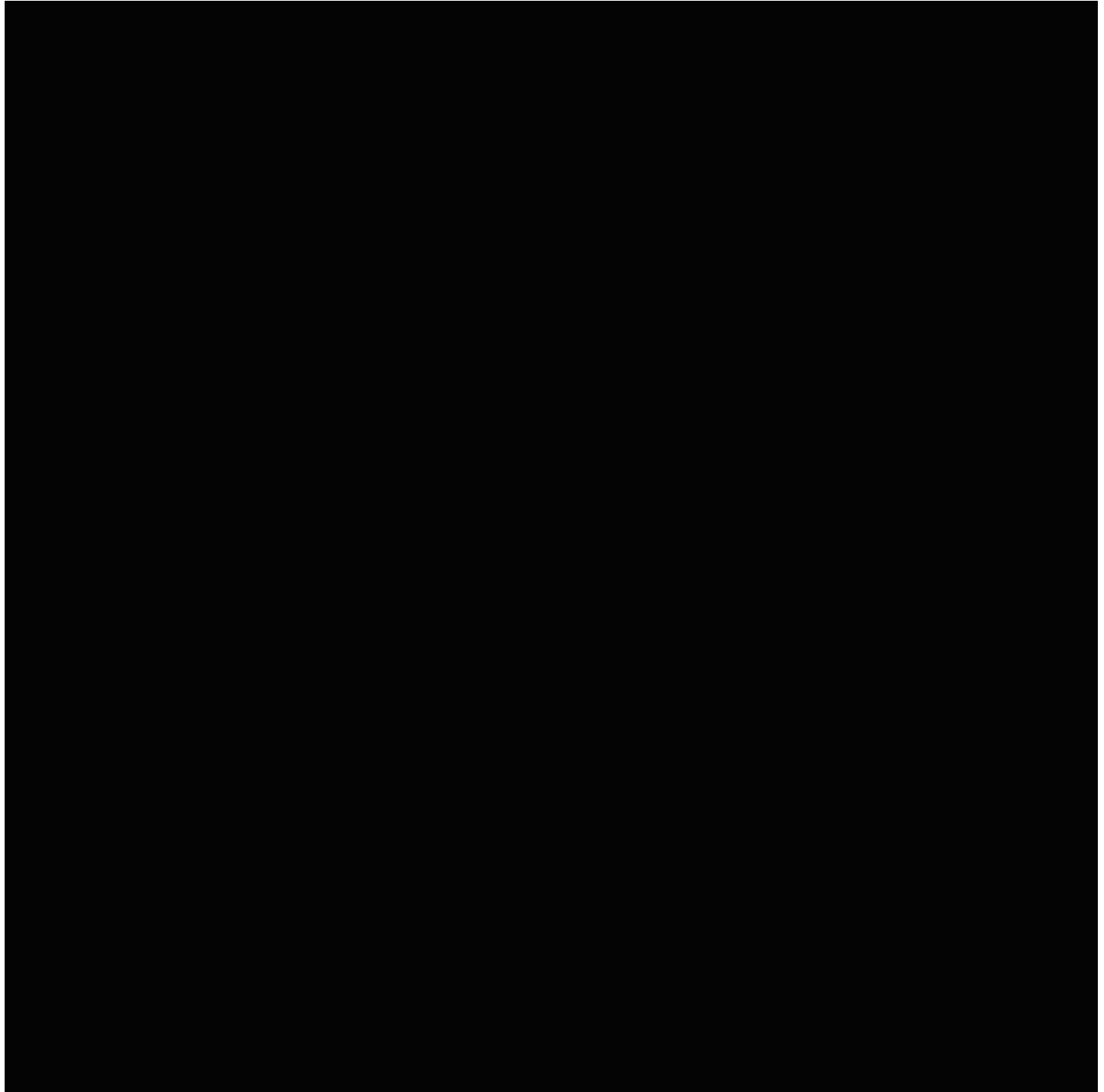
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Buses could be a great chance to show off Los Angeles's vast network of neighborhoods and what makes them each unique. There could be a bus that takes a design cue from

[these autonomous shuttles](#) designed to reflect the Leimert Park neighborhood, or a bus that mimics the look of the funky, bright [Jeepneys](#) that take people on [tours of Historic Filipinotown](#).

Few people would take a selfie with a streetcar, but who could resist taking a photo with one of these if they saw it on the street?



An imagined autonomous shuttle with a design inspired by Leimert Park, as seen in a 2017 video produced by Karl Baumann and Ben Caldwell. | Via [Vimeo](#)

## Vintage buses



Via [Metro Library and Archive](#)/Creative Commons

This streetcar through Downtown is often pitched as bringing back a mode of transport that used to be there—“the return of the streetcar!” They say. If everyone’s so hot for a throwback, why not get some buses that look like they’re old? (They’d be up to current environmental standards, of course.)

Metro appears to have some old Metro buses [like the one above](#) that are trotted out on rare occasions and look sharp.

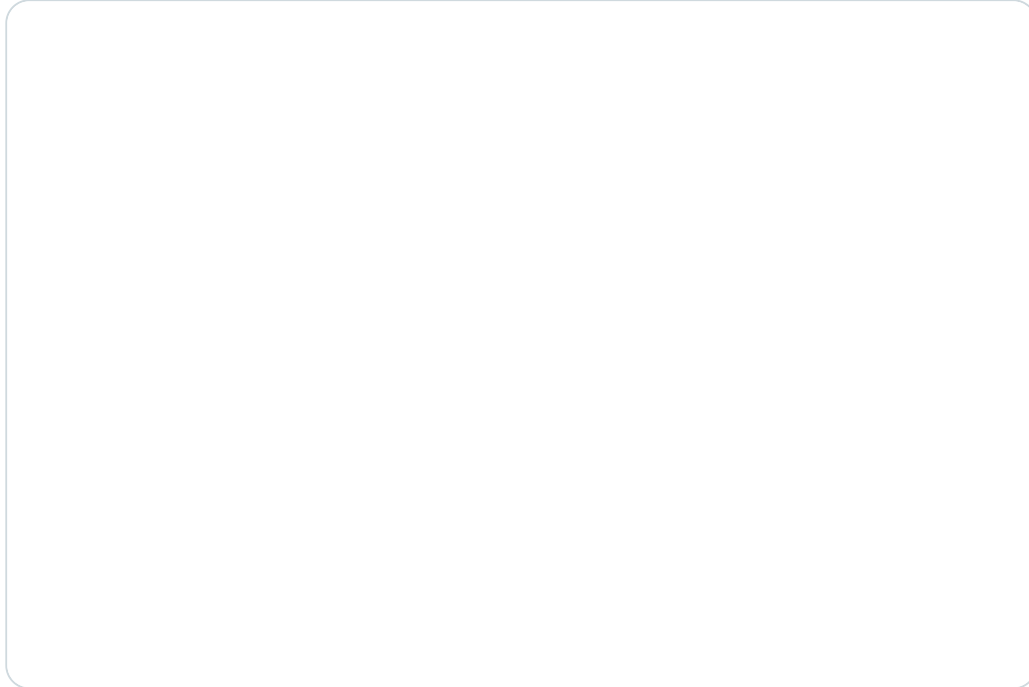
## “Rail bus”

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The world's first railless electric train, which can be precisely controlled with a set of virtual tracks laid out on urban roads, began test operations in Zhuzhou, central China's Hunan Province, on Tuesday. [@CRRC\\_global](#) [@HunanofChina](#)



2:04 AM · May 11, 2018



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It's a bus, it's a train, it's rail bus! This remarkable hybrid exists in China, where [a bus that looks convincingly like a train](#) travels along the street, following “rails” made of white paint and aided by sensors on the rail bus. No ripping up the street required, no protracted construction and street closures—just some paint and a high-tech bus in disguise for a fraction of the cost of a regular tram.

## Trolley buses





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West Hollywood, California

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Clang, clang, clang went the *streetcar*? No! No one sings joyfully about streetcars. A trolley is a surefire way to capture the hearts of locals and visitors, and to have your public transport be immortalized in song. [LADOT's trolley bus](#) is adorable and a delight to see on the streets. The adorably named, Pop Art-bedecked WeHo PickUp trolley is functional *and* fun. Downtown can follow its lead!