

Sky pods maker eyes UAE projects

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The local office of Belarus-headquartered Unitsky String Technologies (UST) is in negotiations with authorities from the UAE and the wider Middle East for the development of sky pod transport networks.

“I hope we will sign contracts [to advance projects] in 2022,” Anatoli Unitsky, founder of UST and uSky Transport, told MEED.

Passenger and cargo pods based on the company’s technology can be carried at speeds ranging from 150 kilometres an hour (km/h) to 500km/h, with up to 50,000 passengers an hour. Unitsky said the aerodynamic pods are carried independently along a roped steel railhead, and developing the network can prove significantly cheaper than conventional railway track or asphalt roads.

The company has completed the first stage of its uSky freight and passenger elevated string rail transport system for use in logistics at the test facility within its innovation centre at Sharjah Research Technology and Innovation Park (SRTI Park). It marks uSky's first commercial project launch, with plans to increase its portfolio to 10 projects by the end of 2022.



Anatoli Unitsky is the founder of UST and uSky Transport [supplied image].

Investment in the design, construction, and certification of uSky's urban transport and freight facilities in the UAE has totals \$14m (AED51m). The construction of a 20-kilometre (km) test track to take the pods to a speed of 500km/h could cost about \$230m. Securing the logistics to construct such a track is among the company's priorities.

"There is support from the governments of Sharjah and the UAE," the

founder said. "For instance, they allocated this land plot within SRTI Park, close to university campuses, where people can visit and view our technology with ease.

"But in order to build the transport technology anywhere in the world, we need financing. Clients who need the project – be it the heads of governments, transport ministries or companies that need logistics solutions – need to drive this."

Local project plans

The first line of the uSky complex could be expanded in its current location at SRTI Park to connect the district's network of training buildings. Unitsky said the company's receipt of transport infrastructure safety certification by TUV and the completion of uSky's string rail system at the Sharjah park brings the technology closer to real-world implementation.

UST is in talks with authorities in Abu Dhabi, Dubai and Sharjah, and neighbouring countries including Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. The firm signed a memorandum of understanding with Dubai's Road and Transport Authority (RTA) at the World Government Summit in February 2019. Unitsky said he expects progress on the RTA's tender imminently to build tracks for sky pod transport in the city.

"We're participating and we're hoping to win. As far as I can tell, we're offering the best solution to Dubai, but it's up to them to decide."

In addition to UST, companies from China, the US, Israel and France are also involved in the competition. RTA selected French engineering company Systra for its planned suspended transport system earlier this year. Systra will deliver design consultancy services for the project, as [MEED reported in September](#).

Sharjah is also reviewing a proposed line to link the main city with the emirate's eastern coast town of Khor Fakkan using super-strong string technology system, with Sheikh Sultan bin Muhammad al-Qasimi, Supreme Council Member and Ruler of Sharjah, is understood to have expressed interest in the project.

UST has submitted multiple options to develop the technology in Khor Fakkan, which includes the sky track for freight transit to Khor Fakkan port, and an urban network within the town.



UST is among the bidders involved with RTA's suspended transport scheme in Dubai [supplied image].

The proposals are "complex" in nature given Khor Fakkan's terrain, which features a deep-sea port, container traffic and mountainous areas. The line to Khor Fakkan port could reportedly span up to 130km.

"We have provided [the options] we were supposed to, and they are under review," Unitsky said.

The company has also held discussions with authorities in Vietnam, Indonesia, India, France, Sweden, Mexico and Ecuador, in addition to other Asian, European and American governments, for the implementation of its technology.

Additionally, Africa is a market of interest for the company. Last week, Unitsky was part of a gathering hosted by a delegation from Lesotho – an enclaved country surrounded entirely by South Africa – during King Letsie III's visit to Expo 2020 Dubai. The founder said members of the Lesotho government expressed an interest in UST' offering during the meeting.

"The landlocked country has no access to the sea and up in the mountains, faces issues with infrastructure and transportation. String technology could solve these problems and support their agriculture industry, helping to attract international investments if the government backs the project."

Lead image: MEED