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SKY-HIGH DREAM TO GET CITY MOVING

CUTTING EDGE: Images of the proposed SkyWay project proposed for Flinders University.

Ex-transport chief unveils \$13m plan for elevated, driverless train

EXCLUSIVE
MICHAEL MCGUIRE

A \$13 million elevated, automated, driverless train known as SkyWay is planned for Flinders University, prompting predictions the technology will

“shake up Australia’s rail industry”.

The Flinders line will be 500m long and is planned as a test base to demonstrate Sky-

Way can be a viable option for projects such as Adelaide’s expanded tram network or even very fast trains between Sydney and Melbourne.

The Flinders SkyWay will sit 5.5m above the landscape and be built on pylons that are spaced 50m apart.

The head of the project, for-



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mer state transport supremo Rod Hook, said the driverless trains, which can be adapted for either passengers or freight, were powered by rechargeable batteries and were less intrusive on the landscape than traditional trams or trains because the space beneath the line could still be used.

The train cars can sit either above or below the tracks and can travel at 100km/h in urban areas and 500km/h on longer journeys.

“No one has been a bigger advocate for tram lines and extensions than I have been,” Mr Hook said. “But we are still

running on 100-year-old technology with steel wheels on steel tracks on the ground.”

Flinders University vice chancellor Colin Stirling is supporting the project, which he said had “great potential and speaks to Flinders’ enterprising spirit”, but the university was not providing funding.

Last week, the Federal Government announced it would build an \$85 million rail line from Tonsley Park to the Flinders precinct. The SkyWay is proposed to run from the new station and connect the Flinders Medical Centre to the university’s central hub.

Mr Hook estimated the service could carry one million passengers annually, who would ride free of charge. He anticipated that construction would start by the end of 2016.

He has also pitched the concept to Premier Jay Weatherill and Treasurer Tom Koutsantonis but said he was not seeking any public money for the \$13 million project. Mr Hook was chief executive of the state’s Transport Department but was controversially sacked in 2014 by Mr Weatherill, who cited a need for “new leadership” at the time.

Mr Koutsantonis said it was “hard to make a judgment on the viability of SkyWay as this is early-stage technology”.

“But it is an interesting concept and I look forward to seeing how it develops,” he said.

Federal Opposition Leader Bill Shorten yesterday announced Labor would contribute \$500 million towards an expanded tram network in Adelaide if it won the July 2 election.

Mr Hook said SkyWay would bid to be a part of those plans if the Flinders test was a success.

“I am confident I can demonstrate that it will be considerably cheaper than a traditional tram or train line,” Mr Hook said.

The technology on which the SkyWay is based has been developed by Belarus engineer Dr Anatoly Yunitskiy, who has been working on the concept for 30 years. Mr Hook travelled to Belarus last year to meet Dr Yunitskiy and they have now formed SkyWay Transport Australia to push the idea in Adelaide.

Mr Hook has also been in discussions with builder Lend Lease and engineering firm Aurecon about the project, which will also need development approval and accreditation from the National Rail Safety Regulator before proceeding.

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