

CABLE CARS

MOVING CITIES ONWARDS AND UPWARDS

Why did the chicken cross the road? To get to the other side, of course. In today's modern world, we can assume it used a bridge or a zebra crossing. But how would our feathered friend manage a river or a kilometre-wide valley? Luckily, there are cable cars.



Once mainly a staple of ski resorts and tourist attractions, aerial cable car transport is steadily growing in popularity as a viable mode of public transport. Using technology originally created for mining sites, amusement parks and other industrial and recreational applications, the first use of cable technology in a city appeared about 100 years ago in the form of the hilltop funiculars of Lyon, Paris, San Francisco, Lisbon and Valparaiso.

Though actual, suspended cable cars emerged much later, they managed to stay in use due to their extraordinary 'fly-over' capability, which allows them to overcome specific challenges like crossing canyons and waterways, with less infrastructure than other transport modes such as railways and buses.

A viable transport mode

Additionally, recent developments in Latin America and the Mediterranean region have strengthened the image of cable car systems as a viable transport mode – as well as their ability to stimulate further local development.

The urban cable system in Medellín, Colombia, is proof of how even unconventional mobility modes can open up new social and economic horizons. “Since its inauguration in 2004, Metrocable, which currently has three lines and two more under construction, has increased access to a wider variety of employment and learning opportunities, as well as leisure activities, for inhabitants in deprived districts previously isolated or with limited mobility

means”, said Tomás Elejalde, general manager of Metro de Medellín. “An added plus, this aerial mode has boosted passenger volumes on the above-ground metro system.” The cable car network in Algiers, first opened in 1956, is also a fine example of how such a system can stimulate local growth. “In addition to being just another mode of city transport, the Algiers cable car system is a project that helps increase social and economic inclusion”, said Christian Bouvier, the vice chairman of the board at POMA, the cable car constructor in Algiers.

Consisting of five lines and 4km of routes, the Algiers network system largely connects outlying neighbourhoods located on high hills, where there are no viable mass transport links to the city centre. The cable car system connects these areas with the city's several existing public transport options, including trams, metros, buses and suburban trains.

A remarkable revival

Though at the moment there about 100 cable car systems operating in an urban environment, the transport mode is experiencing a remarkable revival. Currently under construction but expected to open later this year, the system in Brest, France is planned to run 17 hours a day, with a capacity of 1,200 passengers per hour. Other cities with projects planned include Paris and Grenoble, in France, and Gothenburg, in Sweden.

Certainly cable car systems currently seem to fill more of a niche market, but even still, many cities across the world, actually do have the necessary conditions for considering this mode of transport, which, like all forms of mobility, positively affect overall urban living. ●

For more information on cable car systems and the opportunities they provide, UITP has published a report, “Aerial Cable Transport Systems”, available for members at www.mobi-uitp.org.