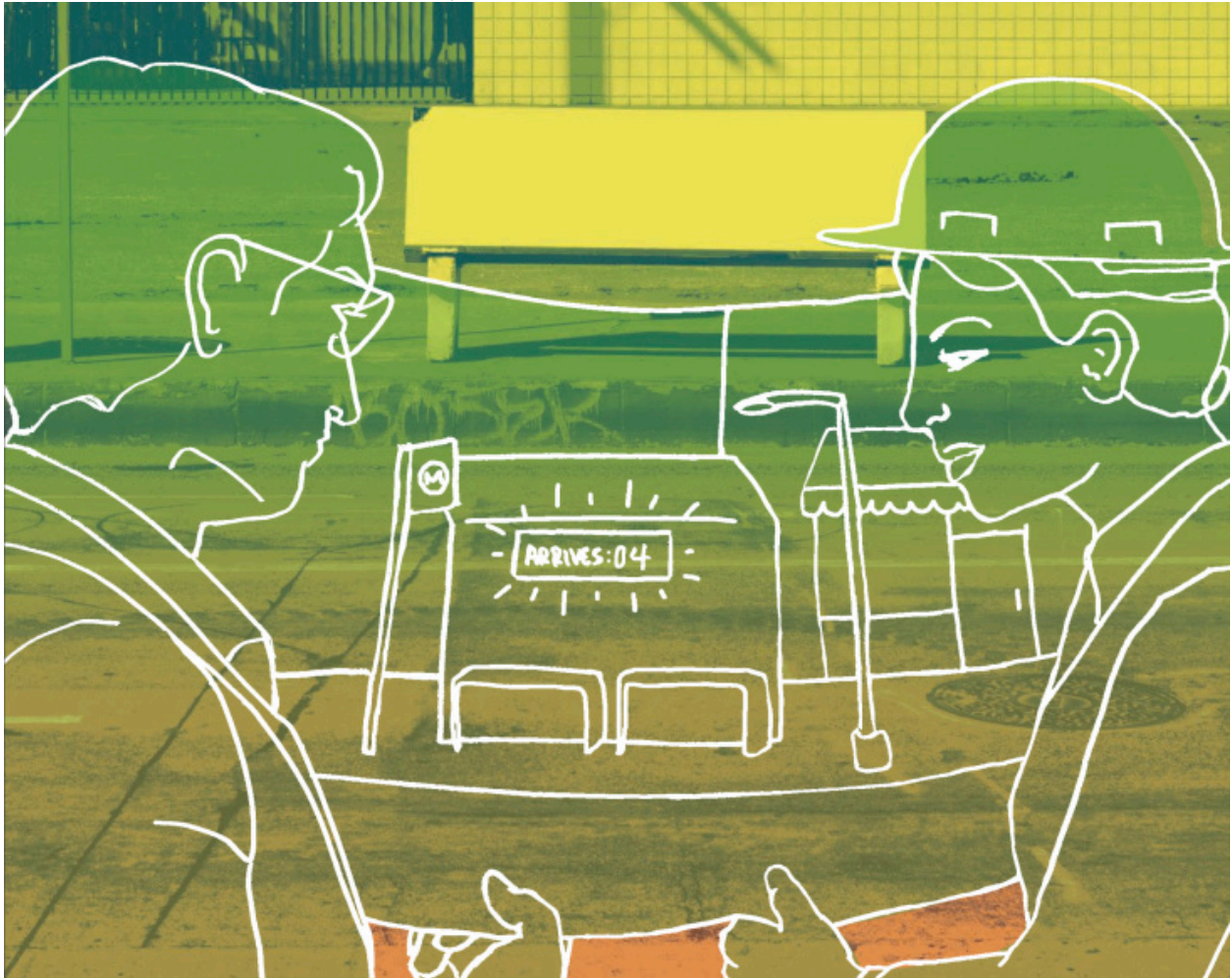


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# LA Metro Has An Innovation 'SWAT Team' And They're Fighting For The Future

BY RYAN FONSECA IN NEWS ON AUGUST 8, 2019 12:30 PM



(Courtesy Los Angeles Metro [Vision 2028 Plan](#))

Fun fact: L.A. Metro has a team dubbed the Office of Extraordinary Innovation, or [OEI](#) for short. Maybe your brain just went to the same place mine did: hidden elevators whisking scientists to a top-secret underground bunker where Tony Stark and Dr. Emmett Brown are building a hover train or an amphibious bus or [those jetpacks](#) we were promised.

But ask actual OEI team members and they'll tell you the work isn't science fiction. They might not work in a secret laboratory or wear capes — they're in cubicles at the [MTA building](#) downtown like most Metro employees — but they do have an ambitious mission: to

reimagine and push the boundaries of Los Angeles County's public transit system to meet the needs of present and future Angelenos. No pressure.

The job is part "SWAT team," part "cheerleader," said Colin Peppard, senior director for public-private partnerships and innovation for team. The OEI has to be tactical in its efforts to push innovation from within while also championing fellow Metro employees, he explained. "There's a lot of talent in this building. And if you just tell them, 'Yes, you can,' they'll do really interesting things," said Peppard, who moved to L.A. from Washington D.C. *because* of our region's [well-documented transportation challenges](#).

"If you can solve it here, you can solve it anywhere," he said.

### **[Article Excerpt]**

#### **TOLLING WITHOUT TRANSPONDERS**

**Project:** *Replace freeway express lanes transponders with a mobile app that makes driving toll lanes more accessible, convenient (and maybe cheaper).*

Solving Southern California's infamous congestion [has proven futile](#) so far, but one method Metro is [currently studying](#) has been shown to provide relief elsewhere: congestion fees — as in charging motorists to drive at certain times on certain roadways.

A form of that is already in place through freeway express lanes, where drivers pay a fee, put a transponder in their car and get tracked when they use the lanes to zip past us regular chumps trapped in our metal coffins, inching slowly toward death (I'm fine). But a new OEI project has Metro testing a way to make freeway tolling simpler and more convenient.

If Metro can accurately track smartphones' GPS to pinpoint vehicles in toll lanes "within the tiniest margin of error," Borgman said, "we definitely see a future where you can access the express lanes with an app instead of a transponder."

"The technology is cool, and it's there," Peppard explained, but the potential doesn't stop at express lanes.

It could also pave the way for a single mobile app that would let people pay for all forms of transit trips in the region, he said, which could save both commuters and transit agencies money. Using the phone you already own saves you from buying a metal transponder — and could save Metro from needing to build the physical infrastructure used to track those transponders.