

A recent image of Saudi Arabia's 'The Line' project, spanning 105 miles long.

World 365s

Architects told the Crown Prince that they could build a pair of giant loop cities next to each other faster, much cheaper, and far less manpower and material intensive. The Crown Prince was adamant that the Line could be built as he imagined.

The original 2021 announcement was for a project 105 (actually 110!) miles long. It would have a batshit insane price tag - implausible lowball estimates started at \$100 billion, realistic estimates are in the low trillions - and rely on technology not yet in existence.

Saudi Arabia originally hoped to complete a five-kilometer (three-mile) segment by 2030.

The Wall Street Journal recently reported that the project hopes to complete a half-mile segment by 2034. So, ten or fifteen years from now, maybe we'll see something 0.5% of the original plan.

And then it will promptly be abandoned and remain uninhabited. Modern-day Tower of Babel. It will be a colossal failure at an astronomic cost in both lives and money, and its ruins will remain for generations as a reminder of humanity's hubris



Why is there no new information on the building of "The Line' City," the NEOM Project of Saudi Arabia? Is the project moving forward, or is it dead in the water?

Ben Allen

No new information?

If it's actual work you are looking for, then there is apparently quite a lot of earth works being bulldozed and excavated at this moment in preparation for the city infrastructure.

- [Saudi Arabia Starts Moving Earth for Its Futuristic Linear City](#)

If its new plans announced you were after then consider:

- [Saudi Arabia announced a wild plan to build a floating, 8-sided city](#)



A rendering of the city of Oxagon in Neom.

There is also signs of life in the business world that this city will highly depend on:

- [Oracle signed on as first tenant of hyperscale data centre in Saudi Arabia's NEOM](#)

So the project appears to be moving forward. Whether it succeeds in the end is a different story but apparently there is movement.



Infrastructure development projects are different from football matches or formula races.

Saleh A. Al-Sulaiman

Football matches and formula races need follow-up and permanent suspension from the beginning of the match or race to the end. As for the infrastructure, it is sufficient to announce the news at the beginning and end of the project, not daily reports.

All NEOM projects are going according to plan, and you can follow some of the news that is being published, but remember that it is an infrastructure project and not a formula race.

I appreciate your interest in development projects in Saudi Arabia.

How realistic is the NEOM project in Saudi Arabia?

Dave Jackson

As visioned it's not terribly realistic, it just too big of a project. I do believe the prince is committed to the project and that Saudi is committed to a 300 billion spend. As such the first stage might get completed to where the Line might be able to house 1–1.5 million people. There is already very little foreign interest in the project and year over year it has just become less. Add in the war in Ukraine, the hyperinflation (which ironically the Saudis are not helping with by keeping oil prices high) is only going to make this project (which is a huge Gamble) all that less attractive to foreign companies who are going to want to keep cash reserves in these times. Saudi plans to offer an IPO but if there already is little interest I don't think that will go very well, it's not Aramco that has a proven Revenue stream that is having an IPO. Without foreign investment this will never get completed or get past the first stage. This is not a 500 billion project, it's more like a 1.5 trillion project. A linear design is a design that introduces engineering problems as opposed to a design that tries to mitigate problems with the design itself. This is the opposite how things are normally done and will increase costs.

Then there are the contradictions. Is this supposed to be a playground for the rich? There's already Dubai. KSA is one of the most conservative and oppressive countries in the world, trying to sell NOEM as a playground is going to be a hard sell. So is getting people to want to live in the middle of the desert in a building where people's opinions range from super cool to a glass prison. I guarantee it will be nothing as magical as the 3D renderings. A hub of technology? KSA doesn't even have an industrial economy, I don't know how it plans on selling itself a tech hub? There are no incentives for tech companies to come here...it's not like KSA is some hotbed of techno wizards waiting to be tapped. The utopian idea that somehow the tech wizards of the world would somehow come here to collaborate on building a better world is absolute marketing nonsense. What's the business model to this? Companies don't share ideas, they may collaborate but they only do so with companies where there's a mutual benefit and this is done under contract and this can be done over the internet. For the US, China and Europe there is no upside. Any technologies on showcase at NOEM are likely coming from these areas already. Maybe countries like Israel, India and Russia could find some benefit as they are countries with good engineers without all the resources as say the US and China? A tourist attraction? Half the countries surrounding KSA are failed states (Yemen, Iraq, Syria and Lebanon) and Egypt is not looking so great either. This makes an already volatile area even , more volatile. What's KSA going to be like once the oil runs out. It's a country full of people who work cushy overpaid government jobs and people who are used to subsidies. What's going to happen when these people are going to have to find work and where that work might be waiting on drunk foreigners and liberal woman? They will be bitter and the Clerics will embrace their anger. Are tourists really going to risk coming to NOEM so they can ski in the desert? I'd rather ski on a mountain.

It's not really clear what stages are going to be built and when. Certainly u will need an airport. Certainly at least some portion of the Line will need to be built. If the Line is built is it going to be for tech or for pleasure? If for tech Oxagon will need to be built. If for pleasure Trojena. I'm not certain there will be enough money left to be build one of these and certainly not both? Cities develop organically for a reason. Perhaps these will be scaled back and both built? If that happens what do u really have?

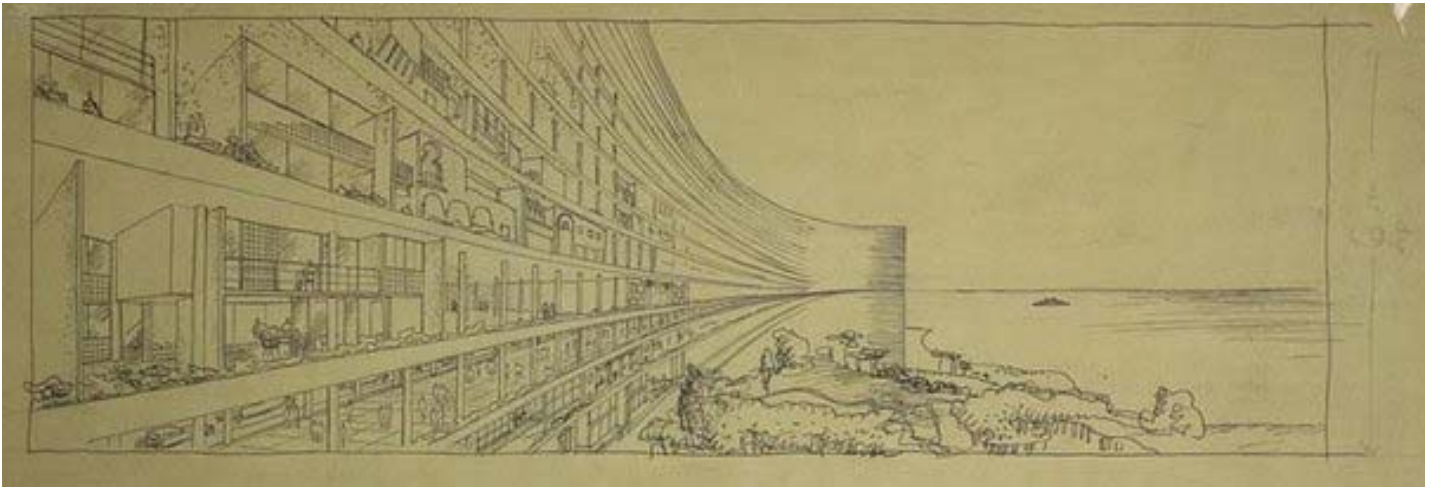
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What are the pros and cons of Saudi Arabia's Neom smart city project, the Mirror Line, a 1,600-foot tall, 75-mile long structure?

Well the only pro I can honestly think of is that, *Inshallah*, this monstrosity will never get built, as many other such Arabian money-laundering schemes did not (anyone remembers the [World Island project](#) from Dubai a decade or two ago? No? Good!) The con, is of course, that this entire brain fart is really... a con, so to speak... of Le Corbusier's 1929 Plan Obus for the city of Cabash, in the then French Algeria.



The Plan Obus consisted of three main elements: a new business district on the Cape of Algiers (at the tip of the Casbah) at a site slated for demolition, a residential area in the heights accessible by a bridge spanning over the Casbah, and, finally, **the ultimate expression of his "roadtown," an elevated highway arcing between suburban cities and containing fourteen residential levels beneath it.** [...] The plan was a modernist megastructure to be laid directly over the Casbah, with its elevated highway and bridges allowing high-speed travel over the prohibitively narrow and complex streets below.

If built, Plan Obus would have been one of the largest and most ambitious modernist projects ever — an inspiring sight of monument and beauty — and likely one of its greatest failures. Clearly disaster loomed in the project's disregard for Algerian social and religious traditions, the segregation of the workers and the European communities, and of course the abrupt change in the spatial arrangement brought on by its brutal scale. What is most interesting about Plan Obus now is not imagining these problems, but contemplating the extreme disconnect between Le Corbusier's solution for Algiers and the romantic harmony, sensuality and poetry of the exoticized other upon which he drew.

He was, for example, very enthusiastic about discrete examples of vernacular architecture. In his writings, he passionately declared his appreciation for individual houses: "O inspiring image! Arabs, are there no peoples but you who dwell in coolness and quiet, in the enchantment of proportions and the savor of a humane architecture?" Le Corbusier contrasted such vernacular manifestations with the European city in which "'civilized' people are holed up like rats." He also celebrated the "Arabs" because they ignored the street and cultivated the private garden courtyards that delighted him.

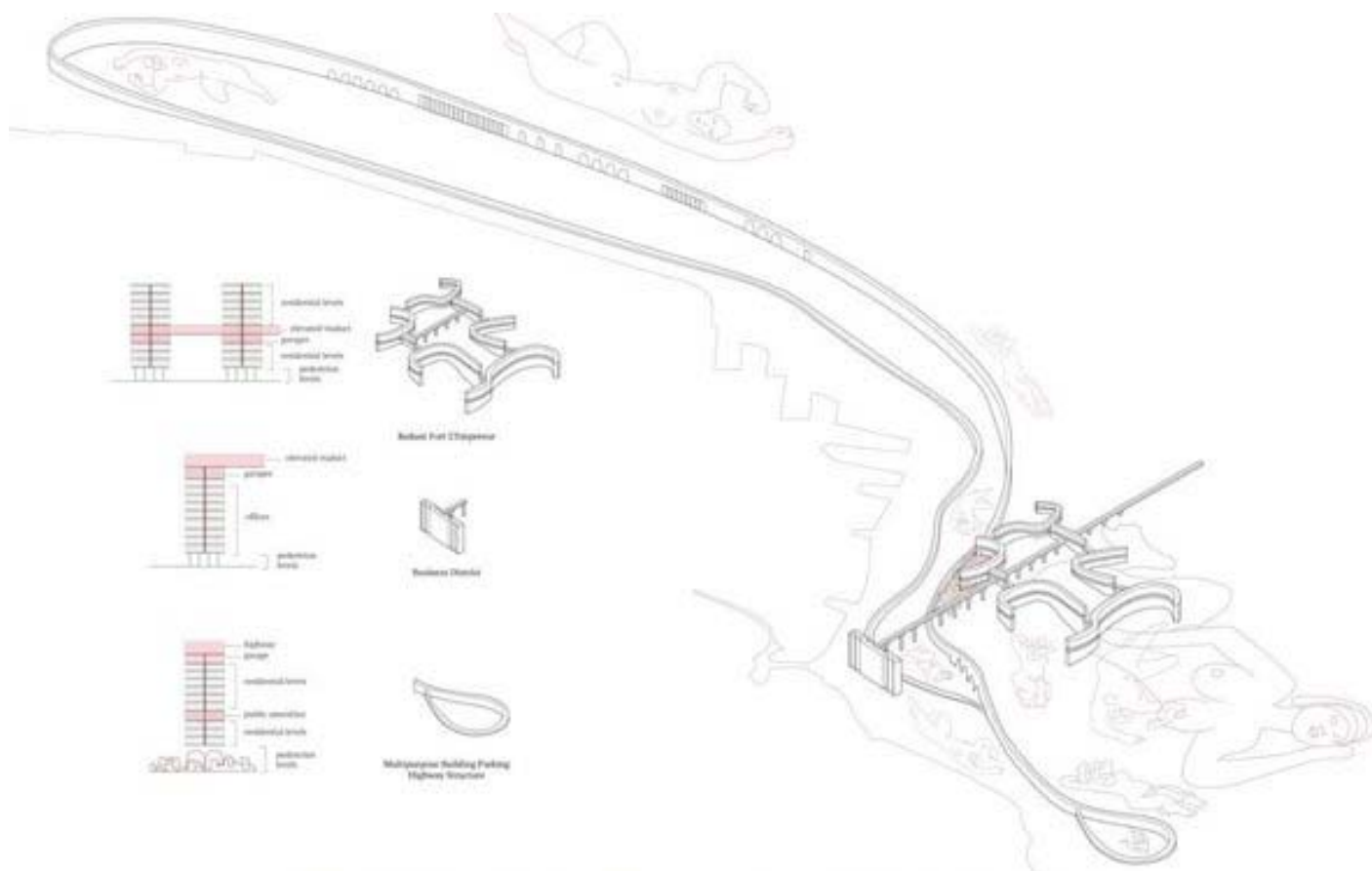
Yet when Le Corbusier referred to Algiers at large, he was less compassionate. In his typically self-aggrandizing form he presented his plan: "Here is the new Algiers. Instead of the leprous sore which had sullied the gulf and the slopes of the Sael, here stands architecture... architecture is the masterly, correct,

and magnificent play of shapes in the light." At the urban scale he is no longer enchanted by the Arabs; he is taken with himself and the fantastic syntheses he proposed. Within his rational, formal organization, he envisioned inserting his beloved pre-industrial, one and two-story homes, complete with gardens flourishing on each of the levels under the highway.

Women provided another powerful source of inspiration. Le Corbusier's intense encounter with Josephine Baker ("the most erotic woman he had ever known") in 1929 precipitated the introduction of nude, mythic woman in his painting. While in Algiers, he was taken by the beauty of two girls and returned to Paris with a notebook full of nude studies of them and several racy postcards of "native" women. As his encounter with Baker unlocked his sense of Rio, it has been suggested that the elegant curves of the Plan Obus, previously uncharacteristic in his work, derived from the fleshy forms of Algerian girls.

Plan Obus was conceived as a collision of the idealized dwelling, mythic feminine and romantic landscape offset by modern technology in the service of colonial needs.

[\[1\]](#)



Introduces the Multipurpose Building-Parking-Highway Triology: an isometric diagram of Plan Obus A's multipurpose infrastructure.

Now it takes some serious, 21st-century-levels of idiocy to take a colonialist pipe-dream - designed by a modernist mad genius who could never build so much as a livable house, let alone a city - look at it and say "Well that's a bit too subtle, how can we hammer this idea of linear megastructure even more?"; and then present it as a revolutionary urban solution for an environmentally friendly, ethnically woke and economically sustainable future. And I think it also tells a lot about the ruling elites of Saudi Arabia, that they look for the most brutalist, heavy-handed, in-your-face examples of Western megalomania - the kind of which even European modernists were having second thoughts about implementing in their native countries - as bold new visions for development of their own state. United Arab Emirates and Qatar have

already turned themselves into *nouveau riche* copies of Las Vegas and Disneyland, while Saudi Arabia now apparently thinks French Algeria is the way to go. Reminds me of that old Jon Stewart comedy sketch, in which John Oliver parodies the 1916 Skyes-Picot reordering of Middle-Eastern borders: "There's nothing Arabs respect more than a strong white hand drawing arbitrary lines betwixt their ridiculous tribal allegiances!"^[2]



And speaking of Arab tribes and their "ridiculous allegiances" caught inside a neocolonialist dystopia:

NEOM (standing for "New Future") is a planned mega-city in the northwest of Saudi Arabia which aims to be "an accelerator of human progress", according to its website. The project is one of the cornerstones of Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman's Vision 2030 initiative, which aims to reinvigorate and diversify the Saudi economy. The planned mega-city would cover an area of 26,500 square kilometres (10,232 square miles) in the northwest of Saudi Arabia, also covering part of Egypt's Sinai region which the Saudi government has leased from Egypt for a fee of about \$10bn. The total cost of the city is estimated to be more than \$500bn, with financial backing supplied by the government's Public Investment Fund.

Some 20,000 al-Huwaitat tribe members face eviction to make way for the project. Though early marketing materials on the NEOM project claimed it would be built on "virgin land", the al-Huwaitat tribe has been settled in the northwest Tabuk province for centuries, as well as in areas of Jordan and the Sinai. [...]

Alya Alhwaiti said the government's narrative around the construction of NEOM has changed since its announcement in 2016. "At the beginning of the project, the government told the al-Huwaitat tribe that they would be involved in NEOM's development and that their area would become one of the most famous in the world. The tribe was excited."

In January 2020, though, the Crown Prince allegedly sent an assistant to al-Huwaitat areas, who told the tribe to accept compensation – a sum of just \$3,000 per family – and leave their lands, or face eviction. The tribe has refused to move and they claim Saudi authorities have started to punish their stance in a variety of ways.

Since that ultimatum was set, the tribe says it has been subject to kidnappings, harassment and threats. Prominent tribe members including seven of Abdul Rahim Ahmad Mahmoud al-Hwaiti's cousins were allegedly abducted and imprisoned incommunicado in the months preceding al-Hwaiti's death. **The tribe says homes have been destroyed, electricity has been cut off randomly, and inexplicable fires have occurred. Tribe members' employers have been pressured to make life difficult for the tribe.**

[3]

But even if looking at this from more of an architectural than political angle, I still think the entire thing is bound to be an unmitigated disaster. Recently I've posted [an answer here](#) about 15 essential properties of good design, described by architectural theorist Christopher Alexander in his life-work, "The Nature of Order". These 15 properties appear in any structure or work of art which feels both alive and liveable; and not to repeat them all here, include stuff like gradual levels of scale, strong centers with strong boundaries, repetition and echoing of basic elements, deep interlock and integration with surroundings... in short, practically everything in opposition to how this NEOM idiocy is designed. It's like architects and planners behind this lunacy carefully read Alexander's studies, and then went on to make everything in contrast to it. "Well he says strong symmetry, smooth texture and separation from environment make a thing feel unnatural and inhumane - Right then, make it a 500 meters tall straight line with a blinding glass facade!" And I'm not even going to go into all of practical and engineering problems totally foreseeable to plague such a city (more about that, for anyone interested, in [youtube video](#) below):

In conclusion, let me just add I'm very averse to any kind of forced originality in architecture or art. My personal design philosophy is "If it works, copy it shamelessly!" (with an addendum of "Someone wiser than you has probably already figured out what works.") So whenever I see ideas such as this one - "Let's shove millions of people into 170 km long, 200 m wide plank of a city, no one has ever done that before!" - I can only sigh that there are probably very good reasons why no one has done it before.

Footnotes

[1] [Le Corbusier's Algerian Fantasy](#)

[2] [Jon Stewart & John Oliver on SykesPicot & Drawing Middle East ... | Jon Stewart & John Oliver on #SykesPicot & Drawing #MiddleEast Borders | By Rebaz Zedbagi | Facebook](#)

[3] [Al-Huwaitat tribe seeks UN help to stop Saudi forced displacement](#)