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State OKs high-speed rail links to Shanghai

Ji Mi

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A magnetic-levitation train arrives at the Longyang Road Station in Shanghai's Pudong New Area. China's State Council has approved the country's second maglev line, which will link Shanghai with Hangzhou, capital of Zhejiang Province. Construction of the 175-kilometer highspeed route will start this year and wrap up before Shanghai hosts the 2010 World Expo.— Jin Liwang

THE central government has given the green light for a high-speed rail link between Shanghai and Beijing and a magnetic-levitation line between Shanghai and Hangzhou, the National Development and Reform Commission said yesterday.

The "time is ripe for constructing the Beijing-Shanghai railway," which is expected to alleviate the heavy crowding on the trains that now run between the two cities, the NDRC said in a statement on its Website.

The 1,320-kilometer [820-mile] route will be designed for maximum speeds of 350 kilometers an hour [217 mph], but operating speeds are expected to run around 300 kilometers an hour [185 mph].

When the line is finished, travel time between the two cities will be reduced from the current 12 hours to five.

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Each of the future trains will carry between 1,000 and 1,200 passengers, according to the China Economic Times newspaper.

Eventually, the line's trains will be able to make 240 one-way trips a day.

Chinese scientists will develop the technologies for the rapid rail system, Liu Zhijun, minister of railways, told reporters during the annual session of the National People's Congress.

Liu said about 140 billion yuan (US\$17.4 billion) will be spent on the project. Foreign funding, including low-interest loans from the World Bank and overseas governments, is expected to help finance the project.

A company will be formed to build and operate the route, the commission said, without releasing details.

About one-fourth of the nation's citizens live along the existing rail link between the two cities. The line is the country's busiest, carrying four times the national average load of cargo and passengers.

The other project involving a maglev route linking Shanghai and the Zhejiang Province capital is expected to start operation before 2010 when Shanghai hosts the World Expo, according to NDRC sources.

The line will cover 175 kilometers [109 miles] and will stop only at Jiaxing, a small city in Zhejiang, according to the project plan. With speeds as high as 450 kilometers an hour [280 mph], the trip will take a half hour, compared with about two hours now.

The cost of the project was estimated at 35 billion yuan [US\$4.34 billion].

The central government expects the maglev line will improve transport within the Yangtze River Delta region.

China plans to invest 1.25 trillion yuan [US\$1.48 trillion] by 2010 to build 17,000 kilometers [10,500 miles] of railways, 7,000 kilometers [4,305 miles] of which will be for passenger transport, according to the country's 11th Five-Year Plan. The trains running those lines will travel at 200km to 300km an hour [125 mph to 185 mph].

By 2020, China's entire railway network will reach 100,000 kilometers [62,137 miles], according to the government's long-term blueprint.

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