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China's fast trains may offer tips for U.S.

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 Enlarge By Calum MacLeod, USA TODAY

Passengers at Guangzhou North Railway Station pose for photos on Dec. 28 before boarding the new high-speed train linking south Guangzhou and Wuhan, China. The train has an average operating speed of 217 miles per hour.

By **Calum MacLeod**, USA TODAY

ABOARD THE GUANGZHOU-WUHAN EXPRESS — Once the speed gauge hits 350 kilometers per hour, or 217 miles per hour, passengers charge down the aisle to photograph the electronic display.

"If we go any faster, we'll take off!" jokes Hu Qing, cracking open another can of beer on [China's](#) world-record-breaking train.

The Dec. 26 opening of the high-speed link between south Chinese cities [Guangzhou](#) and [Wuhan](#) is the latest example of massive state spending to keep China's economy roaring. The fast-expanding network of high-speed trains is stoking patriotism, too.

"This train is the pride of the Chinese people," says Hu, 42, the boss of a paper factory, who chose the train over a direct flight

home to northeast China.

U.S. companies await the first round of government grants announced by President Obama in his State of the Union address totaling \$8 billion to jump-start long-delayed high-speed rail in the USA.

Meanwhile, China enjoys a considerable head-start.

Last year, [Beijing](#) invested \$88 billion in the country's railways, according to the Ministry of Railways, and now operates a world-leading 1,758 miles of high-speed rail.

An alternative to flying or driving

Obama said he wanted to study China's high-speed trains during his November 2009 visit, recalls the ministry's beaming spokesman Wang Yongping. The USA "can learn from Chinese rail's speed, comfort and other aspects," Wang suggests.

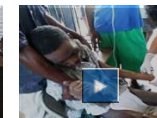
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Anti Wrinkle Secret (EXPOSED)

Like railway advocates in the USA, the Ministry touts rail as a greener, more energy-efficient form of transportation than driving or flying. For passengers, it promotes high-speed trains as "fast, safe, comfortable, convenient and punctual."

With top operating speeds of 221 mph, the new trains connect cities almost as fast as a jet but without the lengthy security procedures at airports.

Speed and convenience are paramount for business traveler Zhao Shiquan. The founder of an environmental equipment company, Zhao stopped checking in for a Wuhan flight at Guangzhou airport in late December when a friend suggested the new train.

"I wanted to know which is more convenient, the plane or the train?" says Zhao, settling into his reclining, first-class seat.

At \$110 one way, the train is more expensive than flying because airlines such as China Southern Airlines offer prices as low as \$28 to fight the new competitor.

But many people still prefer the trains.

"Planes are often late, and time is vital to a company," says Zhao, 42, who employs 100 people in his firm in Changsha, a major city en route. "In China, you need to meet people in person to do business, and take clients out for meals, so I often have to travel. High-speed trains could be the answer."

The previous ride for the 664-mile Guangzhou-Wuhan journey took 10 1/2 hours in cars filled with cigarette smoke. The new train takes 3 hours, 45 minutes, or 3 hours for the express, and smoking is banned.

The route is an important one. Guangzhou is one of China's richest cities, an export powerhouse whose thousands of factories manufacture many of the items found in an average U.S. home. Wuhan is a Yangtze River port and central China's major industrial center.

Passenger comforts

The trains are powered by electricity, so they're not weighed down by huge engines and hundreds of gallons of diesel fuel. The carriages of the "Harmony" trains running between these two cities bear a smart, plane-like appearance, with restrooms far larger than their airborne counterparts.

Attendants dressed like air stewards push trolleys of snacks, including beer and peanuts, down aisles that are patrolled by two armed, uniformed policemen.

The dining car, usually a noisy focus of days-long Chinese rail journeys, appears a zone of quiet. Only microwaved Chinese dishes and fast food such as beefburgers, at \$1.30 each, are available.

While most media coverage in China's state-run press has been reliably positive, some commentators complain about prohibitively high ticket prices. At \$69, the second-class fare from Guangzhou to Wuhan costs far more than regular trains, and several slower services have been canceled to make way for the new trains.

Debate about payoff

The focus on infrastructure, and failure to raise incomes, has created a "lopsided development model," that may leave China as "an emerging market economy without emerging consumers," worried You Nuo in the state-run *China Daily*.

The cost of building high-speed tracks, at \$20.1 million per mile, is money well spent, counters Qian Lixin, a veteran rail expert at the China Academy of Railway Sciences in Beijing.

"China has met many difficulties in construction, and gained experience in building railroads at low cost. But American railways are owned by individuals, not the government, so investment is the biggest problem," Qian says.

In its April 2009 strategic plan for high-speed rail, the U.S. Department of Transportation said that decades of focusing on highway and aviation networks have seen America's railways fall behind other nations. The plan lists private railroad ownership, state fiscal restraints, a lack of expertise and resources as the biggest challenges.

The No. 1 barrier remains "the lack of access to adequate funding," and the lack of political will driving that inadequacy, says John Spychalski, professor emeritus of supply chain management at Penn State. "You can't do

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much with \$8 billion, and the \$1 billion a year (for five years), but at least it's a start," he says.

If federal funding is spread too thinly, and directed mostly at enhancing conventional services that will remain below 110 miles per hour, then "there's not going to be much left to build a dedicated, true high-speed line that would even approach" the current Chinese services, he says.

Will it work in U.S.?

Not everyone thinks high-speed rail is right for the United States.

"Transportation works best if you use markets, not subsidies by government," says [Randal O'Toole](#), a senior fellow at the libertarian [Cato Institute](#) who researches transportation and urban planning.

"High-speed rail is an obsolete technology that requires huge subsidies in France, Japan and China. Our government seems to view trains as a form of social engineering that they think is better than driving or flying," he says. "Everybody will pay for these new rail lines through taxes, but only a few people will use them."

O'Toole says high-speed rail here will just transfer wealth from airline owners to train owners, at great expense to taxpayers as contracts go to the politically connected. He also rejects the argument that trains are more convenient because they deliver people into the heart of cities instead of to airports outside of cities.

"Less than 8% of all jobs in the U.S. are located in the downtown of our cities," he says.

As for clean energy: "Energy efficiency is rapidly growing for automobiles and aircraft," O'Toole says.

But many experts believe it will happen in the United States.

"To mix a metaphor, I think there's a lot of wind in the sails of high-speed rail in the United States," says Keith Dierkx, director of the IBM Global Rail Innovation Center, which opened in Beijing last June.

"There will be high-speed rail in North America."

Costs top benefits

The basic obstacle facing development of high-speed rail lines is that the direct economic benefits rarely exceed the direct costs, according to a Congressional Research Service report in December.

The report says the two main reasons such trains are not widely available in the United States is that only a small portion of the U.S. rail network is electrified, and federal regulations require that passenger trains have design features to protect passengers in a train crash. This results in relatively heavy passenger trains, which are slower, it says.

But Dierkx believes the USA's lagging could be an advantage.

"All of the innovation that is taking place globally can play to the U.S. advantage," as U.S. firms cherry-pick the best capabilities and technologies. "I think that the U.S. is going to benefit significantly from the work that is being done in China."

At the end of the line, businessman Zhao considers his trial run a success, and vows to return.

"I feel very proud, as China now has the fastest train in the world. On average incomes, we remain far behind the West, and it's very hard to catch up," he says. "But in some areas we are very advanced."

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Jet Graphics (1 friends, [send message](#)) wrote: 1d 7h ago

Rail is not obsolete. Rail, electric powered, will become the dominant land transportation as the century progresses. Laws of Physics favor steel wheel on steel rail over the automobile. Finite surface area favors rail over the automobile. End of cheap and plentiful petroleum favors electric rail over airplanes and automobiles.

Scalability of rail transport carrying capacity is far superior to the paved road paradigm.

However, government should not operate rail transit. At best, public authorities may own the tracks, but private enterprise should operate the rolling stock.

Let's get America "Back on Track!"

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Earth POD 1 (0 friends, [send message](#)) wrote: 1d 22h ago

I am a partner in a solar electric trans rapid magnetic levitation "HyRail" that is privately funded and requires no taxpayer dollars. We run our system along the existing right of way access on roads and rails. Our "HyRail" provides multiple sources of revenue for local communities..transit fees, electricity, water, and other and we are built and functioning in less than 2 years versus plus 11 years of other HS Rails.

Governor Granholm of Michigan does not want to grant our company the rights of way for HyRail to exist. My question is, does anybody know WHY?After all the efforts that her task force put in, not to mention all the other people in her administration who seem to support HyRail & the efforts of people from HyRail, doesn't she owe us an explanation? Seems to me that the Michigan Governor could simultaneously support standard steel wheeled HSR & HyRail, since they are not competing for the same funds, especially now that the federal government has only given her \$40 million of

the stimulus money. If she signed our agreement shecould ride out of office on a high & partially redeem her time inoffice. Everybody wants to have a legacy with some great positives & HyRail could be hers. I fail to see what she feels the state has to lose byendorsing a rights of way agreement, especially if we can address theconcerns mentioned in the task force report of proof of

funding in the form of a bond.

There really is no down side for her or the people of Michigan unless she has a hidden agenda. Even if HyRail never turned a dime of profit (highly unlikely), Michigan would still have benefited greatly from all the mass transit & pipeline infrastructure that was installed at no cost to the government, not to mention all the jobs it would bring for Michigan. This is a "no brainer" decision for a state that badly needs this project !!

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psmdfwsma (0 friends, [send message](#)) wrote: 2d 7h ago

The MagLev train in Shanghai traveled 431 kph (267 mph for the metric impaired) to the airport last visit.

A money loser, but very cool, like most of the great city!

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joeblow666 (0 friends, [send message](#)) wrote: 2d 10h ago

Scratch that prior post, we will not buy faster buses, we will call them something else, but they will in reality be nothing more than a nice bus. That's how you buy the BS.

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joeblow666 (0 friends, [send message](#)) wrote: 2d 11h ago

America has a third world infrastructure and that's the way it's going to be. We need immediate gratification, no investments here. We will just buy faster buses.

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mdspatsy (0 friends, [send message](#)) wrote: 2d 11h ago

Previously, Japan was a pioneer of introducing the fastest trains in the world. Now, China has taken edge over for introduction of the fastest trains to the world. I have read entire writings from this author to this famous news website.

I hope that, America will also introduce these methods of fast travelling by new innovations by using more American labor, budget allotments and to save their long pending hours in other means of transport.

Now a days, many people prefer fast trains than ordinary air routes to reach for immediate destinations.

Good views, good watching of these latest developments from China.

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Pits and McGoo (3048 friends, [send message](#)) wrote: 2d 12h ago

"Less than 8% of all jobs in the U.S. are located in the downtown of our cities," he says.

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Tell that to the L.A. freeways during the commuter hours. How about 1-1/2 hrs. from L.A. to Las Vegas on a Chinese train instead of 1-1/2 hours just to get to the airport in SoCal. in a Japanese car~~ How about 3 hrs from L.A. to San Francisco instead of a half a day wasted by car or the air?

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**lunchtimereader** (0 friends, [send message](#)) wrote: 2d 13h ago

It's simple. We buy things from China (Walmart/Kmart/Target, pretty much every store). All that money goes over there, and they have the \$ to build up their infrastructure.

Since all our \$, and jobs are now there, we have no \$ and we can't afford to build the fancy trains here. Bottom line is, anyone can have these trains, or anything they want, if they have the \$ to buy it. Yes, there are environmental studies, but even if approved, we have no \$\$\$.

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