

China opens new high-speed railways, venturing toward fast future

By CGTN on 28 Dec 2023



A bullet train runs on the Chengdu-Zigong-Yibin High-speed Railway, Yibin City, southwest China's Sichuan Province, December 26, 2023. /CFP

With its efficiency and convenience, high-speed trains have become one of the preferred choices for domestic travelers in China, which has the world's largest high-speed railway network.

The country has mastered advanced technologies for building tracks, long-span bridges, and complex tunnels in challenging geological and climatic conditions, expanding high-speed rail to remote and ethnic minority areas to foster economic and social development.

As of the end of November, the total operation mileage of China's railway network exceeded 155,500 kilometers, including 43,700 km of high-speed railways.

In December alone, multiple new high-speed rail routes were launched ahead of the approaching 2024 Spring Festival travel rush which will last 40 days starting from January 26.

The Spring Festival travel rush usually begins 14 days ahead of the Spring Festival, or the Lunar New Year, which is the biggest date on China's cultural calendar. It is a time for people to return home from all over the world for family reunions, social gatherings and big dinners.



Jingdezhen North Railway Station at the Huangchang section of the Hangzhou-Nanchang High-speed Railway, Jingdezhen City, Jiangxi Province, east China /CMG

New rail delivers tourism boost

A new high-speed railway connecting a number of popular tourist attractions across east China commenced operation on Wednesday, to deliver a major regional tourism boost and drive the development of other industries along the route.

With over five years of construction, the 560-km-long Hangzhou-Nanchang High-speed Railway is now fully operational, after a near 300-kilometer section connecting Huangshan City in Anhui Province to Nanchang City in Jiangxi Province was officially put into use.

The new Huangshan-Nanchang stretch boasts a designed speed of 350 km per hour, while the existing Hangzhou-Huangshan section, which was made operational in late 2018, has a designed speed of 250 km per hour.

The railway passes through a region rich in tourist attractions featuring scenic lakes, mountains, ancient villages and cultural treasures like porcelain and tea.

Officials say the new rail link will help bring greater connectivity to the region and attract tourists from further afield.

Mao Zhu, project manager of the Nanchang East Station of China Railway Design Corporation, told China Media Group (CMG) that "the Hangzhou-Nanchang High-speed Railway has a total of nine stations along its route, with seven stations located within Jiangxi Province. Among them, Nanchang East Railway Station is the largest, boasting a total construction area of more than 223,500 square meters."

The railway gets within easy reach of UNESCO World Heritage sites like Hangzhou's West Lake and Anhui's Huangshan Mountain, which attracts throngs of tourists every year with its distinctively-shaped rocks and impressive granite peaks. The launch of the new route has also halved the travel time from Nanchang to Huangshan.

Meanwhile, Fu Jiajia, deputy director of the Railway Construction Office under the Anhui Provincial Development and Reform Commission, emphasized the broader impact of the new railway which could have a transformative effect on the region.

"With the opening of the Nanchang-Huangshan section, it has shortened the distance in both time and space. This can further drive new urbanization along the route, promote the development of the tourism industry, and contribute to the construction of the Yangtze River Economic Belt," said Fu.



A bullet train runs on the Chengdu-Zigong-Yibin High-speed Railway in Chengdu City, December 26, 2019. /CFP

Linking city clusters

Another brand-new high-speed railway started operation on Tuesday in southwest China's Sichuan Province, completing a railway loop in southern Sichuan and facilitating the travel between provincial capital Chengdu with the dinosaur-famed Zigong and baijiu-brewing city Yibin.

The Chengdu-Zigong-Yibin High-speed Railway allows bullet trains running at 350 km per hour despite the challenging geography of the province. It has 12 stations and links five cities in the southern parts of the province including Chengdu, Ziyang, Neijiang, Zigong and Yibin.

Zigong, a tourism destination with abundant fossil discoveries, is now a mere 51-minute train ride from Chengdu, down from hours by road. Yibin, a city renowned for its fiery Sichuan liquor, sees travel time slashed to 73 minutes.

Tianfujichang (Tianfu Airport) Railway Station on the route has slashed the travel time from downtown Chengdu to Tianfu International Airport to 25 minutes, much shorter than the subway, which takes 74 minutes.

Through five years of hard work, the builders prevailed over numerous adversities such as high mountains, deep valleys and winding rivers, and built 231 bridges and 29 tunnels traversing through mountains and valleys along the route.

Among them, the 3.6-kilometer-long Jinxiu Tunnel, the only one in the densely-populated main urban area, is a main project throughout the route due to its complexity of crossing underneath seven existing railways and two subway lines.

Mu Junhua, chief engineer of the Chengdu-Zigong-Yibin High-speed Railway project headquarters under China Railway 14th Bureau, told CMG that "we operated with an earth-pressure shield tunneling machine with a diameter of 12.4 meters. This operation mode features high efficiency, noise reduction, without disturbing residents, and can also effectively forestall and defuse construction safety risks."

The railway passes through its longest Baiyun Mountain Tunnel, one of the most difficult to build nationwide. Stretching 13.3 kilometers, it has traversed complex terrains such as coal seams and goaf areas.

The railway shares a gigantic rail-road bridge over Yangtze River with a main span of over 500 meters with the Chongqing-Kunming High-speed Railway. The bridge allows passage of trains, cars, non-motors and pedestrians.



A view of the Fuzhou-Xiamen-Zhangzhou High-speed Railway, September 28, 2023. /CMG

Venturing for fast future

In 2008, the year China hosted the Summer Olympic Games, the Beijing-Tianjin Intercity Railway, with a design speed of 350 km per hour, entered operation, unveiling a fast-expanding modern high-speed railway network in the world's second-largest economy.

China's rail development continues to speed ahead in 2023, with the launch of more lines aimed at fostering economic and social development within the country and beyond.

One of the most notable additions to China's vast high-speed rail network this year is the Fuzhou-Xiamen-Zhangzhou Railway, the country's fastest cross-sea high-speed rail, where trains reach a maximum speed of 350 km per hour.

Starting operation on September 28, the 277-km-long railway slashes travel time between the cities of Fuzhou and Xiamen, both in southeast China's Fujian Province, to less than an hour.

High-speed rail is symbolic of the new structure of the Chinese economy, influencing all aspects of society.

From January to November, a total of 3.56 billion railway passenger trips were made nationwide, more than double from the same period last year, the China State Railway Group Co., Ltd. (China Railway) said.

To meet booming travel demand, China Railway has improved its railway operating plan and increased transport capacity. The average daily number of passenger trains reached 9,638 in China, a year-on-year increase of 52 percent.

China's high-speed railway has also gone global.

The latest example is the Jakarta-Bandung High-speed Railway in Indonesia, officially launched in October. It is the first overseas high-speed railway project fully utilizing Chinese railway systems, technology, and industrial components.

"China's high-speed rail provides more countries and regions with the opportunity to join the fast track of shared development," said Cong Yi, vice president of Tianjin Administrative Institute.

"In the future, it will continue to contribute to China's modernization and opening up, and promote global balanced, coordinated and inclusive development," Cong added.

Discussion Qns:

- 1. How does the newly opened high-speed railway improve the future of transport?*
- 2. What are some socio-economic benefits of the newly opened high-speed railway?*

