



China to Bid on US High-Speed Rail Projects

Minister: China to bid for US high-speed rail projects; building lines in Venezuela, Turkey

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The Associated Press

BEIJING

China plans to bid for contracts to build U.S. high-speed train lines and is stepping up exports of rail technology to Europe and Latin America, a government official said Saturday.

China has built 4,000 miles (6,500 kilometers) of high-speed rail for its own train system and President Barack Obama issued a pledge in November with his Chinese counterpart, Hu Jintao, to cooperate in developing the technology.

"We are organizing relevant companies to participate in bidding for U.S. high-speed railways," Wang Zhiguo, a deputy railways minister, told a news conference.

Wang gave no details of where China's railway builders might seek contracts, but systems are planned in California, Florida and Illinois. He said state-owned Chinese companies already are building high-speed lines in Turkey and Venezuela.

Beijing plans to construct a 16,000-mile (25,000-kilometer) high-speed rail network by 2020 in a 2 trillion yuan (\$300 billion) project it hopes will spur economic and technology development. A new line linking the central city of Wuhan with Guangzhou near Hong Kong on China's southern coast is billed as the world's fastest at 237 miles (380 kilometers) per hour.

China produces high-speed trains using French, German and Japanese technology. Its manufacturers have developed a homegrown version but have yet to produce a commercial model.

Chinese rail authorities have signed cooperation memos with California and Russia and state companies plan to bid on a line in Brazil linking Rio de Janeiro with Sao Paulo, Wang said. He said Saudi Arabia and Poland also have expressed interest.

The White House announced \$8 billion in grants in January for rail projects including the high-speed systems in California, Florida and Illinois.

"China is willing to share its mature and advanced technology with other countries to promote development of the world's high-speed railways," Wang said.

So far, China's government has completed 2,295 miles (3,676 kilometers) of rail lines with top speeds of up to 220 mph (350 kph) and 1,795 miles (2,876 kilometers) with speeds up to 155 mph (250 kph), according to Wang.

Another 6,000 miles (10,000 kilometers) of lines are under construction, he said.

Once the network is completed, it will cut travel time from Beijing to Hong Kong from 24 hours to 10.

Some critics say high-speed train fares are too high for average Chinese and question whether the lines can recover their construction costs.

Wang said high-speed trains already have higher occupancy rates than regular trains, though he gave no details.

Associated Press researcher Bonnie Cao contributed to this report.

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