

Subway lines to link Beijing with cities in Hebei

Four new subway lines will be built to link Beijing and neighboring Hebei province by 2021, as part of the region's integrated development, Hebei's top economic planner said.



[China Daily]

The subway lines, together with other means of transportation, will cut the transfer time between the capital and cities in Hebei to less than 1 hour, according to a transportation plan released by the Hebei Development and Reform Commission for the 13th Five-Year Plan period (2016-20) period.

According to the plan, one of the four subways—the Pinggu Line—will link Beijing's Pinggu and Tongzhou districts with Sanhe in Langfang, Hebei.

Preparatory work for the Pinggu Line has already started and is expected to be completed by 2021, according to the National Development and Reform Commission.

The other three lines, which are in the planning phase, would link Yizhuang in Beijing with downtown Langfang; Daxing in Beijing with Gu'an in Langfang; and Fangshan in Beijing with Zhuozhou in Baoding.

Development of the urban rail transportation system in the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region must be accelerated as there is significant demand for transportation services for short- and medium-distance journeys in the region, according to the plan.

By 2015, five cities in Hebei—Langfang, Cangzhou, Shijiazhuang, Baoding and Tangshan—had become part of a “one-hour traffic circle” connecting them to the capital.

However, large volumes of commuters traveling to and from Beijing every day require bus, subway or intercity railway services that provide faster and more frequent modes of transport.

To better meet demand, a 58-billion-yuan (\$8.4 billion) investment will see the total length of the urban rail transportation system in Hebei, including lines connecting Beijing, reach 80 kilometers by 2020.

Intercity railway lines that connect Beijing, Tianjin and Hebei, not including subway lines, will be extended to a total of more than 400 km.

Intercity railway stations will be established mainly around Beijing's new airport in Daxing district and Chongli in Zhangjiakou, a co-host of the 2022 Winter Olympics.

Construction of the stations is expected to guarantee convenient routes for passengers traveling between the new airport and Winter Olympics venues.

The upgrade of the transportation system will aid in moving Beijing's noncapital functions, and the transfer of industries and people to Hebei, the plan said, adding that it will also create job opportunities and help develop the local economy.

"The system will make life more convenient for residents of the capital's neighboring cities, which will attract more investment," said Wang Yuling, an official at the Hebei Development and Reform Commission.

Arxan's tourism prospects for poverty alleviation

Arxan, a small city of Hinggan League, north China's Inner Mongolia, has begun developing a sustainable tourism industry following the "Tourism Plus" program proposed by the China National Tourism Administration in 2015.

"Arxan is beautiful in all seasons," said President Xi Jinping on his first visit to Arxan on Jan. 26, 2014. "Arxan will become a popular tourist destination."



Linshu Village, tourists resort in Bailang Village, Arxan, north China's Inner Mongolia. [Photo provided to China.org.cn by Pei Xiaoge]

Natural Charm

Arxan has one of the world's largest functional hot springs. The Haishen Hot Spring Resort is a 4A national scenic spot with 48 springs that are said to be able to cure eight types of disease.

Its long winter lasts from early October to April, making it the best destination to enjoy winter scenery. You can even ski from the slopes directly to the front door of some hotels.

Chaihe Scenic Spot in Arxan has the best-preserved volcanic landforms in Asia. Due to the area's geothermal conditions, Budong River or "never-frozen river" flows year round.

Arxan sits at the junction of four grasslands, which cover 95 percent of the area with vegetation. This makes Arxan an ideal destination to escape the summer heat and enjoy the beauty of the natural foliage.

You also have to try the local food, but brace yourself for some unusual local dishes. One specialty dish here is fried eggs with ants.

Expert: Gender equality vital for population planning

China's population is expected to reach 1.42 billion by 2020, while the birth

gender ratio is expected to be reduced to 112 boys for every 100 girls, according to a population development plan for the 13th Five-Year Plan (2016-20) recently released by the National Health and Family Planning Commission (NFHPC).



Zhai Zhenwu, vice chairman of China Population Association and professor of sociology and population studies at Renmin University of China. [Photo by Zheng Liang/China.org.cn]

In a wide-ranging interview with China.org.cn to coincide with the report's release, Zhai Zhenwu, vice chairman of China Population Association and professor of sociology and population studies at Beijing's Renmin University of China, discussed the population development planning.

Imbalanced sex ratio at birth since 1985

Prof. Zhai said gender imbalance has become a very acute issue in China with a far-reaching impact on the country's population structure and social-economic development.

He cited some statistics from the development plan. "Before 1985, the birth gender ratio was 106 or 107 boys for every 100 girls, which was still a normally-accepted gap. However, the number kept growing year-by-year, and in 2000 it reached 120 boys for every 100 girls; in some provinces it was even up to 135 to 100."

Such a big imbalance is rarely seen in the world in terms of degree, duration and scope, he stressed. "The issue has aroused great concern throughout society, and some media have continuously reported that millions of men are

facing a 'bachelor crisis,'" he said.

Thanks to great efforts by all sides, the ratio declined to 113 boys to 100 girls in 2016, the lowest in decades, Professor Zhai added.

Main reasons for imbalance

The professor identified three main reasons for the gender imbalance.

The first is a traditional social attitude that regards men as superior to women, which prevails especially in rural areas like those in Guangdong and Fujian provinces in southern China. This reflects the financial reality that a son will take care of his ageing parents, while a daughter will normally marry and be lost to the family in this regard.

Even though people's living standards have greatly improved, their deep-rooted attitude in this regard has not changed accordingly.

The second reason is sex-selective abortion, which has made the situation worse. Despite a ban on pre-natal sex tests and gender-based abortions, both have seen a steady rise in some areas since ultrasound technology was introduced. Early sex-selective abortions were performed in many rural hospitals, where pregnant women asked doctors to help identify the sex of the fetus and induce an abortion if it was a girl.

The third reason is an overall decline in the country's birth rate. This is related to the state family planning policy implemented for nearly four decades known as the "one-child policy."

Major problems with overseas aid for Eastern European countries

I was surprised to read in the Sunday press that some people think it a good idea to divert overseas aid to Eastern European members of the EU to "buy" a better deal with that organisation.

As I have explained before, there is no Treaty power to require a UK leaving payment above and beyond completing our annual payments to their budget for the period of our continuing membership. Nor is it legal under WTO rules to pay for more favoured trade with a particular country or group of countries than the rest. Payment for trade under WTO rules takes the form of accepting tariffs, and these have to be limited to the current mfn schedules the EU has agreed.

The trade choice is for the rest of the EU to make. The UK would be quite happy to carry on tariff free. That will help the rest of the EU more than

us. It would mean registering our current trade arrangements as a Free Trade Agreement at the WTO. Or we can trade under mfn arrangements under the WTO. Most of UK trade will be tariff free, whilst EU sales of agricultural products would suffer heavy tariffs into the UK. The UK could agree lower or no tariffs with other cheaper suppliers of food around the world through the WTO process. I have said it is in the EU's interest to accept the tariff free offer, and they may do so after much huffing and puffing. I have also always said that they might decide to harm themselves by accepting WTO terms instead. Under the general WTO arrangements the UK will be fine.

The overseas aid idea also falls well foul of the overseas aid rules. The Eastern countries in the EU do not qualify for overseas aid under the international definition, as they are too well off. UK Ministers by law have to hit the 0.7% Aid target under international definitions, so they could not switch this aid money to Eastern Europe unless they repealed the 0.7% requirement. It would not be easy to achieve repeal, given the likely fact that all the opposition parties would oppose repeal other than perhaps the one UKIP MP. The government might be able to persuade enough Conservative MPs to get it through the Commons, but the Lords would be likely to have a big majority the other way. As it would not be a Manifesto pledge, and does not stem directly from a referendum, the Lords might become very difficult.

In circumstances where the EU Commission and one or two large countries were not wanting a free trade Agreement with the UK for political despite their interests in having one, it is difficult to see how offering to send money to Eastern countries would buy a change of heart.

Bird flu vaccines set to undergo clinical trials

Four kinds of vaccine for the H7N9 strain of bird flu virus have been approved for clinical trials by China's top drug regulator, according to the Beijing Food and Drug Administration.



The China Food and Drug Administration. [File photo/Xinhua]

The administration will continue to provide assistance and guidance for clinical trials of the vaccines so they can enter the market as soon as possible, it said in a statement last week.

Beijing Tiantan Biological Products Co, a State-owned enterprise in Beijing, which developed the vaccines, announced on Wednesday that the China Food and Drug Administration had approved clinical trials. The company added that it must conduct other procedures after the completion of clinical trials before the vaccines can be sold on the market, including applying for registration of the drugs and acquiring certificates for their manufacture from the CFDA.

There are currently no vaccines for the H7N9 strain of bird flu—which is most active in winter and spring—available on the market in China or overseas, although several other domestic companies have also acquired approval from CFDA for clinical trials for similar products, Beijing Tiantan said.

Two human cases of H7N9 have been reported in Beijing this year, with both patients suspected of having been exposed to live poultry markets. Both are in critical condition, the Beijing Center for Disease Control and Prevention said last week.

A 41-year-old woman infected with the H7N9 strain of bird flu in Nanning, Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region, died on Sunday, the regional Health and Family Planning Commission said.

The central government has intensified measures to control the spread of H7N9, including shutting down live poultry markets, according to the National Health and Family Planning Commission. The commission called on the public to

take precautionary measures such as avoiding contact with live poultry and cooking chicken meat thoroughly.

Human cases of H7N9 have been reported in 16 provinces in China since October, including in Yunnan, Fujian, Hubei and Hunan provinces, with most of them involving exposure to live poultry markets, according to the commission.

In January alone, 192 human cases of H7N9 were reported on the Chinese mainland, including 79 deaths, making it the worst period since the virus first appeared in China in 2013, the commission said.

There is no evidence to support sustained human-to-human transmission of the virus, which was first reported in the spring of 2013, according to the World Health Organization.

The Beijing Center for Disease Control and Prevention said last week that more sporadic cases are expected in the city.

Sporadic cases of the bird flu may last until late April, said Ni Daxin, deputy director of emergency response at the Chinese Center for Disease Control and Prevention.