

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."



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

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."

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.

Plan to lower age to 14 on detention gets mixed review



[Shanghai Daily]

A new draft law that would change the minimum age for administrative detention from 16 to 14 has been met with both concerns of over correction and voices of support, albeit cautious.

In China, administrative detention is a punishment for violations that threaten public security but do not constitute a criminal charge. Sentences usually do not exceed 20 days. People awaiting trial are sometimes held in administrative detention.

Currently, minors are exempt from administrative detention. However, the draft public security administration law released last Friday proposed administrative detention should be applicable for individuals "at least 14 and under 18."

The draft law comes in response to rising concerns about young offenders, especially those involved with bullying or violence at school.

Moreover, a survey by China Youth and Children Research Center in 2015 showed that juvenile offenders are getting younger.

Many people, however, are wary about the new draft law.

"I don't agree with it," said Ge Haiyan, a mother in Beijing. "Children of that age are not mature enough to understand the consequences of their actions, and they are often rebellious at puberty. If we are too strict, our

methods could have a negative effect."

Wang Tingting, another Beijing parent, said there should be a more holistic approach to punishment, as juvenile offences were influenced by home and school life. "Teachers and parents should step up," she said.

Song Ruiyong, an education official in Beijing, said he was more concerned about the negative effects administrative detention had on young offenders.

"There is a risk that they will interact with more seasoned criminals while in detention, and they could have a negative influence on them," Song said. "Being locked-up is an irreversible experience, especially for children."

He said youth education services would be better suited for young offenders.

Bian Feng, a judge in Shenyang City, said that the incarceration of minors was ignoring the fundamental problem. "I think community or social services could be a better option."

Some people welcomed the proposed law, but not without conditions.

Wu Changhai, a law professor at China University of Political Science and Law, argued that the minimum age should only be applied in certain situations. "The rule should only be executed if the misconduct has had a huge social impact or if the suspect is a repeat offender," Wu said.

Deng Xiquan, deputy director of CYCRC, also supports the new rules. "There are no existing actions in the current law for young offenders aged 14 to 16, and this has been exploited by some criminals who use kids of that age to circumvent the criminal law process," Deng said. "The new rule, in a way, protects minors."

Deng's support comes with a condition. "All young offenders should be kept at a specialized complex, away from bad influences," he said.

Wang Na, a lawyer in Beijing, supported the lowering of the minimum age, especially for those suspected of severe crimes.

"Teenagers these days mature earlier," Wang said. "I have encountered cases of 14-year-olds suspected of molesting girls."

She said the number of reported school bullying cases had increased, so the new law could work as a deterrent.