

Japan offers to fund part of US high-speed rail project

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Japan has offered to fund part of a project to build an ultra-fast train line between Washington and New York, which would revolutionize travel on the US east coast, a Japanese official said Friday.

In talks with US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, Japanese Foreign Minister Seiji Maehara proposed that the Japan Bank for International Cooperation would fund a portion of the first phase of a project to bring Maglev trains to the US, said Satoru Satoh, the Japanese embassy press attache.

The proposed first phase of the project would see a Maglev train, which can travel at speeds of up to 341 miles per hour (550 kilometers per hour), link Washington with Baltimore some 60 miles (100 kilometers) to the north and currently an hour's train ride away.

The Maglev line would eventually be extended to New York, more than 200 miles from Washington, putting the Big Apple and Baltimore closer to the capital in terms of travel time than many suburbs in Virginia and Maryland.

New York would be an hour away from Washington once the Maglev is up and running instead of the current four hours.

Baltimore, which is linked to Washington by a commuter train that takes an hour and 10 minutes, would be around a quarter of an hour away.

The proposal is still just that -- a proposal -- and has to be taken up with the US Department of Transportation, governors through whose states the trains would travel, and others.

Maehara's proposal is part of a renewed push for "economic diplomacy" by Japan, said Satoh.

Japan's Maglev and Shinkansen bullet trains are contenders for President Barack Obama's 13-billion-dollar project to develop high-speed rail travel in the United States, which at present is non-existent.

China, France and Germany are among other countries vying to sell their trains and technology to the Americans for the multi-billion-dollar project.

During a visit to [Japan](#) last year, US Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood took a test ride on the ultra-fast magnetic levitation train, which hovers 10 centimeters (four inches) above the tracks and in 2003 reached a world record speed of 581 kilometers per hour (361 miles per hour) on a Japanese test track.

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