

China's launch of key high-speed railway imminent

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China's much-anticipated high-speed railway linking Beijing and Shanghai is set to open this month, despite safety concerns after a recent corruption scandal.

China's much-anticipated high-speed railway linking Beijing and Shanghai is set to open this month, the government said Monday, shrugging off safety concerns after a recent corruption scandal.

"The technologies are advanced, the quality is reliable and safety is guaranteed. It is fully ready for operations and will open in late June," vice rail minister Hu Yadong told a news conference.

One-way [ticket prices](#) will range between 410 yuan and 1750 yuan (\$63 and \$270) subject to further adjustments, he added, compared to about 1,300 yuan for a flight between the two cities.

Hu said the trains would run between 250 and 300 kilometres (155 and 188 miles) per hour on the \$33 billion new link, although the line is designed for a maximum speed of 380 kph.

The speed is in line with a nationwide directive made public in April that said all high-speed trains must run at a slower pace than previously announced -- no faster than 300 kph -- to make journeys safer.

This followed a major corruption scandal in February that raised concerns over the costs and safety of China's high-speed rail links.

Then railways minister Liu Zhijun was dismissed after an investigation into "serious disciplinary violations" -- a term that usually results in [criminal charges](#).

He had allegedly taken more than 800 million yuan in [kickbacks](#) on contracts linked to China's high-speed rail network.

A month later, China's state auditor revealed that construction companies and individuals had last year siphoned off 187 million yuan in funds meant for the Beijing-Shanghai link.

But the new railway is still highly anticipated, as a journey between the two cities may take only four and three quarter hours -- two hours less than the fastest current trip by train.

The Beijing-Shanghai flight takes about two hours. But travel to the airports is in itself time-consuming, and the busy air route is often subject to delays and cancellations.

[China](#) has invested heavily in its [high-speed rail](#) network, which reached 8,358 kilometres at the end of 2010 and is expected to exceed 13,000 kilometres by 2012 and 16,000 kilometres by 2020.

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