

France to run driverless mainline trains within five years

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Soon there won't be a driver to wave out the window

French railway operator SNCF said Wednesday it was planning to introduce prototypes of driverless mainline trains for passengers and freight by 2023, and include them in scheduled services in subsequent

years.

"With autonomous trains, all the trains will run in a harmonized way and at the same speed," SNCF chairman Guillaume Pepy said in a statement. "The train system will become more fluid."

The operator hopes that the switch will allow it to run more trains on France's busiest mainlines, and cut energy consumption.

Many cities, including Paris, already run driverless metro trains but driverless long-distance travel presents a new set of challenges, Pepy said.

"Railways are an open system, and the unexpected is the rule," Pepy said.

SNCF will be partnering up with rolling stock specialists Alstom and Bombardier who will each be heading up consortia for freight and [passenger](#) traffic, respectively.

The shift to driverless trains is to happen in stages, Pierre Izard, who runs SNCF's rail technologies division, told AFP, "up to the most extreme of automatisisation, when there is no human presence onboard".

Pepy said that autonomous trains "are clearly the future", but he also said it may take time before passengers accept boarding driverless trains.

Although Australia, China and Japan are already experimenting with driverless trains, France is not coming too late to the game, said Carole Desnost, head of innovation at SNCF.

SNCF said it was talking to German operator Deutsche Bahn about promoting a European standard for driverless trains.

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