

Saudi Arabia opens high-speed railway to public

October 11 2018



Passengers walk on the platform at Mecca train station on October 11, 2018 as Saudi Arabia's new high-speed railway opens

Saudi Arabia's new high-speed railway opened to the public on Thursday, whisking Muslim pilgrims and other travellers between Mecca and Medina, Islam's holiest cities.

The Haramain High Speed Rail system will transport passengers 450 kilometres (280 miles) via the Red Sea port of Jeddah at speeds of up to 300 kilometres per hour.

Two trains, each carrying 417 passengers, departed from Mecca and Medina at 8 am (0500 GMT), according to the state-run Saudi Press Agency.

Two daily services are initially planned in each direction, it said.

Saudi King Salman on October 25 inaugurated the high-speed railway, which local officials described as the biggest transportation project in the region.

The new link will slash the travel time Mecca and Medina from several hours to 120 minutes, transport officials said.

The rail project, dogged by several delays, was built at a cost of more than \$16 billion, according to Saudi media.

In 2011, Saudi Arabia signed a deal for a Spanish consortium to build the rail track, supply 35 [high-speed trains](#) and handle a 12-year maintenance contract.



Passengers wait at Mecca train station on October 11, 2018 as Saudi Arabia's new high-speed railway opens

The kingdom is boosting its infrastructure spending and expanding its railways, including with a \$22.5 billion metro system under construction in the capital Riyadh, as it seeks to diversify its oil-dependent economy.

The annual hajj pilgrimage, which is to be held in September next year, attracts more than two million Muslims to the Mecca region.

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