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While U.S. Fills Potholes, China Plans Transport Boom (October 30, 2013)

Jeff McMahon
Forbes

5:35 p.m. CDT, October 30, 2013

While the U.S. struggles to maintain its transportation infrastructure, China is planning a massive expansion of highways, rail lines, and airports, according to transportation ministers who painted contrasting portraits Wednesday of their respective countries.

"Although we've already obtained lots of achievement in China's transport development, we see increasing demand for an even bigger transport system in China," Vice Minister Gao Hongfeng said at public lunch during the [6th U.S.-China Transportation Forum](#)

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at Chicago's Westin Hotel.

"The existing system still cannot meet the demand for the movement of goods and the movement of people.

In the coming five years, Gao said through an interpreter, China plans to:

- Add 500,000 kilometers of highway (China currently has 4.2 million km, Gao said)
- Add 108,000 kilometers of motorway
- Invest 500-600 billion yuan (\$82-98 billion) annually in a new [railway fund](#). The U.S. invests about \$2 billion annually in rail activity, according to [The Transport Politic](#).
- Increase the number of civil-aviation airports from 170 to 230.

The U.S., meanwhile, is [struggling to maintain](#) the transportation infrastructure it already has developed.

"Where I think we're falling down on the job is the basic public funding to maintain the infrastructure that we have now," said U.S. Deputy Secretary of Transportation John D. Porcari.

National transportation policy will be driven by local innovation, Porcari predicted, which prioritizes goals like livability, and "that calls for a different transportation system than the one we've built in the past."

It also means a more diverse system.

"Instead of being overly reliant on a single mode of transportation, people and goods are much more likely to see a balance of transportation modes, and those modes may change at any given point in time," he said.

For example, the U.S. is seeing record ridership on Amtrak, which, if developed, could balance passenger reliance on highways and airlines. More balance would come from high-speed rail, which Porcari predicted will develop along two-city pairs, like Chicago-St. Louis.

The two ministers spoke at a public lunch hosted by the [Chicago Council on Global Affairs](#). Their remarks highlighted stark differences between the two nations in terms of development and funding, but similarities in goals.

According to Gao, China also plans: to:

- improve transportation management with information technology,
- promote green transportation technologies that will save energy and reduce emissions. (Gao mentioned warm-mix asphalt as a technology that emits less carbon)
- convert urban public transport vehicles to natural gas and electric fuels
- standardize the dimensions of inland ships,
- convert ships to natural-gas fuel
- convert the power supply for port equipment to cleaner sources and supply that cleaner shore power to docked ships

"All in all, our goal is to develop our transport system in a more efficient, healthy, and green way."

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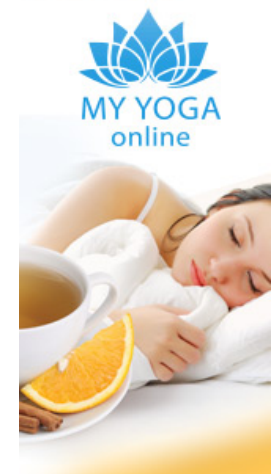
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