

Independent Journalism Needs You!

 newsweek.com/china-worlds-largest-high-speed-rail-network-new-milestone-12502845

Soo Kim

September 29, 2026



to see more of our trusted coverage when you search.

China's record-breaking high-speed rail network has unveiled several major new railway lines across four provinces on Monday.

The newly opened sections include one between the Xiong'an area in Hebei province and the city of Shangqiu in Henan province; another between Xi'an and Ankang in Shaanxi province; and a new section between the city of Harbin and Yichun in Heilongjiang province, according to Xinhua, China's state news agency.

A new high-speed railway between Yichang and Xingshan in the Hubei region also opened on Monday. Spanning 101 kilometers (around 62 miles) and traveling at 350 kilometers (around 217 miles) per hour, the new route connects China's two major high-speed railway lines—the Shanghai-Chongqing-Chengdu line and the Zhengzhou-Chongqing line—according to Xinhua.

Traversing the Daba Mountains, the new route between Yichang and Xingshan is expected to boost tourism between major cities such as Wuhan, Zhengzhou, and Chongqing, as well as attractions like the Three Gorges region along the Yangtze River, Xinhua said.



A high-speed train runs on elevated tracks in Nanjing, in China's eastern Jiangsu province, in January 2026. | Getty

The recent railway openings are the latest among China's record-breaking infrastructure projects in recent years.

Earlier this year, the country began operations on what is believed to be "the world's first wind-powered underwater data center," which is powered by an offshore wind farm. Located offshore in Shanghai's Lingang area, the facility has a planned capacity of 24 megawatts, which is reportedly enough to power roughly 20,000 households.

Last year, work began on the [world's biggest hydropower dam](#), which was described as "the project of the century." Located on the eastern rim of the Tibetan Plateau, the multi-dam cascade is expected to generate 300 billion kilowatt-hours of electricity a year, which reportedly equates to the total electricity consumed in the United Kingdom in 2024.

At a Glance: The World's Largest High-Speed Railway Network

China has the world's largest high-speed railway network and operates the world's fastest commercial high-speed rail services, according to Xinhua, China's state news agency.

Growing since 2008

China's high-speed rail journey took off in 2008 with the launch of the Beijing-Tianjin Intercity Railway. Since then, it has seen incredible growth since, with its operational mileage surpassing the combined total of all other countries in the world.

To expand by nearly 50 percent by 2035

China's high-speed rail network is projected to reach 70,000 kilometers (over 43,400 miles) by 2035, Xinhua reported Monday.

Accessible in nearly all of China's major cities

The country's high-speed rail services are accessible in 97 percent

Over 31,000 miles of high-speed rail

The total length of its operating railways was reported to have reached 165,000 kilometers (over 102,500 miles) by the end of last year, including over 50,000 kilometers (over 31,000 miles) of high-speed rail.

Accommodates a 'megacity' each day

China's daily passenger capacity has reached 16 million, the equivalent of the population of a "megacity" moving across its high-speed rail network, notes Xinhua, the Chinese state news agency.



Sources: [September 2026 report from Xinhua](#), [December 2025 report from Xinhua](#)

The Broader Implications of China's Expanding Rail Network

The latest rail connections strengthen the broader transportation network by connecting previously less accessible places. The high-speed rail lines help reduce travel times, improve access to jobs and markets, and support tourism and economic activity, Susan A. Shaheen, a professor of civil and environmental engineering at the University of California, Berkeley, told *Newsweek*.

Shaheen, also co-director of the Transportation Sustainability Research Center (TSRC) at the Institute of Transportation Studies, said improved accessibility is particularly important for mountainous areas, such as the western Hubei region.

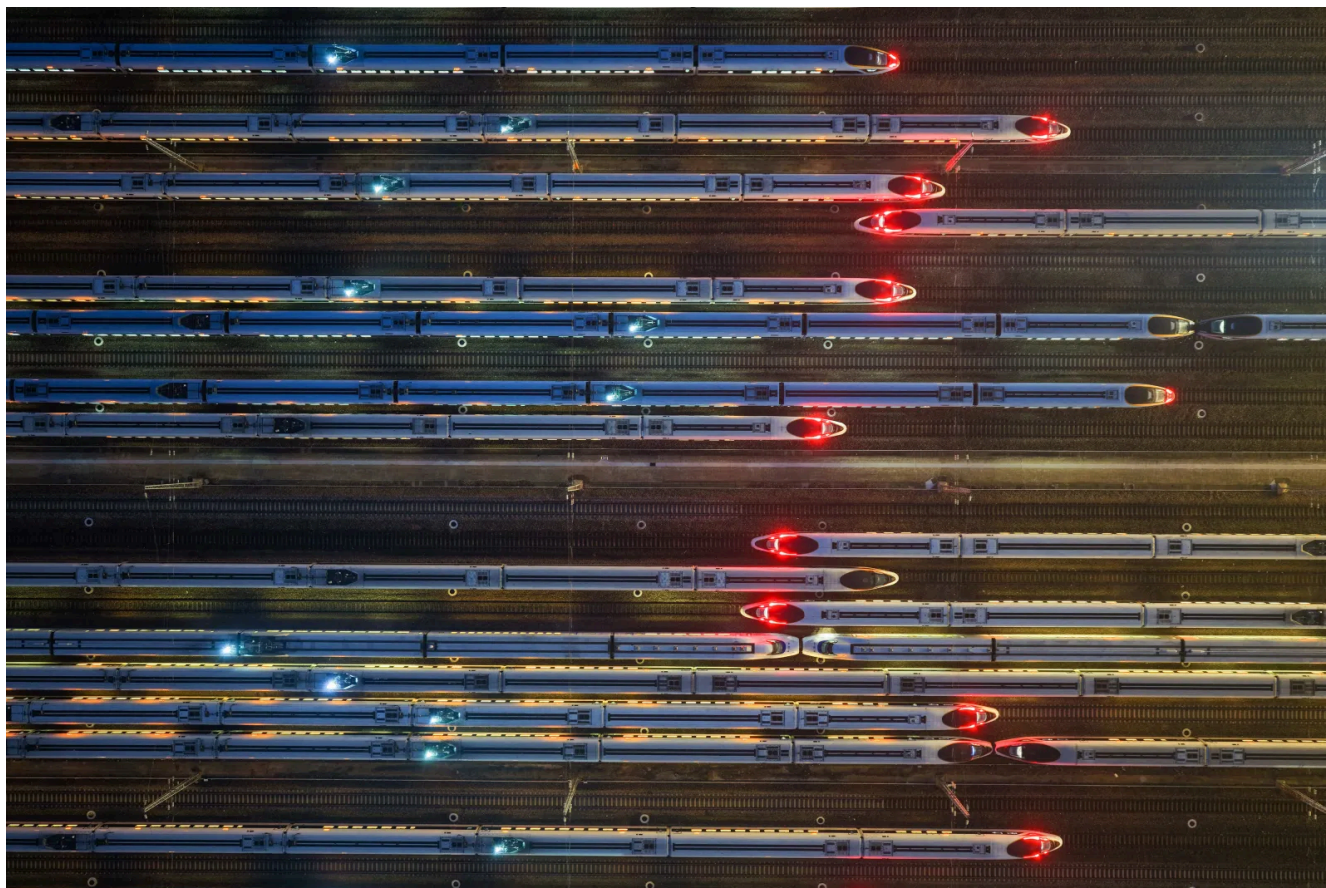
The professor said high-speed rail can make these areas much more accessible to major population centers and tourism markets, creating new avenues for tourism, local businesses, and agricultural producers.

However, transportation infrastructure enables rural revitalization rather than being an outcome in itself, she warned.

"A key question is how effectively communities can leverage that improved accessibility through complementary investments in local transportation, businesses, housing, tourism, and other services," Shaheen said.

China expert Usha Haley, a Barton Distinguished Chair in International Business at Wichita State University who researches multinational corporations and international strategic management, particularly in Asian and emerging markets, shared similar thoughts.

Haley told *Newsweek*: “Infrastructure is not development. Trains move people and capital, but economic gains depend on how local governments and businesses deploy the resources.”



This aerial photo shows high-speed trains at Nanjing South High-Speed Train Depot, in China's eastern Jiangsu province in June 2026. | Getty

The Challenges and Opportunities That Lie Ahead

China's high-speed rail expansion is “a story about control and coordination,” Haley said, explaining that the Chinese model for rail expansion depends on concentrating responsibility, authority, and resources.

Research shows that rail development is propelled by long-term planning, strong government backing, relatively stable project plans, provincial participation, and coordination among manufacturers and research institutions, Haley said.

China can align these different elements and entities behind a national objective. But “it can also control and coordinate that infrastructural development for decades. The model has many benefits and some deep problems that parallel China's overcapacity in some industries that are also seen as strategically important,” Haley noted.

She warned that “Beijing’s model is ill-equipped to handle the policy questions that follow. Does each additional railway line create sufficient economic and social value to justify its cost? The control and coordination that grease infrastructural development can suppress competing signals about costs and alternative uses of capital, and there lies the risk with the Chinese model. It does not advise one when to stop.”

Shaheen says that as China continues to expand its high-speed rail network, the opportunity will increasingly be about how the pieces work together, rather than how many kilometers of track are added. According to Shaheen, integrating high-speed rail with conventional rail, local and regional public transit, airports, and other modes can make the overall transportation system more useful and accessible.

“The challenge will be ensuring that new infrastructure is aligned with longer-term travel demand and that it is financially, environmentally, and operationally sustainable,” Shaheen said, noting “at this scale, network integration, resilience, and effective connections to local communities become just as important as ongoing expansion.”

Newsweek reached out to China's Ministry of Transport for comment via email.



Workers clean a high-speed train at the Xuzhou East high-speed train depot in Xuzhou, in China's eastern Jiangsu province in February 2026. | Getty

Do you have an architecture- or design-related story to share? Let us know via s.kim@newsweek.com, and your story could be featured by *Newsweek*.

Contact Newsweek editors on this story: [Sirena Bergman](#) and [Sam Wilson](#).

 Membership

Become a member for a fresh perspective—ad-free reading, access to our editors, and insight beyond the conventional wisdom.