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Uniting for the future of mobility: The 12th World Congress on High-Speed Rail opens in Beijing

(Beijing, 8 July 2025) Today marks the official opening of the 12th World Congress on High-Speed Rail, organised by the International Union of Railways (UIC) and China Railway (CR). Taking place in the vibrant city of Beijing, China, this landmark event gathers over 2000 leaders, experts, operators, policymakers, researchers, and innovators from across the globe to share knowledge, forge partnerships, and chart the future of one of the most transformative sectors in transport.

This congress is not the first of its kind, with a similar high-speed rail congress being held in the country in 2010. This played a pivotal role in establishing a framework for development, standardisation, and international cooperation, one which has continued to shape the industry over the past 15 years. Since then, the global high-speed rail network has expanded considerably, technology has advanced rapidly, and new challenges and opportunities have emerged. China, the host nation of this congress, stands at the forefront of this dynamic evolution.

In his opening address, Song Xiude, President of CR, underlined the significance of the World Congress on High-Speed Rail returning to Beijing, 15 years after the successful 2010 edition. This event is a meaningful recognition of China's achievements in high-speed rail and its commitment to global cooperation in this field.

Song then highlighted the extraordinary development of China's rail network. Now the world's largest high-speed rail system, it comprises around 48,000 kilometres of high-speed lines, with a total network exceeding 162,000 kilometres. This transformation has significantly enhanced national connectivity, improved travel conditions for millions of passengers, and supported balanced urban-rural development.

Song also emphasised the importance of openness and coordination. Projects such as the China-Laos Railway and the line between Hungary and Serbia demonstrate China's contribution to improving international rail connectivity, as well as its willingness to cooperate with global partners by sharing expertise, technology, and innovation.

Looking ahead, Song reaffirmed CR's desire to continue innovating in areas such as smart infrastructure, digital systems, and green mobility. He expressed his hope that the 12th Congress would strengthen discussions, encourage innovation, and promote the shared development of high-speed rail worldwide. As the host of the event, CR is committed to providing robust and professional support to ensure the success of this global platform for dialogue and cooperation.

Dr Alan Beroud, Chair of UIC, opened the congress by underscoring the broader significance of the gathering.

The theme of the congress, "*High-Speed Rail: Innovation and Development for a Better Life*", encapsulates the sector's mission to push the boundaries of speed and technology while also

enhancing the quality of life for people worldwide. Dr Beroud highlighted that, with more than 65,000 kilometres of high-speed rail lines now in operation around the world and serving more than 3 billion passengers each year, the sector has proven rail's value as a fast, safe, and environmentally friendly mode of transport.

He also drew attention to the transformative role of digital technologies, artificial intelligence, predictive maintenance, 5G communication networks, real-time data analytics, and seamless ticketing, which are redefining the passenger experience and operational efficiency.

Additionally, the development of high-speed freight logistics is increasingly aligned with the growing demands from e-commerce and sustainable distribution, signalling new opportunities for the sector.

Next, Dr Beroud emphasised the need for a collective approach to advancing high-speed rail – one that is inclusive, economically viable, digitally enabled, and environmentally responsible. He reminded participants that UIC is supporting this transformation through its role in setting technical standards, conducting research, facilitating knowledge-sharing, and building capacity for its members.

In his opening address, François Davenne, Director General of UIC, further discussed the strategic vision underpinning the congress. He reminded the audience that high-speed rail is more than just a mode of transport; it is a critical public infrastructure that must serve broader societal goals and can be adapted to different governance models. Beyond speed and punctuality, the future of high-speed rail lies in inclusivity, resilience, and integration into wider multimodal transport networks, connecting airports, urban transit, and regional railways, while also leveraging digital infrastructure.

Davenne also underscored the importance of interoperability across borders and the adoption of shared technical standards to enable seamless international rail travel and logistics. He highlighted the urgency of addressing global challenges such as decarbonisation and infrastructure renewal through innovation, collaboration, and pragmatic approaches.

Reflecting on UIC's century-long legacy, Davenne expressed pride in the organisation's ability to adapt and serve its members by fostering cooperation, aligning goals, and facilitating the exchange of best practices. The congress itself stands as a testament to this ambition, providing a platform where ideas translate into action, and where different stakeholders come together to drive the railway sector's progress.

It also offers a unique opportunity for hands-on learning and networking. The accompanying MODERN RAILWAYS 2025 exhibition showcases the latest innovations and technologies from leading global suppliers and research institutions. Meanwhile, the exclusive Tour on High-Speed Rail Innovation offers participants a chance to experience China's high-speed network firsthand, blending cutting-edge technology with rich cultural heritage.

Over the next three days, the participants will take attend over 180 sessions and workshops, exploring themes ranging from technical advancements and digital transformation to policy frameworks and sustainable development. The event serves as a vital forum for forging new partnerships, sharing insights, and building the collective intelligence needed to tackle the complex challenges facing the global railway sector.

During this congress, UIC is taking inspiration from a timeless Chinese proverb: "It is always a delight to have friends coming from afar". The event embodies that spirit of friendship, cooperation, and shared purpose. Together, the global railway community is poised to accelerate progress toward a more connected, sustainable, and people-centred future of mobility.

UIC gratefully acknowledges the Platinum Sponsors: China Railway Rolling Stock Corporation (CRRC), Knorr-Bremse, and China Railway Signal & Communication Corporation (CRSC), for their valuable support and active involvement in promoting the development of high-speed rail. In addition, Lucchini RS is recognised as a Supporting Partner whose contribution to the success of the congress has been substantial.

Finally, special thanks are extended to the Media Partners, *International Railway Journal (IRJ)*, *Railway Gazette*, *FerPress*, *Via Libre*, *Revue Générale des Chemins de Fer*, and *Railway Pro*, for contributing to the visibility of the congress and facilitating the dissemination of its key messages to the global railway community.

The opening video is available here: <https://youtu.be/cevTcLsjSBc>

The dedicated brochure is available here:

<https://shop.uic.org/en/other-documents/14928-high-speed-worldwide-historical-geographical-and-technological-developments.html>

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