

Maglev

A British politician has raised the question about building a Maglev train in the UK. Is this the future for rail travel?

1 Which are the three most important factors for you when traveling by train? Compare your answer with a partner.

speed	safety	reliability
price	comfort	opportunity to work

Maglev: super fast trains which run on special tracks. Word comes from 'magnetic' and 'levitation'.

2 Choose the correct alternative to complete the following sentences. Check your answers by scanning the article.

- (a) The world's first commercially operating maglev railway was in **Britain / China / Japan / Germany**.
 (b) The maglev at Shanghai International Airport in China went into operation in **2000 / 2003 / 2005**.
 (c) The cost of the maglev railway in Shanghai was **\$23 million / \$43 million / \$63million** per mile.

Building a Maglev

Should the UK invest in developing maglev technology? This was a question raised last month by a UK politician, who suggested that we should follow the example of China, Germany and Japan. These three countries are researching or trialling a maglev system. Maglev trains are super fast: they currently run at speeds of above 430 km per hour. They move (literally float) a few centimetres above the specially built tracks, propelled by the force of electric-powered magnets.

The question is ironical, as the world's first commercially operating maglev railway was ... in Britain. Between 1984 and 1995, a maglev train ran at Birmingham International airport, between the terminal and the railway station. This maglev faced problems of reliability, and was abandoned. Meanwhile, the Shanghai International Airport in China maglev went into operation in 2003. The maglev railway was designed by the German firm, Transrapid. It takes just eight

minutes to complete the 30km journey between the airport and Shanghai city centre.

The cost of the maglev railway in Shanghai was an astronomical \$63 million per mile. This compares to the \$11m per mile cost in France's recent extension of its traditional high-speed rail network. The UK has no plans to reinvest in maglev technology. The main reason is ... price. Still, after the initial outlay, maglevs are much less expensive to operate and maintain than high-speed trains, buses or even planes.

What will the future bring? China wishes to expand its maglev; Germany and Japan are hoping to install it. Some think the UK government and track operator Network Rail should look at maglev again, arguing that a high-speed railway infrastructure will help the economy. Others argue that maglev is just too expensive.

3 Read the whole article. What do you learn about the maglev train?

4 Find words in the article from the following definitions.

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| (a) testing a product over a period of time | (paragraph 1) |
| (b) something which was stopped, especially because it was too difficult | (paragraph 2) |
| (c) a very high amount, price or charge | (paragraph 3) |
| (d) amount of money that you must spend in order to buy something | (paragraph 3) |
| (e) to put a piece of equipment somewhere | (paragraph 4) |
| (f) set of systems within a country that affect how well it operates | (paragraph 4) |
- (Definitions from or based on: *Macmillan English Dictionary* Text © Bloomsbury Publishing Plc 2002)

5 Discuss the following questions in small groups. Be ready to report back your ideas to the class.

- (a) Would you agree to the building of a maglev in your country/city? Why / why not?
 (b) How do you see the future of transport systems (road, rail and air) over the next ten years in your country?