

## High-speed dreams

Has the dream of building a high-speed MAGLEV (*magnetic–levitation*) railway finally come to an end?

- 1 Decide on the order of importance of the following factors for you as a rail traveler.  
1 = most important; 6 = least important. Compare your choice with a partner.

safety	speed	comfort
punctuality	reliability	price

- 2 Now read the article and check which of the factors in 1 are mentioned in the article.

### Maglev

The world's first commercial Maglev service has begun in China, linking the city centre of Shanghai with Pudong airport. Trains reach a top speed of 430kph and the distance of 29 kilometres takes eight minutes. In a taxi, the same journey takes between 40 minutes and an hour. Maglev comes from two words: *magnet* and *levitation*. The technology means that trains float on an electromagnetic cushion that allows them to be propelled along rails at great speed.

However, the airport link cost an incredible cost \$1.2bn (£665m) and the project was dogged by delays. Now the Chinese government has announced that the technology is too expensive to build a railway between Shanghai and Beijing. The consortium of German engineers bidding for the lucrative contract is naturally disappointed.

Supporters say that the technology is environmentally friendly and involves low maintenance costs. Critics of the Maglev trains say it is expensive and will waste energy. They say high-speed trains already in use in Japan and Europe can travel nearly as fast as the hi-tech trains on standard tracks and have proven to be reliable. Nearly a decade ago plans to build a maglev shuttle which linked the airport of the English city of Birmingham with its railway terminal were abandoned because it proved unreliable.

Not for the first time an innovative idea has been axed for reasons of cost. Concorde, the first passenger plane to break the sound barrier, flew its last flight in 2003. While speed is important to some, it seems rail passengers value a reliable service at a fair price. Safety matters are of utmost importance. It seems the high-speed dream of the Maglev has crashed into the realities of the business world.

- 3 Find words in the article with the following meanings:

- a operating for profit (paragraph 1)
- b a group of companies who work together (paragraph 2)
- c offering to do work for an amount of money (paragraph 2)
- d bringing a lot of money, profitable (paragraph 2)
- e stopped doing something before it is finished (paragraph 3)
- f new and advanced (paragraph 4)
- g ended something, like a plan or project (paragraph 4)

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- 4 Discuss the following questions in small groups and report your ideas to the class.

- a Given the costs, would you approve of your government building a Maglev railway between your capital city and the airport?
- b Should we still pursue the idea of supersonic air travel?
- c Do you know of an innovative project which was abandoned for reasons of cost?