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Having opened the latest extension to its two-line metro network in April 2024, Panamá City has now started work on a lengthy monorail route to serve areas west of the Panama Canal. In the longer term, Metro de Panamá plans an ambitious network of no less than eight mass rapid transit lines, including two more heavy metro lines, two monorails and two tram routes (p28).

Photo: Metro de Panamá

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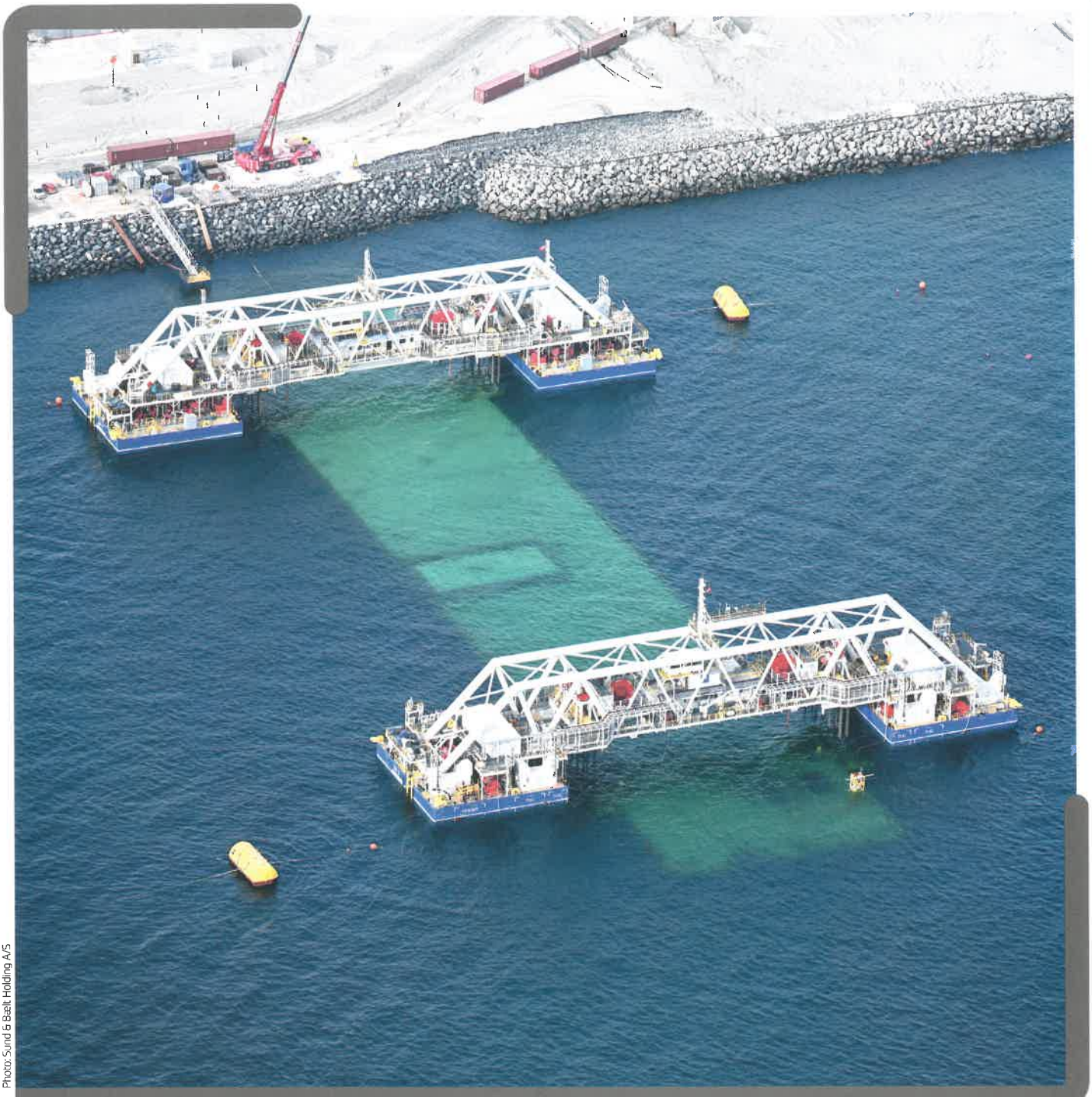

Photo: Sund & Bælt Holding A/S

The first concrete element for the Fehmarnbaelt tunnel was successfully immersed onto the seabed on May 7 after having left the assembly site at Rødbyhavn three days earlier. The delicate operation to position the first element in the trench leading from the Danish portal took around 14 h. The 217 m long tunnel section weighed 73 500 tonnes, and the contractors added 4 500 tonnes of concrete ballast to ensure it was heavy enough to sink.

The operation marks a critical step in improving connections between the Danish and German rail networks, and EU Transport Commissioner Apostolos Tzitzikostas called it an 'historic achievement'. However, promoter Sund & Bælt Holding A/S announced on May 17 that it was now expecting to complete the road link first; the rail connection would follow 'at a later date, once the necessary facilities have been completed on the German side'.

COMMENT

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Still a long way to go

June 14 is due to see the reopening of Deutsche Bahn's Hamburg – Berlin main line, following a nine-month closure for refurbishment and upgrading work that had to be extended by a further six weeks as a result of construction delays attributed to severe winter conditions.

Operators and industry associations have expressed their frustration with the disruption to Germany's busiest inter-city corridor, which has been closed since August 2025 and was originally due to reopen by the end of April. Industry association ProBahn's deputy chairman Marcel Drews pointed out that the related diversions of both passenger and freight services were impacting on other parts of the network, and called for better scheduling of improvement projects.

As we have reported before, DB has been wrestling for years with a massive backlog of maintenance and renewals across its 33 000 km network. Infrastructure manager DB InfraGO ramped up its spending on maintenance and renewals to €19·9bn in 2025, out of a record €22bn spend for the group, and almost €4bn up on the previous year. DB plans to spend more than €23bn on infrastructure in 2026, of which half will go into the existing network, with the rest earmarked for digitalisation (including ERTMS) and enhancements. However, DB CEO Evelyn Palla warned last month that there was still 'a long way to go' before the network would be back to a state of good repair.

The infrastructure manager's annual status report for 2025, issued on May 7, estimated the maintenance backlog at €124·5bn. Assessing around 291 000 infrastructure assets and more than 90 000 station assets, DB InfraGO said the need for condition-based renewals had fallen by nearly €4bn while the backlog at stations had dropped from €20·3bn to €18·6bn.

Using a grading from one to six, where a lower score indicates a better condition, it said the average condition of its assets remained unchanged at 3·00. 'It seems we have reached the lowest point in the unchecked deterioration of our rail infrastructure', commented Palla. 'The overall rating remains at the 2024 level — a sign that the turnaround has not yet been achieved.'

Last year DB InfraGO renewed 1 900 km of track and 1 900 turnouts, as well as 3 700 signalling units, while work was carried out at more than 950 stations. Its CEO Philipp Nagl insisted that 'these investments are paying off. The increased construction volumes resulted in a lower figure for the renewal needs of assets rated as poor, inadequate, and restrictive for the first time in years.'

Signalling and bridge repairs remain key pressure points. Signalling is the worst-rated asset class, with about 55% deemed in need of renewal. This is costed at €36·7bn, or almost a third of the backlog, which is reflected in the allocation for digitalisation and ETCS. The 1 920 bridges deemed in need of renewal account for another €31bn.

Track deterioration has been reflected in an increase in failures and temporary speed restrictions. DB InfraGO said it had 9 600 km of track awaiting renewal at a cost of €10·5bn, while the length in need of 'urgent' renewal had increased to 1 370 km. Recent performance figures suggest that efforts to stabilise network condition have not yet translated into improvements in service reliability.

Presenting DB's annual results at the end of March, Palla admitted that the programme of blockades for the modernisation of key routes would now run until 2036, directly impacting on the performance of its operating businesses. Overall punctuality declined further last year, with only 60·1% of long-distance trains arriving on time, compared to 62·5% in 2024. DB Fernverkehr recorded an impairment loss of around €1·4bn which was attributed to lower revenue expectations and infrastructure constraints.

Lobby group Allianz pro Schiene said that while the status report offered a 'glimmer of hope', the remaining backlog still amounted to a 'huge sum'. Managing Director Dirk Flege argued that despite last year's record spend, the available funding would not cover the total needs. Further disruption would be inevitable if assets in urgent need of renewal could not be replaced quickly or if projects had to be postponed 'indefinitely' because of funding shortages.

The question of funding remains a subject of debate. In December 2024 the government agreed to inject an €8·3bn equity increase into Deutsche Bahn during 2025, all of which would be passed on to DB InfraGO and used exclusively for infrastructure. It also provided a loan of €3bn for investment, and it has earmarked up to €81bn for rail between 2025 and 2029 out of a €500bn national infrastructure fund.

DB InfraGO had proposed to increase its track access charges for 2026 by an average of 16% above than 2025, which inevitably brought protests from the train operators. Having examined its figures, the Bundesnetzagentur decided to cap allowable costs at €6·9bn, reducing the average increase to 2·4%. Freight operators would pay 5·8% more, while long-distance passenger trains would benefit from a 1·2% reduction.

Palla stressed last month that it was 'crucial that the public sector continues to provide sufficient funding so that we can reduce the investment backlog as quickly as possible'. Flege too believed that the government would have to dig deep, accepting that the national network could not be made healthy overnight after being 'neglected for decades'. Stressing that the government needed 'staying power', he emphasised that 'a sound plan means that record investments can't be a one-off'.

19·9 €bn

DB InfraGO spending on infrastructure modernisation and renewals during 2025

> 'It seems we have reached the lowest point in the unchecked deterioration of our rail infrastructure.'
>
> *Evelyn Palla, CEO, Deutsche Bahn*

Market opening

THAILAND

Thailand's rail market is to be opened open up to competition over the next two years, a representative from the Department of Rail Transport confirmed to *Railway Gazette International* in Bangkok on May 7.

The Rail Transport Act BE 2568 which came into force on March 27 provides for State Railway of Thailand to remain the infrastructure owner and continue operating its existing services. However, SRT will in future be expected to make train paths available to private operators who bid to operate freight or passenger services.

SRT is required to publish a Network Statement enabling aspiring new entrants to understand the condition of the the country's metre-gauge network and the access conditions. This is expected to be issued in July, enabling the first private companies to start operations by 2028.

Night train start-up

EUROPE

Berlin-based start-up Nox Mobility has raised €2m in pre-seed funding to support its plan to create a pan-European overnight network focused on offering private rooms for one or two travellers.

The funding round is fronted by IBB Ventures, the venture capital arm of Berlin's public development bank IBB, which is supported by the EU's European Regional Development Fund. It is also backed by Italian investor Tommaso Lucca and HomeToGo Co-Founder Patrick Andrae. Nox said the financing would be used to 'accelerate the start-up's team growth, full-scale mock-up construction and preparations for its first routes, launching in 2027'.

The start-up says it is aiming to serve city-pair routes such as Paris – Milano, Amsterdam – Berlin, Zürich – Perpignan and Malmö – Stockholm, as part of a wider goal to connect more than 100 European cities by 2035.

Long-distance fleet order

SWEDEN

Trafikverket has awarded a €756m contract to Talgo for a fleet of long-distance trains to operate between Stockholm and the country's northernmost cities, including dedicated overnight stock. Deliveries are scheduled to begin in 2030.

The contract signed on April 20 includes a firm order for nine day trains and 11 overnight sets, plus 10 locomotives to be supplied by Siemens Mobility as a subcontractor. It also includes an extendable 10-year maintenance package and options for additional vehicles.

Based on the Talgo 230 push-pull inter-city sets now operating in Denmark and Germany, the trainsets are intended to replace legacy rolling stock that is nearly four decades old.

Unlike the existing Swedish stock which has a body width of 3 400 mm, the new vehicles will be 3 150mm wide to ensure interoperablity with the TEN-T network. There will also be a shift from six-berth couchettes to what Trafikverket described as a 'built-in hotel night' ambience, with four-berth compartments and two-berth premium suites with en-suite facilities. The trains will have a restaurant-bistro lounge car and there will be dedicated storage space for luggage, skis, and bicycles.

To suit Arctic conditions, the trains will operate in top-and-tail formation, rather than with a push-pull driving trailer. Trafikverket said that using two Vectron locomotives would provide the necessary tractive effort and a degree of redundancy.

The fleet configuration and operating parameters are intended to support Sweden's 'Total Defence' strategy, ensuring that long-distance services can continue to operate during security crises.

Scandinavian ambitions

EUROPE

Swedish private operator Snälltåget launched a daytime train between Stockholm, København and Hamburg in early May, augmenting its overnight service between Stockholm, Hamburg and Berlin.

The northbound train leaves Hamburg Hbf at 09:51 and arrives at Stockholm C at 21:17. In the opposite direction, the train departs from the Swedish capital at 10:43 and reaches its destination at 21:57. The trains serve 14 intermediate stops including Odense C, København Syd, Malmö C, Alvesta, Nässjö and Södertälje Syd.

Snälltåget is reportedly positioning itself to expand further in this market. SJ's EuroNight service between Stockholm and Berlin is due to end later this year, after Swedish state funding for year-round operation was withdrawn and the contract between Trafikverket and SJ was not extended.

However, RDC Deutschland, which currently operates the night train jointly with SJ, has said it plans to continue running the service on a commercial basis.

Meanwhile, Norwegian operator Vy has announced plans for a direct train linking Oslo, Göteborg, København, Hamburg and Berlin, to be operated jointly with DSB and DB. Due to launch in summer 2028, the service will be worked by DB Fernverkehr's Talgo ICE L trainsets, offering a journey time of 14 to 15 h. This could be cut by 90 min after the Fehmarnbaelt fixed link opens (p4).

'Platypus' trainset unveiled

TAIWAN

Taiwan High Speed Rail Corp has unveiled the first of 12 N700ST trainsets ordered from the Hitachi Toshiba Supreme consortium in May 2023 at a cost of NT$28bn.

THSRC Chairman Shih Che travelled to Japan to unveil the first train on April 30, comparing the design to a platypus, and explaining that the more aerodynamic nose profile would help to reduce noise and vibration, especially when the trains are entering tunnels. The trains will also be 13 tonnes lighter than THSRC's existing fleet.

Deliveries are scheduled to run from August 2026 through the end of 2028, with the trains entering service from August 2027. They will augment the operator's current fleet of N700T high speed trainsets based on Japan's 700 Series, of which 30 were delivered for the opening of the line in 2007, and four more were ordered in 2012 to increase capacity.

Work starts on Quang Ninh line

VIETNAM

Work is getting underway on the construction of an inter-regional high speed railway between Hanoi and Ha Long, following a groundbreaking ceremony attended by Prime Minister Le Minh Hung and other senior officials.

Being developed by the VinSpeed subsidiary of Vingroup, the 121 km line is expected to be completed by the end of 2028 at an estimated cost of 147tr dong.

The 1 435 mm gauge double-track electrified line will run from Co Loa in the northeast suburbs of Hanoi to Ha Long in the coastal Quang Ninh province, with intermediate stations at the future Gia Binh Airport, Ninh Xa and Yen Tu.

Designed for a maximum speed of 350 km/h, the line is being developed as a turnkey project, with rolling stock, signalling and communications systems to be supplied by Siemens Mobility, which signed a partnership agreement with the VinSpeed High Speed Railway Investment & Development Joint Stock Co last year (RG 2.26 p9).

CEO Michael Peter told delegates at the groundbreaking ceremony on April 12 that his company would deliver 'world-proven' high speed rail technology, explaining that the long-term co-operation agreement covered technology transfer, joint assembly, and maintenance, and was aimed at supporting the development of a high speed rail 'ecosystem' in Vietnam.

Inland Rail scaled back

AUSTRALIA

The government has announced A$1·75bn of funding for rail freight, but has stopped development of the northern section of the 1 600 km Inland Rail corridor. The project envisaged 600 km of new and 1 000 km of upgraded railway to support 1 800 m long double-stack container trains running at speeds up to 115 km/h, and was aimed at reducing the transit time between Melbourne and Brisbane from 33 h to less than 24 h.

On May 6 the government said it had decided to 'consolidate' Inland Rail after independent cost assurance work by ACIL Allen had put the cost at more than A$45bn, over three times the current budget allocation, and found that the project could not be delivered until at least 2036.

It now aims to complete the route between Beveridge near Melbourne and Parkes in New South Wales by the end of 2027. This includes 617 km of existing railway, 2 km of upgraded line and 37 km of new line, and would enable double-stack trains to travel between Melbourne and Perth.

The route north of Parkes would require significant greenfield construction. Efforts will now focus on protecting the corridor and sites for future intermodal terminals in Queensland.

The funding builds on an existing $1·04bn commitment to upgrade the ARTC network, which the government said would 'enable more freight to move via rail, with important upgrades to be delivered where they are needed most'. A co-ordinator will be established to identify and implement improvements in conjunction with other infrastructure managers.

Upgrades to improve the efficiency of the East Coast network will include track renewals, passing loop extensions, improved signalling and the removal of speed restrictions. There will be resilience works in flood-prone areas, particularly where the east-west corridor has suffered from multi-week closures following heavy rains in central Australia.

The A$55m Transport Resilience & Capacity Kickstart pilot programme is intended to incentivise more freight to travel by rail or ship, supporting more fuel-efficient freight movements, in light of the Middle East conflict affecting global fuel supplies.

Velvet trainset unveiled

FRANCE

High speed new entrant Velvet has unveiled an Alstom Avelia Horizon trainset in its dark fir green and lilac livery, as it prepares to compete against SNCF as France's first domestic private entrant with its own new-build fleet.

Parent company Proxima ordered 12 nine-car Avelia Horizon double-deck trainsets in 2024, using the same model as chosen by SNCF for its next-generation TGV Inoui fleet which is now expected to enter service this year. The trains are being assembled at Alstom's La Rochelle facility, although the production is spread across multiple sites in France, including Belfort for the power cars and Aytré for the passenger vehicles. The trains are to be maintained at a new depot near Bordeaux.

Digital driver

GERMANY

A dedicated ERTMS Co-ordination Office is to be established to manage the country's lagging digitalisation programme, the federal transport ministry BMV announced on April 17.

As well as serving as 'the central point of contact for the entire rail sector' for the rollout of ERTMS and ETCS, the body would co-ordinate funding for the retrofitting of onboard equipment.

A steering committee led by the ministry would bring together key players from the German rail sector. The group would 'commence its work immediately', with a review to be undertaken next June.

Indian contractor wins Croatian upgrade

CROATIA

HŽ Infrastruktura has selected Indian contractor Afcons Infrastructure Ltd to undertake a €677m upgrade of the 83 km Dugo Selo – Novska section of Pan-European Corridor X, which it describes as Croatia's largest ever railway project. The deal announced on May 11 is the company's first in the European rail market.

The work includes double-tracking and station modernisation, plus the renewal of signalling and overhead electrification, as well as realignment to increase speeds. The project is being co-financed by the EU through the Connecting Europe Facility and the Competitiveness & Cohesion Programme, and the work is expected to take almost six years.

The infrastructure manager has awarded Spanish contractor Cosma a €279m contract to rebuild, double-track and electrify the 44 km Hrvatski Leskovac – Karlovac section of its Zagreb – Rijeka main line as part of the TEN-T corridor linking the Port of Rijeka with Central Europe.

Infrastructure Minister Oleg Butković said the 'strategically important' investment would strengthen Croatia's position on the trans-European transport network, adding that nearly €6bn had been earmarked for railway renewals over the next decade.

Italo targets ICE network

GERMANY

Italian private operator Nuovo Trasporto Viaggiatori is looking to launch Italo-branded high speed services in Germany by the end of 2028, with a planned investment of €3·6bn.

Chief Executive Gianbattista La Rocca told local media on April 29 that the company had established a German subsidiary in 2025, with a view to competing with DB Fernverkehr's ICE network; it had submitted a request for an operating licence in October.

NTV has negotiated a contract with Siemens Mobility for the purchase and maintenance of the trains, which La Rocca hopes will be signed in June. However, he said it was 'absolutely essential' that the operator received 'a clear and reliable overview' of the train paths and station access from DB InfraGO by the end of May.

The company expects to spend €1·2bn on the purchase of 26 Velaro trainsets, with an option for a further 14. Another €2·4bn would cover maintenance for 30 years and the related activities to establish the German business, including staff training and back office systems.

NTV hopes to operate up to 50 services a day on a 1 300 km network linking 18 cities. Its priorities include München – Köln – Dortmund and München – Berlin – Hamburg, as these are the busiest inter-city routes in Germany.

ÖBB presents new-generation Cityjet

AUSTRIA

Austrian Federal Railways and Stadler have unveiled the first of 109 new-generation Cityjet double-deck EMUs ordered for local services, with 45 units set for deployment in the country's east by the end of 2026.

Launched at Wien Hbf on May 6, the units are scheduled to enter passenger service on the Wien Floridsdorf – Payerbach/Reichenau route from the end of June. ÖBB is investing around €1·5bn in the 109 KISS units, as part of a €6·1bn programme covering the purchase of around 330 new trains by 2030.

The 160 km/h EMUs will be delivered in two variants: a 160 m six-car version with 591 seats, and a 107 m four-car set seating 371.

Airport link opens

MEXICO

The rail link to Mexico City's Aeropuerto Internacional Felipe Ángeles was officially opened for revenue service April 26, with the opening of a branch which diverges from the Buenavista – Cuautitlán Tren Suburbano route at Lechería.

The 23·7 km double-track branch adds six stations and an underground terminal at the airport. It is electrified at 25 kV 60 Hz, and carries a 15 min interval service. Journey time for the 41 km from Buenavista to the airport is currently 60 min, although the government hopes this can be cut to 43 min once the operations stabilise.

Services are operated using eight CAF EMUs from the batch ordered for the Tren Interurbano service linking México with Toluca. These are similar to the older CAF units used on the Cuautitlán service.

The airport line is included in Mexico City's Movilidad Integrada integrated fare collection system. Ridership is forecast to reach approximately 80 000 passengers/day, with a mix of airport users and commuters.

Cross-border launch

EUROPE

Région Grand Est has introduced the first of a fleet of Régiolis trainsets on the Strasbourg – Offenburg route, with a ceremony on May 4 attended by Grand Est President Franck Leroy and Baden-Württemberg transport minister Winfried Hermann.

Assembled by CAF at the former De Dietrich plant in Reichshoffen, the Régiolis Transfrontalier France-Allemagne units built specifically for cross-border services are designed to accept the French 25 kV 50 Hz and German 15 kV 16·7 Hz power supplies.

The 30 four-car trains will operate services from Strasbourg to Saarbrücken, Karlsruhe and Neustadt an der Weinstrasse, as well as from Metz to Trier and Saarbrücken and Mulhouse to Freiburg im Breisgau.

Each unit has seats for 203 passengers, plus standing accommodation for 112.

Grand Est and the three German *Länder* have invested €388m in the fleet, of which €40m was needed for the development of the cross-border version.

Briefing

Dutch open-access operator GoVolta announced on May 8 that it would withdraw its Amsterdam – Hamburg service from the end of the month, and redeploy the rolling stock to augment its Amsterdam – Berlin route where the trains were running nearly full.

The Belgian government has approved an update to Infrabel's 2023-32 investment plan, adding four new projects. These include €27·5m for charging infrastructure to facilitate battery train operation on four non-electrified lines and €21·5m to enhance military mobility through targeted upgrades including the ability to handle 750 m long trains.

CargoBeamer and SBB Cargo have introduced an intermodal service transporting semi-trailers between the DUSS Terminal near Stuttgart and the Malpensa intermodal terminal in Milano, following the ending of the RAlpin 'Rolling Highway' piggyback service between Freiburg im Breisgau and Novara.

Interrail pass company Eurail has partnered with distribution technology specialist Distribusion to expand access to passholder fares and seat reservations for rail and ferry networks. The growth of reservation-only services has significantly limited the effectiveness of the passes in countries such as France and Italy.

The framework contract for Siemens Mobility to supply Swiss Federal Railways with up to 200 six-car Desiro double-deck EMUs was finally signed on April 30, after Stadler abandoned its legal challenge (RG 5.26 p15).

Skånetrafiken has selected VR Sverige to continue operating Pågatågen services in southern Sweden for nine years from December 12 2027, beating a rival bid from Transdev by a small margin.

Read the latest news at www.railwaygazette.com

First MI20 unveiled

FRANCE

Ile-de-France Mobilités unveiled the first MI20 partially double-deck trainset for Paris' RER Line B at Alstom's Crespin plant on May 7, ahead of the start of dynamic testing this summer. However, the trains are not now expected to enter service until the end of 2028.

The authority has ordered 146 trains to replace ageing MI79 and MI84 EMUs on the north-south line, as part of a €5bn investment. This includes a new control centre and the roll-out of NExTEO train control technology. Offering level boarding and improved passenger amenities, the MI20s are expected to provide 22% more seats than the single-deck trains they are replacing and 35% more capacity overall.

The MI20s were originally ordered from a consortium of Bombardier Transportation and CAF. Following Alstom's acquisition of Bombardier, the company is building the intermediate cars and leading the assembly and integration work, including testing. CAF is responsible for the power cars, although Alstom is supplying the traction equipment.

Photo: Jérémie Anne

MetroLink procurement starts

IRELAND

Transport Infrastructure Ireland has launched the tendering process for a contract to design, build, finance, operate and maintain Dublin's planned MetroLink automated metro. The 18·8 km mostly underground line will link Swords in the north with Charlemont in the south.

The M500 contract will cover the rolling stock and railway systems, including signalling for GoA4 unattended operation, the trackwork, electrification and the maintenance depot. It does not include enabling works or major infrastructure and tunnelling, as these are being procured separately.

TII CEO Lorcan O'Connor said the contract had been 'carefully structured to allocate risk appropriately, encourage innovation and ensure long-term operational excellence'. The availability-based PPP contract with an estimated value of €7·3bn would allow seven years for completion of the works followed by 25 years of operation and maintenance.

An initial pre-qualification phase will see the three highest-ranked applicants shortlisted for the next stage.

Dubai Gold Line approved

UAE

Approval for the 34bn dirham Gold Line metro project was announced by Dubai's ruler Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum on April 22. Tenders are to be called this year, with the construction contract to be awarded in 2027; inauguration is scheduled for September 9, 2032. The Dubai government said delivery would be 30% faster than for the Blue Line, which is currently under construction.

Running from Al Ghubaiba to Jumeirah Golf Estates, the 42 km Gold Line will have 18 stations, including interchanges with the Green Line at Al Ghubaiba and the Red Line at Business Bay. There will also be interchanges to the developing Etihad Rail network at Meydan and Jumeirah Golf Estates.

The route will serve 55 development projects and ridership is expected to reach 465 000 passengers/day after 2040. It will be the first metro line in Dubai to run entirely underground, reaching a depth of 40 m in some places.

Roads & Transport Authority Chairman & Director-General Mattar Al Tayer said the Gold Line marked 'a strategic milestone in the evolution of Dubai's public transport network'.

The project is projected to achieve a 430% cumulative economic return over 20 years of operation, driven by savings in time and fuel as well as reductions in road accident fatality rates and carbon emissions.

Lausanne metro upgrade

SWITZERLAND

Transports Publics de la Région Lausannoise has awarded Alstom a €295m contract to modernise its 6 km automated light metro Line m2 from Ouchy to Croisettes to provide more capacity.

This includes the installation of Urbalis Fluence CBTC, allowing trains to operate at shorter headways. The train-centric architecture, which puts more intelligence onboard, is designed to limit the need for infrastructure changes and additional trackside equipment.

A mid-life modernisation of the line's two-car rubber-tyred trainsets will be undertaken at Alstom's site at Villeneuve in Switzerland. This will include replacement of the train control and monitoring system, which will be fully integrated with the new CBTC, as well as an exterior refresh and enhancements to the interior.

Suburban line opened

CHINA

Nanjing suburban Line S2 was opened on April 22, as the region's first 'inter-provincial' commuter railway.

The 54·2 km line with 16 stations runs from the Xishanqiao terminus of Nanjing metro Line 7 southwest to Taibai in the neighbouring city of Ma'anshan. An 11·7 km section of the new route is underground and the remainder elevated.

The line has been developed jointly by Jiangsu and Anhui provinces, which will now manage it together. Operationally it is fully integrated into the Nanjing metro, including unified fares, taking the city's overall network length to 579 km serving 283 stations.

Line S2 services are operated by 80 m long, four-car Type B 1·5 kV DC EMUs, which have provision for lengthening to six cars. They run at a maximum speed of 120 km/h. Loops at four stations enable the operation of stopping trains taking 52 min and express services taking 36 min.

Opal 2.0 contracts awarded

AUSTRALIA

Transport for New South Wales has awarded two contracts for the Opal 2.0 programme to undertake the biggest overhaul of Sydney's public transport ticketing since the roll-out of the smart card-based Opal payment system by Cubic 13 years ago.

INIT will deliver an account-based system, with the card or device used to touch in and out serving solely as a means of identification while tickets and funds are processed in the back office. The project will see the installation of 25 000 new readers to replace life-expired equipment.

Development is expected to progress throughout 2026, with the first hardware installation starting in 2027 and completion scheduled for 2028. There will then be a 10-year operations period.

In parallel, Trapeze Group will upgrade the information systems on 5 000 buses to provide better real-time tracking and display upcoming stops.

The Opal 2.0 programme has a budget of A$738m, with the bus upgrades taking the overall investment to A$820m.

Metro, bus, light rail and ferry passengers will be able to pay using contactless bank cards or smart phones. Digital Opal cards will be available for mobile devices, removing the need for a smart card. Passengers will be able to use any of their registered media to check-out, not just the one they used to check-in, which INIT said would be 'a big plus in usability'.

São Paulo opens Line 17 at last

BRAZIL

The initial 6·7 km section of São Paulo's monorail Line 17-Gold was finally inaugurated on March 31, no less than 12 years behind schedule. It links Congonhas Airport with Morumbi on suburban Line 9, serving seven stations.

Works on Line 17 began in April 2012, and the line was originally intended to open in time for the 2014 FIFA World Cup. However, the project was delayed by problems with both procurement and construction, leading to retendering of the scheme in 2020. The first section is reported to have cost R$5·97bn to complete.

Line 17 is operated by concessionaire ViaMobilidade. Trains are initially operating between 10.00 and 15.00, at headways of 7 to 14 min. A full service is expected to begin in October.

State Governor Tarcísio de Freitas said extensions would be built at both ends totalling 4·6 km, but did not specify timescales. These would take the line south to Vila Paulista, and north to Américo Mourano. In the longer term, Line 17 is intended to run for 17·7 km, linking Jabaquara on metro Line 1 to São Paulo-Morumbi on metro Line 4.

Meanwhile, limited services have started on the 2·7 km peoplemover linking terminals 1, 2 and 3 at São Paulo's Guarulhos Airport with the airport station on suburban Line 13. This uses the Aeromovel air-propulsion technology.

Multilevel III EMU unveiled

USA

NJ Transit unveiled its first Multilevel III double-deck EMU car at its Meadows Maintenance Complex in Kearny on April 13, ahead of the start of testing and commissioning.

The agency has ordered 112 motor cars, 100 driving cars and 162 trailer cars from Bombardier Transportation and later Alstom over the past seven years, explaining that the procurement of separate vehicles rather than complete units would enable train lengths to be adapted to suit demand.

Part of Alstom's Adessia commuter train family, the vehicles are being assembled at the manufacturer's Plattsburgh plant to meet Buy America requirements, with at least 70% US-made content.

Designed for 177 km/h operation, they are expected to be 10 times more reliable than the 1970s Arrow III and Comet II and IV single-deck cars that they will replace.

Briefing

The 35·3 km first phase of **Wuhan** metro Line 12 was inaugurated on May 1, linking Gangduhuayuan and Moshuihu Park around the south of the city. A 24·6 km second phase is due to open by the end of this year, creating what the city says will be the longest orbital metro line in the world.

FirstGroup replaced Arriva as Transport for London's contracted operator of **London Overground** services on May 3. The concession contract with First Rail London runs for eight years, with an optional two-year extension which could take the total value to £3bn.

EIB has agreed a €265·6m loan to finance improvements to the **București** tram network, which carries around 500 000 people a day. The city will use the financing to renovate around 50 km of track, purchase 63 trams and upgrade Colentina depot.

The **UK** Department for Transport has agreed to provide the Light Rail Safety & Standards Board and industry body UKTram with a total of £4·5m of funding to support their continued operation over the next three years.

The **Los Angeles** County Metro board has approved the San Vicente – Fairfax alignment option as the locally preferred alternative for the K Line Northern Extension. The 16 km underground line with 10 stations would extend the K Line from Crenshaw/Expo to Hollywood.

Public consultation has started on the preferred route for the Luas **Cork** tram project, which would run from Ballincollig to Mahon Point via the city centre and Kent station.

Delhi Metro Rail Corp is to work with the Indian Agricultural Research Institute to find plants suitable for harsh, dry and low-light conditions to enhance green cover along metro corridors and under station structures.