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Maglev – The 6th Mode of Transportation Development in China

Midway through the first decade of the 21st century, China is confronting increasingly serious traffic jams, transportation delays, and congestion-related social and economic problems, resulting from, among other factors, its highly successful economic zones, its rapid urbanization, its rising population densities, the emergence of city clusters, its increasingly robust inter-city economic activities, an especially vigorous surge in automobile use and vehicle traffic flows, and a lag in transportation management planning. In turn, these developments have resulted in massive energy consumption, exhaust gas pollution, and environmental destruction. The transportation challenge worsens daily, and has presented itself as a priority societal and economic issue for the country.

State Council Premier Wen Jiabao chaired the regular meeting of the State Council on March 16th, 2005, at which the National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC) submitted a new inter-city track transportation network plan, addressing transportation requirements for the Bohai Gulf coastal region (Beijing, Tianjin and surrounding areas of Hebei Province), Yangtze River Delta region, and Pearl River Delta region,. NDRC reported that presently these are the most vigorously developing economic regions in China. In order to meet the fast-growing passenger transportation demand in these regions, accelerate their economic integration, and avoid the extreme cost, disruption, and environmental impacts of traditional responses such as expanded airports and super highway systems, there is an absolute need to formulate and implement regional track transportation networks that will be resource-conserving, environmentally-friendly, cost-effective, fast, and highly modern.

It is imperative, therefore, that China seek a breakthrough in track transportation technologies and systems, i.e. an intra-/inter-city regional public track transportation system that is safe, comfortable, high-speed, environmentally-friendly, highly-efficient, low-cost, and low in energy consumption, and that will closely support continuing social and economic development. As a leading possible solution, China now is actively evaluating Maglev technology research and test applications carried out in recent years in countries such as Germany, Japan, and the U.S., all of which are continuing to actively pursue Maglev technologies. Now, as part of China's active track transportation network

planning and evaluation, China will encourage and support studies that will evaluate Maglev's potential to become the 6th mode of transportation.

China already has begun activities related to research, testing, and deployment of Maglev technology. By the end of March 2005, the demonstration project 33-kilometer Shanghai Pudong Airport Maglev line will have run more than 1.5 million operating kilometers, and will have safely carried approximately 3.3 million passengers in its test operations. Since the project's inception, China has gained significant experience and achievement related to Maglev technology.

Since the 1980s, Magplane Technology Inc. (MTI), a company based in the U.S., has been developing a new Maglev technology system known as the "Magplane" system - a system that uses permanent magnets in a design that differs from the superconducting and electromagnetic Maglev technologies tested and deployed in research and test projects to date, including the Shanghai Pudong Maglev Project. The new Magplane system integrates the merits of various forms of transportation systems. It employs matured technologies and commercialized products and, in comparison with the alternative Maglev approaches, is relatively low in projected construction and operations costs. The Magplane system caters to high-speed, large-capacity, intra-city and inter-city transportation requirements, and integrates them as a single intelligent control system, thus providing an ideal solution to complex intra-city and inter-city transportation challenges. Currently MTI is planning to build a test line in USA, produce parts and assemble the test line system, and build a test line in China at a location soon to be identified.

In order to evaluate the Magplane technology and explore its feasibility for application in China, the Centre For Traffic Technology Development & Planning (CTTDP) of the Institute of Comprehensive Transportation (ICT), NDRC, now will encourage and support studies on adopting Magplane in inter-city track transportation lines connecting selected representative Chinese cities, with the goal of speeding up the development of an intra-/inter-city track transportation network in China.

CTTDP of ICT, NDRC Guo Wenlong, Director and Researcher