

Why doesn't the USA have high speed rail?

Why doesn't the USA have high speed trains? Good question! China has them, so does Japan. They are all over Europe. All run between 300-431kph (186-268mph). Yet in America the fastest train does a mere 241kph (150mph) and that is over a very short distance. The average speed in the USA of a high speed train is an incredible 127kph (79mph)! The USA seems to have got left behind. The definition to Americans of high speed trains is the Acela Express that runs from New York to Washington DC. Why is this so? It is probably because Americans prefer to fly between cities, as it's cheaper. The other reason is the motor car. Another reason is the lack of investment. Considering the size of America these days it is cheaper and quicker to fly than to take the train between cities. However, if the price was right and the speed of the railways was increased all that could change. The latter though involves some considerable investment.

A bit of investment by the American banks or the Obama administration to create jobs might just be a good thing. Surely investment in a high speed network would benefit the American people? It would also reconnect American cities and take the passengers right into the city thus making the journey time quicker. Of course, getting your average American to ditch their car is another thing. Compared to European trains American trains are a pale reflection – in terms of frequency, speed and relative luxury. What the Americans need to do is to modernise their rail networks and create a new high speed network. The Americans are upgrading a 24-mile section of track in New Jersey so that train speeds will reach an incredible 257kph by 2017. Wow! For a country that took man to the moon this is pretty sad. Change though is coming.

The US High Speed Rail Association (USHSR) has set out a highly ambitious US\$600bn plan to build a high-speed rail network in four phases by 2030. Thousands of jobs will be created, which is good news for the American economy. The price of a barrel of oil is one reason that is pushing this change. If Americans paid European petrol prices they would rapidly speed up this rail plan. Their reliance of the car and cheap petrol prices still prevail. Hostility from several State governors and privately owned freight train companies is another big reason delaying the idea. The Americans are not working together on this plan to modernise their rail network in their country, which if you think about it is a pity.

Category: USA / Railways / High speed trains

Level: Intermediate / Upper intermediate

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EXERCISES

1. High speed rail networks: Briefly, what three things do you know about high speed rail trains? Go round the room swapping details.

2. Dictation: The teacher will read four to six lines of the article slowly and clearly. Students will write down what they hear. The teacher will repeat the passage slowly again. Self-correct your work from page one - filling in spaces and correcting mistakes. Be honest with yourself on the number of errors. Advise the teacher of your total number of errors. Less than five is very good. Ten is acceptable. Any more is room for improvement! More than twenty - you need to do some work!

3. Reading: The students should now read the article aloud, swapping readers every paragraph.

4. Vocabulary: Students should now look through the article and underline any vocabulary they do not know. Look in dictionaries. Discuss and help each other out. The teacher will go through and explain any unknown words or phrases.

5. The article: Students should look through the article with the teacher.

- a) What is the article about?
- b) What do you think about the article?

6. High speed rail v flying: In pairs think of five reasons why going by high speed rail is more beneficial than flying. Then suggest five reasons why flying is better. Use examples – it may not be beneficial in all instances! Write them below.

High speed rail	Flying
1	1
2	2
3	3
4	4
5	5

The teacher will choose some pairs to discuss their findings in front of the class.

7. High speed networks around the world: In pairs, think of three countries that have high speed rail networks. Add the name of their high speed trains. Write them below. Discuss them together. What was their purpose? When were they built?

Country	Name of high speed train
1 _____	_____
2 _____	_____
3 _____	_____

The teacher will choose some pairs to discuss their findings in front of the class.

8. Let's draw! In pairs draw a high speed train, including the inside of one carriage. Add the features you think it should include e.g. a TV.

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9. High speed rail in the USA: In pairs think of three good economic reasons why high speed rail will be good for the USA. Then think of three (economic) reasons why high speed rail has been derailed so far. Write them below.

For	Against
1	1
2	2
3	3

The teacher will choose some pairs to discuss their findings in front of the class.

10. Let's roleplay 1: NBC News: In pairs/groups. One of you is the interviewer. The others are one of the following people. You are in the *NBC News* TV studio in Washington. Today's interview is about: *Why doesn't the USA have high speed rail?* 5-10 minutes.

1	Freight train operator boss	3	Spokesperson from USHSR
2	The US President	4	An opposing US State governor

The teacher will choose some pairs/groups to roleplay their interview in front of the class.

11. Let's think! In pairs. On the board write as many words as you can to do with **High speed rail**. *One-two minutes*. Compare with other teams. Using your words compile a short dialogue together.

12. Presentation: In pairs, groups or individually: Prepare in class or at home a two minute presentation on: **High speed rail**. Stand at the front of the class to give your presentation to the class. The class can vote on the best presentation.

13. Let's do 'The Article Quiz': Have the students quiz each other in pairs. They score a point for each correct answer and half a point each time they have to look at the article for help. See who can get the highest score!

Student A

- 1) Name the countries.
- 2) Name the association.
- 3) Who is opposing the new network? Why?
- 4) Which country took man to the moon?
- 5) How fast do American trains go?

Student B

- 1) How fast do other countries high speed trains travel?
- 2) Give one reason 'why is this so'?
- 3) What could change the American view on high speed trains?
- 4) What is happening in 2017?
- 5) Compared to European trains American trains are what? Explain.

14. Let's write an e-mail: Write and send a 200 word e-mail to your teacher about: **'High speed rail'**

15. Sentence starters: Finish these sentence starters. Correct your mistakes. Compare what other people have written.

a) American trains _____

b) High speed rail _____

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DISCUSSION

Student A questions

- 1) Did the headline make you want to read the article?
- 2) Surely, developing high speed trains can only be a good thing in America?
- 3) Why are America trains so slow?
- 4) What advise would you give to the US High Speed Rail Association (USHSR)?
- 5) Would you like to travel on a 'real' high speed train in the USA?
- 6) Could the age of the high speed train in the USA – including luxury travel between cities – be with us, in say, less than ten years?
- 7) Surely high speed train connections would kick start the urban regeneration around stations in the USA?
- 8) Are high speed trains the future? Explain.
- 9) How do trains today differ from 100 years ago?
- 10) Does it take as long today to get from New York to San Francisco by train compared to 100 years ago? Explain.

Student B questions

- 1) What do you think about what you read?
- 2) Have you learnt anything from today's English lesson?
- 3) Have you ever been on a high speed train? If yes, explain.
- 4) Are high speed trains dangerous? Explain.
- 5) Do you think the USA will eventually create a network of high speed trains?
- 6) Should the US government do more to push the future network of high speed trains in the USA?
- 7) Why does American politics block the development of high speed trains?
- 8) Why are some State governors blocking the development of high speed trains in the USA?
- 9) Are the freight company owners blocking the development of high speed trains in the USA?
- 10) Did you like this discussion?

SPEAKING

Let's discuss! High speed trains

Allow 10-15 minutes – As a class / small groups / pairs / 1 to 1

1. Viability requires a large number of people needing to travel over moderate distances. (A profitable line is from Paris to Brussels)
2. A good configuration occurs if you have decent sized cities in a line: this occurs in Japan.
3. Some of the more recently announced development in France and all of the lines in Spain are not economically viable. Spain's development has been paid for by European tax payers and the first line was from Madrid to Seville (where the PM lived!). None of Spain's lines have enough population to make them viable.
4. In America the distances tend to be too great and the cities can't be put on a line. If the distances are too large the plane wins. There are actually few economic routes in the USA and you certainly can't link the East and West coast.
5. The UK's London to Birmingham proposals is the right sort of distance between stops. It will however be particularly expensive because of all the real-estate in the way.

GAP FILL: READING:

Put the words into the gaps in the text.

Why doesn't the USA have high speed rail?

Why doesn't the USA have high speed trains? Good question! China has them, so does Japan. They are all over Europe. All run between 300-431kph (186-268mph). Yet in America the fastest train does a (1)_____ 241kph (150mph) and that is over a very short distance. The average speed in the USA of a high speed train is an (2)_____ 127kph (79mph)! The USA seems to have got left behind. The (3)_____ to Americans of high speed trains is the Acela Express that runs from New York to Washington DC. Why is this so? It is (4)_____ because Americans prefer to (5)_____ between cities, as it's cheaper. The other reason is the motor car. Another reason is the lack of investment. Considering the size of America these days it is cheaper and quicker to fly than to take the train between cities. However, if the price was right and the speed of the (6)_____ was increased all that could change. The (7)_____ though involves some considerable (8)_____.

fly

investment

railways

mere

latter

probably

incredible

definition

A bit of investment by the American banks or the Obama administration to create (1)_____ might just be a good thing. Surely investment in a high speed (2)_____ would benefit the American people? It would also (3)_____ American cities and take the (4)_____ right into the city thus making the journey time quicker. Of course, getting your average American to ditch their car is another thing. Compared to European (5)_____ American trains are a pale reflection – in terms of (6)_____, speed and relative (7)_____. What the Americans need to do is to modernise their rail networks and create a new high speed network. The Americans are upgrading a 24-mile section of track in New Jersey so that train speeds will reach an incredible 257kph by 2017. Wow! For a country that took man to the (8)_____ this is pretty sad. Change though is coming.

reconnect

trains

network

frequency

passengers

luxury

jobs

moon

GAP FILL: LISTENING

Listen and fill in the spaces.

Why doesn't the USA have high speed rail?

Why doesn't the USA have _____? Good question! China has them, so does Japan. They _____. All run between 300-431kph (186-268mph). Yet in America the fastest train does a mere 241kph (150mph) and that is over a _____. The average speed in the USA of a high speed train is an incredible 127kph (79mph)! The USA seems to _____. The definition to Americans of high speed trains is the Acela Express that runs from New York to Washington DC. Why is this so? It is probably because Americans prefer to _____, as it's cheaper. The other reason is the motor car. Another reason is the lack of investment. Considering the size of America these days it is cheaper and quicker to fly than to take the train between cities. However, if the price was right and the speed of the railways was increased all that could change. The latter though involves some _____.

A bit of investment by the American banks or the _____ to create jobs might just be a good thing. Surely investment in a _____ would benefit the American people? It would also reconnect American cities and take the passengers right into the city thus making the journey time quicker. Of course, getting your _____ ditch their car is another thing. Compared to European trains American trains are a pale reflection – in terms of frequency, speed and relative luxury. What the Americans _____ modernise their rail networks and create a new high speed network. The Americans are upgrading a 24-mile section of track in New Jersey so that train speeds will reach an incredible 257kph by 2017. Wow! For a country that _____ this is pretty sad. _____.

GRAMMAR

Put the words into the gaps in the text.

Why doesn't the USA have high speed rail?

Why doesn't the USA have high speed trains? Good question! China has them, so does Japan. (1)___ are all over Europe. All run between 300-431kph (186-268mph). Yet in America the fastest train does a mere 241kph (150mph) and that is over a very short distance. The average speed in the USA of a high speed train is an incredible 127kph (79mph)! The USA seems to have got left behind. The definition to Americans of high speed trains is the Acela Express (2)___ runs from New York to Washington DC. Why is (3)___ so? It is probably because Americans prefer to fly between cities, as it's cheaper. The other reason is the motor car. Another reason is the lack of investment. Considering the size of America (4)___ days it is cheaper and quicker to fly than to take the train between cities. (5)___, if the price was right and the speed of the railways was increased all that (6)___ change. The latter (7)___ involves (8)___ considerable investment.

these

this

some

though

could

that

they

however

A bit of investment (1)___ the American banks (2)___ the Obama administration to create jobs might just be a good thing. Surely investment in (3)___ high speed network would benefit the American people? (4)___ would also reconnect American cities (5)___ take the passengers right into the city thus making the journey time quicker. (6)___ course, getting your average American to ditch their car is another thing. Compared to European trains American trains are a pale reflection – in terms of frequency, speed and relative luxury. What the Americans need to do is to modernise their rail networks and create a new high speed network. The Americans are upgrading a 24-mile section of track in New Jersey (7)___ that train speeds will reach an incredible 257kph by 2017. Wow! For a country that took man to (8)___ moon this is pretty sad. Change though is coming.

a

it

or

so

of

by

and

the

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SPELLING TEST

The teacher will ask the class individually to spell the following words that are in the article. Afterwards, check your answers with your teacher, using the following ratings: **Pass = 12, Good = 15, Very good = 18, Excellent = 20**

1	definition	11	reliance
2	prevails	12	probably
3	hostility	13	incredible
4	luxury	14	administration
5	though	15	just
6	considerable	16	quicker
7	frequency	17	latter
8	surely	18	investment
9	reconnect	19	modernise
10	between	20	passengers

LINKS

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-15251180>

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/High-speed_rail_in_the_United_States

<http://answers.yahoo.com/question/index?qid=20111003063430AAYh3pB>

<http://www.infrastructurist.com/2010/01/04/why-doesnt-the-us-have-decent-rail-service-blame-democracy/>

<http://www.bnet.com/blog/travel-detective/train-envy-will-we-ever-get-high-speed-rail-in-the-us/306>

ANSWERS

GAP FILL: Why doesn't the USA have high speed rail? Why doesn't the USA have high speed trains? Good question! China has them, so does Japan. They are all over Europe. All run between 300-431kph (186-268mph). Yet in America the fastest train does a **mere** 241kph (150mph) and that is over a very short distance. The average speed in the USA of a high speed train is an **incredible** 127kph (79mph)! The USA seems to have got left behind. The **definition** to Americans of high speed trains is the Acela Express that runs from New York to Washington DC. Why is this so? It is **probably** because Americans prefer to **fly** between cities, as it's cheaper. The other reason is the motor car. Another reason is the lack of investment. Considering the size of America these days it is cheaper and quicker to fly than to take the train between cities. However, if the price was right and the speed of the **railways** was increased all that could change. The **latter** though involves some considerable **investment**.

A bit of investment by the American banks or the Obama administration to create **jobs** might just be a good thing. Surely investment in a high speed **network** would benefit the American people? It would also **reconnect** American cities and take the **passengers** right into the city thus making the journey time quicker. Of course, getting your average American to ditch their car is another thing. Compared to European **trains** American trains are a pale reflection – in terms of **frequency**, speed and relative **luxury**. What the Americans need to do is to modernise their rail networks and create a new high speed network. The Americans are upgrading a 24-mile section of track in New Jersey so that train speeds will reach an incredible 257kph by 2017. Wow! For a country that took man to the **moon** this is pretty sad. Change though is coming. **(V4)**

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