Implications of High Speed Rail on Urban Development in China

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China now has the largest and the fastest expanding high speed train network in the world. The impacts of this investment will unfold over many decades to come. There are many reasons why it is important to understand and gauge the impacts, not least that the debate on its costs and benefits is unabating in the media. Some of the reasons are related to two practical challenges in China’s urban development. First, high speed rail projects with a prima facie justification have largely been launched or completed – the remainder of the planned routes are mostly for the under-developed central and western regions, which requires careful consideration, planning and design in order to ensure that the on-going construction achieve the benefits as intended. Secondly, most cities on the high speed train network do not appear to be ready for the new transport connections – the new stations often have little to do with the cities and the upcoming expansion plans. This talk shows that the two challenges facing China’s high speed rail are common across the world, although the stake for resolving them in China is a magnitude higher. The talk therefore puts forward a generic approach to understanding and measuring the effects, and considers the long term impacts on urban development in this light. The talk would also be of interest to those who like to understand the impacts of high speed rail upon contemporary cities in other countries.

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