

Russia joins high-speed club

While California was voting to play "catch-up", high-speed trains were being delivered from their German makers to Russia.

The first of eight trains was shipped from Sassnitz in north Germany to the Russian Baltic Sea port of Ust Luga.

Dr Hans-Jörg Grundmann of train maker Siemens said: "Shipping the first Russian high-speed train marks another important milestone in the longstanding and successful partnership between Russia and Siemens."

"We are very proud that Siemens technology from Germany has helped Russia to now join the club of high speed countries."

Sassnitz-Mukran is the largest train ferry port in Germany, and the only one in central Europe with tracks for the Russian broad gauge, for which the Velaro train has been built.

The ships to Kaliningrad and Ust Luga were also fitted out with broad-gauge tracks.

The final 100-mile leg of the journey was overland to St Petersburg. In Germany, however, the 10-car broad-gauge train – built at Krefeld – had to go by road.

The trains are scheduled to go into service on the line between Moscow and St Petersburg at the end of 2009 and operate at 155mph.

We can only hope that rivalry between Russia and America will encourage development of high-speed rail.

In America, more people now know that in addition to its environmental advantages over air travel, high-speed rail offers a cheaper alternative, with less hassle.

And more recognise that just building more roads and expanding airports is not a sustainable option and is more expensive.

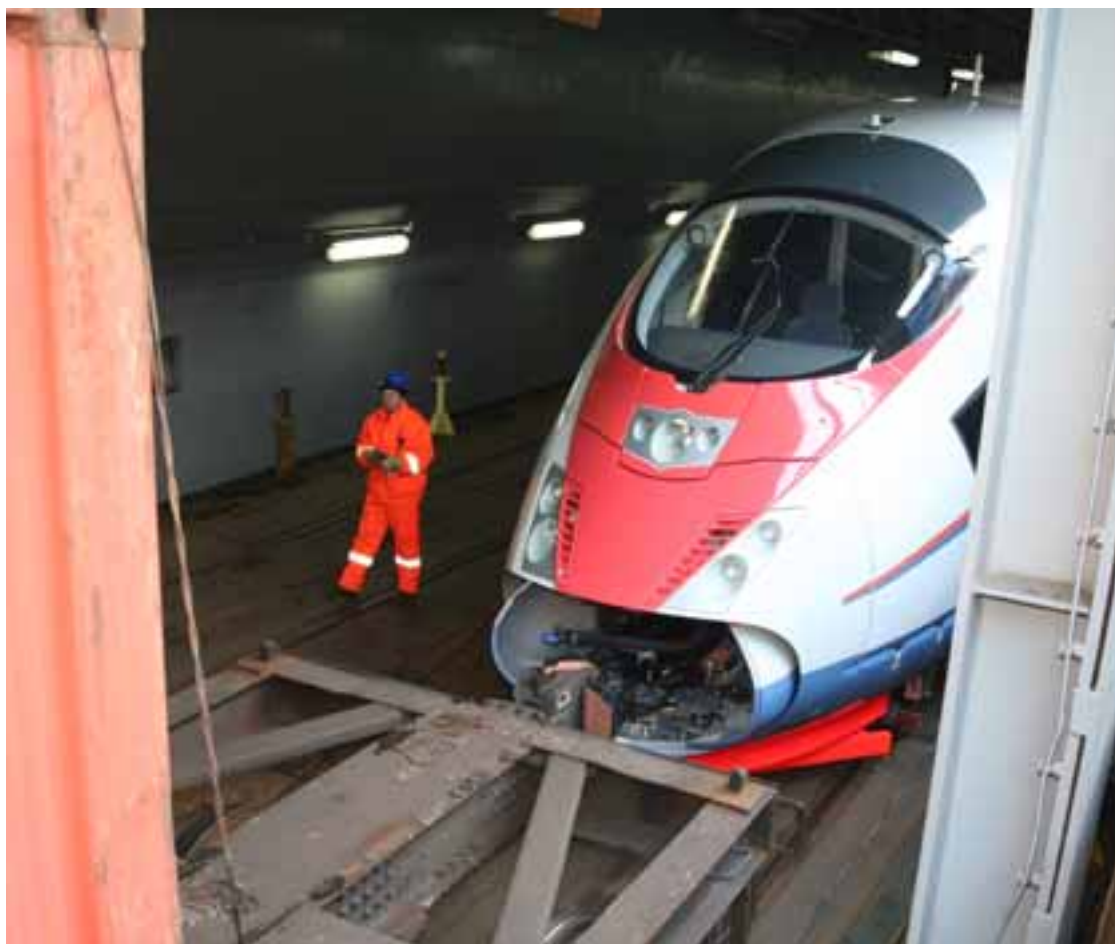
Quentin Kopp, chairman of the California High Speed Rail Authority, said: "With no operating subsidies and no new taxes, a reliable 220mph electric high-speed train system will reduce our dependence on foreign oil by more than 12 million barrels a year and reduce greenhouse gases that cause global warming by half a million tonnes annually."

The British Government and its Heathrow airhead friends should take note.

The Tories have stolen a march on the Government by professing to prefer high-speed rail to Heathrow expansion.

Railfuture's Graham Nalty gave a lecture in Birmingham to the Conservative Transport Group highlighting the advantages of high-speed rail.

He said: "The upgrading of the West Coast main line will not be sufficient to meet predicted capacity required in about 10 to 15 years.



THINK BIG: A German-built Velaro broad-gauge train is loaded on to the Baltic ferry Picture: Siemens

But it has cost as much as building a new high-speed line, and has caused an unacceptable level of travel disruption while being built.

"A study by Atkins in 2003 showed that building a new high-speed railway to the North from London would increase capacity more efficiently and effectively than upgrading the existing rail routes, spending large amounts of money building new roads or expanding airports to accommodate increased internal flights."

In addition, a high-speed line from London to the North could generate as much as £63billion in economic benefits. Graham concluded: "Let us have a high-speed line from London to Birmingham that is the first part of a UK high speed network. Let us have a high-speed line that serves the centre of Birmingham."

"Let us have a station in Birmingham city centre for high-speed line trains that can bring the greatest benefits to rail passengers and to the West Midlands economy."

But he added: "The benefits of a high-speed rail network from Scotland to the major cities in England and Wales are immense.

"The optimum choice of route would follow close to the existing West Coast main line going through the centres of both Manchester and Birmingham." In evidence to a Scottish Parliament

inquiry, Railfuture Scotland said: "We actively support further high-speed lines (186mph or higher) in Scotland and the UK.

"Rail usage in Scotland and the UK is expanding fast and the network needs new capacity.

"Enhancements on existing lines are highly disruptive to current train services and new high-speed lines can offer much greater capacity for the money invested, with much less disruption."

"Railfuture Scotland does not wish to see a reduction of investment in the current classic rail network as a result of investing in new high-speed lines."

Argentina is hoping to build the first high-speed railway in the Americas, before the California scheme is operational.

China began work in November on a high-speed rail link between Nanning and Guangzhou that will cut travel time between the two south China cities from almost 13 hours to three.

Japan's Kawasaki company, which has already supplied high-speed trains to China and Taiwan, has unveiled a 220mph high-speed train to compete in the global export market.

The "environmentally friendly" Super Express Train will have a lightweight aerodynamic body and, to ensure reliability, uses

components proven in service on Japan's Shinkansen network. By 2011 Japan will have an unbroken 800mile-long high-speed line from Tokyo to Kagoshima-Chuo.

Vietnam will get help from Japan to create a 200mph £22billion express rail service from Hanoi to Ho Chi Minh City.

South Korea is celebrating the beginning of production of locally produced 186mph trains at its Hyundai Rotem plant in Changwon after initially improving TGV-style trains from France.

Poland has approved a draft programme and environmental impact study for the development of high speed rail services.

The £6billion proposals envisage the construction of a Y-shaped network totalling 300 miles.

A line would run from Warsaw through Lodz to Kalisz, where it would split to serve Poznan and Wroclaw.

The new British Transport Secretary Geoff Hoon conformed to type by saying in October he was "passionate about assessing the scope for new lines, including high-speed ones." Lots of scope there for civil servants and consultants to confuse him with some "facts".

Even they can't carry on much longer with their ridiculous plans to convert rail lines into guided busways. Or can they?