

railwatch

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Picture: SIEMENS

High-speed rail comes in from the cold

This is Russia's new high-speed train undergoing trials on the Moscow-St Petersburg line.

It is a warming reminder that high-speed rail is becoming normal throughout the world – and may even happen in Britain if politicians' promises are kept. There are now high-speed lines in 12 countries and more under construction or in preparation in another 13.

But the rest of the world is being left way behind China, where this year 1,400 miles of high-speed track will be opened. France plans to triple its existing 500-mile-long

high-speed network in 15 years but China is going to build 12,400 miles of high-speed railway.

The French are amazed Britain has stood on the sidelines for so long while they pick up much of the multi-million pound business available worldwide.

"There is no doubt that high-speed rail is ideal for the United Kingdom," said David Azema, director of strategy at French national railways. "It will be easier to provide in Britain than in France."

The German-built 155mph Velaro – called the Sapsan in Russia and pictured above – was accompa-

nied on its demonstration run by St Petersburg governor Valentina Matviyenko.

When in service, it will complete the journey from Moscow to St Petersburg in just under four hours, compared to five hours by plane (city centre to city centre).

Russian Railways president Vladimir Yakunin said: "The involvement of Russian scientists and specialists in the Sapsan production project provides a good impetus to the introduction of cutting-edge innovation technology to Russian industry." In Britain, Transport Secretary Lord Adonis is

a great believer in high-speed rail.

"We need the political will and a credible plan," he said. "And in time we can be a world leader in rail technology again."

But he added: "A high-speed line will never be built unless all political parties agree. We need a broad national consensus."

Shadow Transport secretary Theresa Villiers said: "Plans for a high-speed line will go ahead if the Conservatives are elected to government. I welcome this initiative with warmth and enthusiasm."

The reasons why: Centre pages