

State Supports Tunnel Construction in Shanghai

Construction of a tunnel beneath the Yangtze River to connect [Shanghai](#)'s Pudong District with Chongming Island has been approved by the central government with the aim of resolving the island's transportation problems.

Gong Deqing, secretary of the Chongming County Party Committee, said the lack of transportation had been an obstacle to Chongming's development. "Once the problem is resolved, Chongming will welcome a golden era," said Gong.

Located at the estuary of the Yangtze, the 1,200-square kilometre Chongming, China's third largest island, accounts for one-fifth of Shanghai's territory, but is only linked to the downtown area by a ferry service.

Shi Yuanming, chief of the county's transportation bureau, said it takes more than 30 minutes to travel from downtown Shanghai to Chongming, compared with 4 to 5 hours 40 years ago. Even so, it is "still troublesome" for the 650,000 Chongming residents to travel to Shanghai, he said.

Due to inconvenient transportation, the island's 2002 per capita GDP was only one-fifth of Shanghai's average.

Each ton of raw materials or products entering or exiting the island currently has an added transport cost of 90 yuan (US\$10.8), said Gong, noting the high cost of logistics had scared investors away.

In addition, frequent typhoons and fog on the river have added to transportation costs.

Gong said the tunnel project constitutes part of a plan to "catch up" with the downtown area.

With a total investment of 12.2 billion yuan (US\$1.47 billion), the tunnel will run 17 kilometres beneath the Yangtze, China's longest river. Construction of the tunnel will begin this year and be completed by 2007.

Given its present isolation, Chongming is strategically located at the intersection of China's coastal economic zone and the Yangtze Delta, Gong said, expressing his hope that the island's development will stimulate the local economies in the regions north of the Yangtze Delta. Shanghai has begun developing suburban Chongming County as part of its strategy to become a "world-class municipality."

With its annual per capita gross domestic product (GDP) reaching US\$5,000, Shanghai is entering a new stage of reaching annual per capita GDP at US\$8,000 to US\$10,000.

Shanghai has already launched development projects, including a tourist district along the banks of the Huangpu River, two deep-water ports and further development in its suburbs. Last year, it also won the bid to host the 2010 World Expo.

Shen Yufang, a professor specializing in urban development with East China Normal University, considers that the strategies all contribute to the upgrading of the city's different development phases. The Chongming project is a new impetus driving the city's development.

According to Feng Guoqin, Shanghai's vice-mayor, the city has expanded its development from downtown prosperity to the urbanization of its suburban areas, to the progress of neighbouring cities within the Yangtze Delta.

"Accounting for one-fifth of Shanghai's territory, Chongming Island is expected to provide ample opportunity for the city's further development and industrial structural adjustment with its low-cost land and labour force," Feng said.

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