

# Grand Paris Express

A PROJECT BEFITTING  
OF A MEGACITY





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**T**he Paris Metro is renowned the world over for being a work of art as much as a transit system. A total of 86 of the system’s stations retain their original art nouveau-inspired entrances, a throwback to the Belle Epoque. But this historic beauty, undoubtedly part of the metro’s charm, also tells of its need to modernize. 100 years ago, the Paris urban area held a population of less than 5 million people. In 2021, that number has tripled.

This calls for a modern transport system, capable of meeting the demands of one of

the world’s megacities, and connecting the centre of Paris with its surrounding region in Île-de-France. The Grand Paris Express will be central to delivering on this mandate. Business Excellence recently spoke with La Société du Grand Paris, the organisation heading up the project, which is currently the largest transport project in Europe.

**Project Overview**

The statistics that underpin the project show why it is considered to be the largest of its

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kind in Europe. In total, there are 68 new stations, 200 kilometres of new railway, and four additional lines on which a new automatic metro will run. Ninety percent of this will be underground and it will accommodate 2 million passengers per day.. This last statistic alone would put it among Europe’s largest transit systems all on its own.

This will bring numerous benefits, of course. Grand Paris Express opens a whole range of opportunities for the inhabitants of Paris. These include improved access to



employment, health care, leisure, and culture. As well as playing a major role in rebalancing the metropolis, it promises to increase social cohesion for the population. The average journey time for remote parts of Paris to the city centre will be cut by over an hour.

And then, of course, there are the benefits that the project brings to other transport users. Grand Paris Express is an opportunity to rethink the travel habits of Parisians. Nowadays, the main road arteries around Paris are all gridlocked at peak times in hyperdense urban environments. This project creates the possibility of a more breathable and livable metropolis, with reduced greenhouse gases and road traffic.

Of course, delivering a project of this scale is a hugely collaborative effort. La Société du Grand Paris currently has more than 7,000 workers on its construction sites and should reach a peak of 15,000 by 2022 or 2023. A social inclusion clause in its contracts with all companies working on the project means that 10% of working hours must be delivered by people in occupational integration, and more than 2 million hours have already been covered by people fitting those criteria.

**Milestones**

Further good news comes in the form that the Grand Paris Express project is already well underway, with all of the lines now under construction. Line 14 should be ready for the Paris Olympic Games in 2024, while 84% of Line 15 is already complete. There are 10 TBM tunnel diggers working around the clock to deliver this line on time, and La Société du

*“Line 14 should be ready for the Paris Olympic Games in 2024, while 84% of Line 15 is already complete”*



Grand Paris has already finished station walls, with facilities such as wifi and AC soon to be delivered.

Everywhere you look, there's something going on. There's ongoing work on Line 16, and 7 TBMs are currently working on Line 17, which had its first TBM Florence launch in January 2021. La Société du Grand Paris also expects to launch the first TBM on Line 18 very shortly, and is already drawing up a contract for the development and supply of the trains for this line, which will be 35 kilometres long in total.

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**Socioeconomic and Environmental Benefits**

Like any modern transport system, Grand Paris Express is not an end in itself, but rather part of a bigger question around the evolution of the city it serves. This means interconnectivity with the city centre, education, health, and technology hubs, and the city's three airports. It will improve the attractiveness of the territory, the functioning of labour and housing markets, and will lead to job creation and productivity gain for businesses and public services.



*“The Covid-19 pandemic in Paris has the potential to be hugely disruptive for ongoing work on Grand Paris Express”*

There are also tangible socioeconomic benefits that have already been planned to align with the project. For example, by 2030, 140km<sup>2</sup> of land around Grand Paris Express stations will be turned into new mixed-use districts. The Société du Grand Paris, private developers, and public housing authorities have already started several land development programs, which will improve the living conditions of millions of people living in the area.

Decarbonization is also a central tenet of the project. An estimated 70% of the aforementioned houses will be built with bio-based materials, including 50% French wood. An estimated three quarters of French people use their cars to get to work. This project will encourage people to switch to public transport and contribute to a better environment. The Grand Paris Express will save up to 27.6 million tons of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions by 2050.

### **Covid 19**

The Covid-19 pandemic in Paris has the potential to be hugely disruptive for ongoing work on Grand Paris Express. However, far from grounding to a halt, works have instead adapted to the new environment: “Progress continues at a good pace, despite the ongoing crisis for more than a year but this hasn’t been without its consequences on our construction sites.

After a 4 to 6 weeks shutdown in the spring of 2020, it took several weeks to rearm the construction sites and find an optimal organization that remains conditioned on the Covid pandemic and its consequences. This



crisis caused about 3 to 8 months of delay on the lines under construction. The challenge remains to optimize the thousands of tasks required to the conception of each line to redefine realistic commissioning dates.

### **The Future**

As the only remaining megacity in the EU, Paris has justifiable grounds to lay claim to being the bloc’s most important city. The Grand Paris Express project is central to ensuring that it continues to be one of the world’s economic powerhouses. Not only does it promise to take millions of daily car journeys from the suburban streets of Paris, it also creates economic opportunities for all. That is something that everyone can celebrate. **BE**

GRAND PARIS EXPRESS

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