

THE GRAND PARIS EXPRESS*

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The idea of a “Greater Paris” is not new. Already in the 19th century, Napoleon III wanted to expand the capital by annexing neighbouring municipalities. The idea of building grand boulevards was also born in this period. Today, the challenges are identical, with efforts to turn Paris and its region comparable to mega-cities like Tokyo or New York. From the very beginning of thinking about a Greater Paris, transport has been considered a key factor in the construction of the new metropolis.

The Grand Paris Express is a project consisting of new fast lines and extensions of existing lines being built in the Île-de-France region of France [2]. The creation of the Grand Paris Express aims to make some underserved areas more accessible and thus increase the supply of housing in Île-de-France, including social housing. These new developments must be part of a new model for a sustainable city.

Introduction

Life in metropolitan areas is constantly accelerating and facing fierce competition. In the conditions of globalization, this requires the difficult management of often drastic decisions that have to

be made on a daily basis in the heart of the global city [1].

The Grand Paris Express project will change the face of Greater Paris and the lives of all its inhabitants. It is a major development project covering more

than 200 km and 68 brand new stations are being built [2].

It is currently the largest development project in Europe. The Grand Paris Express will provide fast connections between suburban areas with four new

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metro lines around Paris. Nearly 3 million passengers will have a faster way to get to their destinations. It will bring jobs, education, modern health facilities and leisure activities closer to residents near the Paris Metro [3]. The lines will run through both the inner and outer suburbs, passing through every department of the Paris region except Paris [4].

Greater Paris and the Grand Paris Express

Greater Paris has a total population of almost 7 million, making it the largest metropolitan area in France. It is divided into 12 territories with at least 300,000 inhabitants and covers an area of 814 km², it is not only a territorial reorganization, but also a new administrative and political body with a special status and its own tax system. Greater Paris is Europe's leading employment centre and the world's top tourist destination, with almost 47 million visitors, and is a major driver of the national economy. Every day, 8.5 million passengers use public transport in the Île-de-France region. The inhabitants of the Île-de-France region spend on average 1 hour and 20 minutes on public transport every day [5].

The Grand Paris Express is a new transport concept whose main objective is to better integrate the centre of Paris with the surrounding suburbs and the Île-de-France region. There is a need for a significant improvement of the transport infrastructure both outwards and inwards. It is necessary for the economic development, competitiveness and strengthening of Greater Paris as a global player, as well as for the social cohesion of its inhabitants, environmental sustainability, solving urban problems and improving quality of life [8].

Brief History and Present

The idea of a Greater Paris is not new. In the 19th century, Napoleon III wanted to expand the capital by annexing neighbouring municipalities. He entrusted Baron Haussmann with the task of transforming Paris into a great modern

metropolis to rival London. Revolutionary transformations were taking place at a time of horse-drawn carriages and river transport on the Seine. In 1900, the first sections of the metro were set up, which gradually became the backbone of the public transport system. This contributed to the development of further urbanisation. In the early twentieth century, the Paris metro began to take shape, with a peak phase in the 1950s and 1960s. In the 1970s, the metro was modernized and RER – Regional express network (*Réseau Express Régional*) lines were introduced. These measures were intended to prevent territorial expansion and congestion from car traffic [2].

In 2007 was created and initiated the concept "Greater Paris" by French President Nicolas Sarkozy, aimed to transform the Paris metropolitan area into a globally competitive metropolis for the 21st century. It focused on improving urban planning, expanding infrastructure, especially public transport, and promoting sustainable development. The project was to address problems of overcrowding, traffic, social segregation and the environment, while seeking to integrate the suburbs with the city centre and to reinforce Paris as a major economic and cultural centre on a global scale [2].

Parisians have become accustomed to travelling by public transport or on foot, and more than half of them have already abandoned the car. However, this is not the case for the suburbs, where the car is not only the preferred but also the necessary mode of travel due to the chronic shortage of public transport links. Paris is one of the 10 most congested cities in terms of congestion from car traffic [6]. Paris has long benefited from a very efficient metro, RER, and rail transport network. RER stations do not currently provide sufficient coverage of the suburbs, unlike the metro in the city centre and the Paris rail transport network was never designed as a metropolitan network.

As Alain Cluzet [7] writes, the Greater Paris region is accelerating to keep pace with other metropolises. *"The more we save time, the more time escapes us and the more we hunger for it. We need to*

move faster so as not to fall behind our competitors. This acceleration is very visible in Paris, thanks to major projects and impressive buildings. The demand for transport improvements is also exponential due to the various effects of metropolitan attraction, the uninterrupted growth of individual mobility and tourism."

The Main Objectives of the Grand Paris Express

Regional Development

The balanced development of the Capital Region is a matter of national interest and global impact. New Greater Paris is a certain idea of regional equity, with the aim of reshaping the region to achieve a better balance between east and west, between Paris and its suburbs, and between rich and poor areas [6]. At the same time as modernising existing networks, it will strengthen equality between the region's territories by serving areas that are currently isolated and offering better infrastructure and services [6].

Strategic Development Poles

No major city can aspire to become a global metropolis unless sufficient synergies are created. The challenge for Greater Paris is to prioritise the maintenance of the main daily European and transcontinental connections with other metropolises through airport transport, Orly and Roissy Charles de Gaulles airports (the third largest airport in the world), to make them accessible to the city and to relocate other less strategic destinations to the smaller Beauvais airport. So far, no direct metro to either airport has been introduced. Equally, the aim is to make accessible the Saclay scientific platform, the main "centre of excellence" in the Paris region, which is in theory a 20-minute drive from Orly, although due to current traffic conditions it takes 2 hours to get there. The aim is also to make La Défense, Europe's leading business district, accessible [1].

Housing

The creation of the Grand Paris Express also aims to make some underserved

areas more accessible and to increase the supply of housing in the Île-de-France region. The housing shortage in mainland France is a serious social problem. In Paris, the lack of supply has led to an unprecedented rise in property prices, which is preventing many households from finding housing. To get out of the housing crisis, Greater Paris needs to catch up with the new housing construction and offer affordable housing to its residents. The 2010 Greater Paris Act foresees the construction of housing, 30% of which will be social housing. These should be concentrated close to future Grand Paris Express stations in order to relieve congestion in Paris. Faster and easier travel will mean better access to employment areas for Greater Paris residents [5]. According to the Société du Grand Paris, the developer of the project, once the Grand Paris Express is completed, 90% of the population of the Greater Paris region will live within 2 km of a station. It is expected that wherever the 4 new lines are easily accessible, there will be an economic boom [9]. Real estate projects in the area of metro stations will see the light of day. More than 100 development projects are planned in the station areas and about 8,000 houses will be built [4]. These projects will have to be part of a new sustainable city model and meet strict environmental criteria by giving priority to low-carbon construction methods [3]. At the heart of these projects are, for example, innovations to promote urban agriculture and the creation of buildings with shared services (car sharing, concierge services, etc.) [1].

Economic Activities

In addition to improving travel between suburbs for commuters, the Grand Paris Express is expected to boost economic activity in the Paris region. The seven million people living in the metropolis generate 75% of the regional GDP and 30% of the national GDP. After the creation of the Grand Paris Express, the metropolis is likely to generate even greater economic spillovers [5]. In the short term, the Grand Paris Express will create nearly 15,000 direct jobs per year in construction work [5]. It is estimated that after 2030, when all lines are open,

the new metro could create 100,000 jobs [4].

Demography

As in most Western metropolises, the demographic trend in Paris is not favourable. If the current demographic trend were to continue without taking into account the Grand Paris Express concept, the balance of population growth would continuously decrease until 2040 (mainly due to high rents and an ageing population). Paris is projected to be one of the Île-de-France departments with the highest proportion of inhabitants aged 75 and over (12%) [10]. The project therefore aims to attract young people of working age and the middle strata of the population.

Energy Efficiency and Environmental Impact

The metro in Greater Paris is also intended to be a model in terms of energy efficiency and environmental impact. It has been designed as an innovation laboratory for the development of a sustainable metropolis (transport accounts for 34% of greenhouse gas emissions). In addition to reducing the use of private cars and increasing the use of public transport, the Grand Paris Express project promotes intermodal transport, which allows easy transfers between different modes of transport. Modern trains are designed with energy savings in mind. They use regenerative braking to reduce energy consumption. For example, all Grand Paris metros will have thermal control and brake energy regeneration systems [6]. Optical fibre is to be laid under the rails so that the communication network can be widely deployed in the areas through which the trains pass. The possibility of reusing the heat produced is currently being investigated [2]. There is also an emphasis on minimising the carbon footprint during construction. Renewable energy sources such as solar panels at stations etc. are also being integrated into the project. Dozens of studies have been carried out which have taken into account many environmental criteria and have resulted in a series of commitments that are binding on

the developer, all partner companies and the architects [6].

Increasing Transport Efficiency

The lines will pass through the inner and outer suburbs, passing through all departments of the Paris region except for the centre of Paris (Figure 1). Some areas will be over-served, such as Seine-Saint-Denis.

Finally, to reduce commuting times, the metro should offer higher speeds, from 55 to 65 km/h on lines 15, 16 and 17. By comparison, the commercial speed of the RER A is 49 km/h and the Paris metro's peak speed is 21 to 27 km/h (but close to 40 km/h on line 14). This speed is also out of line with other means of transport: 19 km/h for cars in the city, 18 km/h for the T3 tram and 12 km/h for buses if they have a priority lane [6].

New Metro Stations and Areas of Influence

Stations play a central role in the development programmes of Greater Paris. They are designed as places where people can live and meet, helping to make the Paris region more attractive and create a more connected and welcoming metropolis. They are not just meant to be places that people pass through, but spaces open to urban life, with shops and services and housing that will support vitality and contribute to the quality of life of local residents [2].

As illustrated in Figure 1, for simplicity, the Grand Paris Express will create 7 main framework areas of influence that are directly linked to major transport hubs. It is here that the most significant spatial synergies are expected to take place. The economic development of Greater Paris will rely primarily on its main centres of activity, such as La Défense (financial centre), Plaine Commune (cultural and creative centre), Roissy-Charles De Gaulle (international business centre), Le Bourget (aviation centre) and the Saclay plateau (new centre of scientific and technological innovation). These clusters should con-

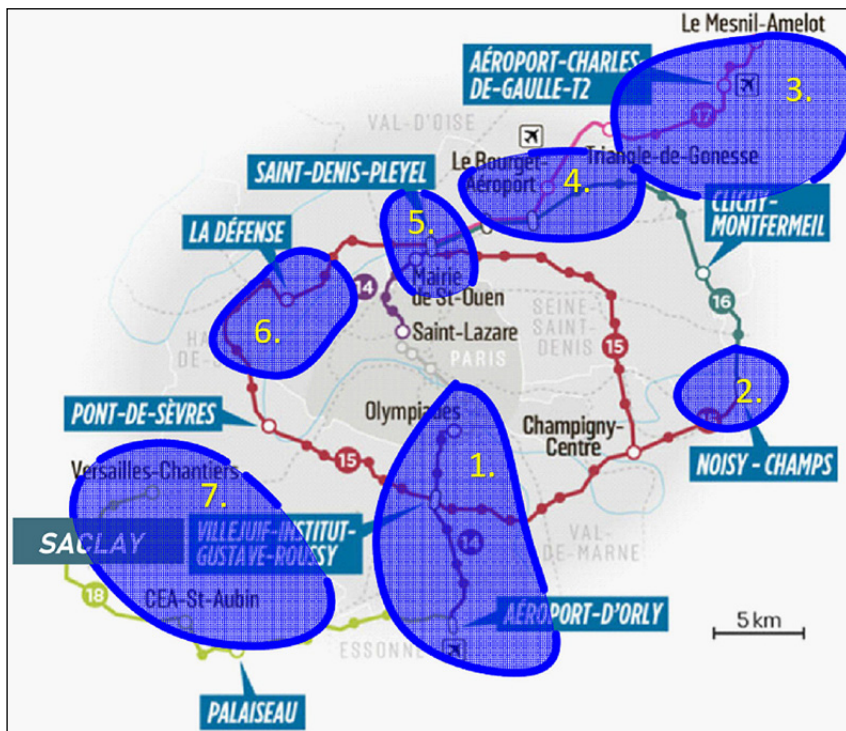


Fig. 1: Overview of the most significant impact areas directly linked to transport routes and nodes [author's archive]

tribute to the attractiveness and competitiveness of the Greater Paris metropolitan area on a global scale [5].

Area Plaine Commune, Direction Only, Line 14, 15, 18

An area which is directly linked to the city centre and towards Orly airport. The aim is to integrate this area, through new stations, into the existing urban and economic fabric and to make the best use of the link between the public space and the station. There are new eco-neighbourhoods such as Victor Hugo and Pierre Plate, located on a large square of 5,000 m². The future stations will contribute to the development of a new centre with a market, shops and public facilities. Priority will be given to ecologic modes of transport, pedestrian zones, and bus services will be organised around the station block. The area also includes a link to Orly airport. In the direction of Orly airport, there is the Le Pont de Pungis development area, which is currently undergoing profound urban changes [11].

Area Noisy – Champs, Line 15,16

The future Noisy – Champs station is a direct extension of the RER A station

and will serve the surrounding neighbourhoods and their 23,000 inhabitants. The station will be located on several levels. At the same time, the area will be connected to the routes of the existing railway [11].

Roissy-Charles De Gaulle Area, Line 17

The area is an important logistical and strategic hub as it provides access to Charles de Gaulle airport and allows transcontinental connections. It is located in an area of major urban renewal with major integration constraints. The design of the transport interchange must take into account the existing and future transport system: bus interchange, RER and Grand Paris Express stations and high-speed rail links. The future TGV Aéroport Charles de Gaulle 2 station is located here. It will provide a quality service to air passengers and platform staff by facilitating connections to Seine-Saint-Denis, Paris, Hauts-de-Seine and Val d'Oise in particular [11].

Area Le Bourget Aéroport, Line 16, 17

The station is proposed for three adjacent towns. It is the link between the

Paris-Le Bourget aeronautical hub, the Aeronautical and Astronautical Museum, the Le Bourget exhibition centre and the Le Blanc-Mesnil residential area. The station consists of a four-sided open-air passenger area, which is used for daily services and for operations on the airport platform side. It is used daily by nearly 25 000 passengers [11].

Saint-Denis – Pleyel Area, Lines 14, 15, 16, 17

The Saint-Denis – Pleyel station is the new flagship of a mixed-use district that is undergoing a complete transformation and is prepared to become the central hub of the northern part of the Paris region. Located in Saint-Denis. In full operation, the new metro will welcome 250,000 passengers a day, the highest number of passengers of any station [11]. With platforms 28 m below ground and nine levels, four of which are underground, Saint-Denis – Pleyel station offers intelligent connections to lines 14, 15, 16 and 17 and to the RER-D. Level -3 is an intermediate platform where the generosity of space and the quiet atmosphere help to facilitate travel. Line 14 provides, among other things, a connection to the Olympic Village. The activities of the interchange are being implemented in stages, with Line 14 which was opened in May 2024, on the occasion of the Olympic Games. Then Lines 15, 16 and 17 by 2030 will be opened. Pleyel Station, with its design, is intended to represent pride in a magnificent work of construction and engineering. The station will be designed with accessibility for all in mind, including people with reduced mobility, and will be integrated into the “Smart City” concept with the integration of modern technologies. The area around the station will also be used for various public and cultural events. At the same time, a new business cluster, an environment for research, development, innovation and entrepreneurship with opportunities for Startups is being formed [14].

Paris La Défense Area, Line 15, 18

It is mainly represented by La Défense station, which will be part of the emblematic business district of the same name. It is located to the north-west of

the historic centre of Paris. The aim is to contribute to the creation of a modern international business hub by integrating the RER E station and the Grand Paris Express station into a mixed, lively environment mainly with offices, businesses, shops but also housing [11].

Saclay Area, Line 18

It is situated twenty kilometres from the centre of the French metropolis, in the middle of a forest, with futuristic buildings. The Paris-Saclay campus has grown up in an area with 430,000 inhabitants and is now one of the ten most important scientific centres in the world. Together with institutions for advanced education (grandes écoles) and public research centres, thousands of private companies are active here in sectors such as information and communication technologies, healthcare, energy efficiency, aeronautics, defence, security and mobility. This vast area accounts for more than 15% of the scientific research activity carried out throughout France and will soon be linked to the centre of Paris by line 18 [11].

Financing Methods and Economic Benefits

As of 30 June 2020, the total cost of the Grand Paris Express is estimated at €42 billion. The financing of the project consists of a combination of several sources. Thus, the financing consists mainly of state funding, loans, regional contributions, special taxes, such as an increase in property tax near the new metro stops, an increase in the tax on office space, through public-private partnerships or through tourist tax [2].

It is estimated that the Grand Paris Express will generate more than €73 billion over the next 50 years. The increase in the value of real estate located near the Grand Paris Express route is expected to increase by between 5% and 10%, which is also expected to generate a potential total capital gain of between €850 million and €1.7 billion [6].

Specific Land Acquisition Methods, Procurement and Policies

Zone d'Aménagement Concerté (ZAC) – Joint Development Zone

Zone d'Aménagement Concerté is a public urban planning operation whose aim is to consolidate and prepare building plots with a view to their subsequent sale or concession to public or private users. (Article L 311-1 of the French Town and Country Planning Act). It provides local authorities with the legal, financial and technical framework for the implementation of land development projects. It allows the urban development project to be drawn up in consultation with the local population concerned and the development operation to be carried out. The ZAC is a public initiative and a procedure in the public interest. It is particularly suitable for large-scale and complex urban development projects (involving a large number of landowners). It must be a coherent concept that meets the needs of future residents and users, its location and its importance in the city [12].

Urban Renewal Project (PRU) – Projet de Rénovation Urbaine

The urban renewal project is developed by the local authority, which works in partnership with the various actors (e.g. social housing owners) and is in constant contact with the public institutions and the regions. The project usually lasts several years. These are projects to better integrate certain neighbourhoods, to achieve their permanent transformation – demolition of dwellings due to obsolescence or to improve urban organisation, opening up neighbourhoods, diversification of housing and functional content, making public/private spaces more transparent, adaptation of housing stock and standards, development of public facilities (new schools, nurseries, development of new schools, etc.), the creation or renovation of commercial, social and cultural facilities, the renovation and development of social rental housing, the improvement of urban spaces and the creation of alleys to demarcate residential blocks etc.

Urban regeneration policy is led by the ANRU – National Agency for Urban Renewal (*Agence Nationale pour la Rénovation Urbaine*), a public industrial and commercial institution. ANRU can contribute to the financing of the above operations, as well as to the financing of the engineering work needed to implement and manage the projects. ANRU's financial contribution is adjusted according to the actual contribution of the project to the urban renewal of the district. The amount of this assistance is also conditional on the efforts of the local authority and the other financial partners and adjusted according to their financial situation [13].

Negative Aspects

France is known for its long formal approval processes. Approvals are subject to rigorous assessment against standards and laws, thus in the time of realisation, they can be outdated and cannot no longer absorb new development trends. They cannot thus be able to respond to the challenges in the open world of globalisation. An international company will hesitate to set up its headquarters in La Défense if construction is delayed by 7 to 10 years, whereas the same delay is 5 years in London and less than 3 years in Shanghai [7].

The project has encountered a number of problems during its genesis, perhaps the most significant of which relates to financing. Compared to the original estimates, the costs have increased several times, necessitating a reassessment of other investments. Together with the global COVID pandemic, this has slowed down construction work compared to the planned timelines. Another problem is the technical constraints related to space and space limits. It encounters unexpected needs to adapt to the already existing environment and infrastructure. The project also faces administrative and political problems as it involves many actors. It is accompanied by a challenging coordination of several levels, governmental regional and municipal, which requires extensive public debates, consultations and subsequent changes to the plans. Some critics consider the idea of Grand



Fig. 2: Sample of the interactive map portal, examples of ZAC and PRU areas near Grand Paris Express stops [14] [author's archive]



Fig. 3: New ZAC neighbourhood in Saint Quen in Seine – ecological neighbourhood [author's archive]



Fig. 4: Old and new face of ZAC Saint-Denis – Peyel [author's archive]

Paris Express routes to be simplistic and limited, which in a sense may promote dispersion rather than concentration and deepen social segregation. They argue that the natural flow of residents heading to work is less encouraged [15]. For example, some sections of lines 16, 17 and 18 pass through areas of very low population density. At the same time, analyses show that stations are located in areas where unemployment rates are low and areas with higher unemployment rates are less connected.

The growing attractiveness of newly built neighbourhoods, rising real estate prices may cause crowding out of the less affluent classes, gentrification and weakening of natural social ties [3]. Critics suggest that this is the beginning of increasing spatial polarization and the displacement of problems to the hinterland of the city. On the one hand, the economic empowerment of newly built neighbourhoods and, on the other hand, the impoverishment of other – peripherally located neighbourhoods, their spontaneous sprawl and the accumulation of problems brought about by new socially marginalised residents [16].

Conclusions

Given the traffic congestion in growing metropolises, there is no technical solution that can provide a one-size-fits-all answer. Global cities are tremendous accelerators of innovation driven by the imperative of speed [1]. However, innovation does not usually lead to time savings, but to increased use of the innovation itself. The mobile phone has not only replaced meetings but has also made it possible to organise more and more of them. Telework has replaced office work, but it has also diversified and multiplied the forms of activity. Similarly with transport infrastructure. The Grand Paris Express is certainly a great engine of growth and fluidity, but no one can confirm that it will solve the problem of exponential demand [7].

Despite criticism that the project does not sufficiently promote polycentrism and connections between places of living, working and leisure, the vision

of the Greater Paris transport system is unique. Setting up a “robust” system for a world-class metropolis to compete in a fierce competition is not easy.

As one of the key components of the Greater Paris project, the Grand Paris Express is expected to fundamentally change mobility in the region, bringing a better quality of life for its residents, driving new development and transformation of underdeveloped areas, creating the conditions for new housing and amenities and a wealth of new services.

The project is also a flagship in the field of eco-innovation, energy-efficient technologies and renewable sources. It promotes combined intermodal transport and will contribute to the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions. Promoting public mobility can also contribute to achieving urbanisation savings, improving the quality of public space and achieving a higher concentration of people in strategic locations.

The Grand Paris Express can have a significant economic benefit not only for the region but for the whole country. An efficient transport system can significantly reinforce the agglomeration advantages and specialisation of the metropolis by contributing to the formation and strengthening of clusters of research, development and innovation, commerce, services and logistics, thus at the same time enhancing the economic and cultural prestige of Paris at a global level. It will also contribute to

the transfer of innovation and creative ideas, which have played an exceptional role in the country's and the world's history.

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SLOVENSKÝ ABSTRAKT

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Myšlienka „Veľkého Paríža“ nie je nová. Už v 19. storočí chcel Napoleon III. rozšíriť hlavné mesto anektovaním susedných obcí. V tomto období sa zrodila aj myšlienka budovania veľkých bulvárov. Dnes sú výzvy totožné, so snahou premeniť Paríž a jeho región porovnateľný s mega mestami ako Tokio alebo New York. Od začiatkov úvah o veľkom Paríži bola doprava považovaná za kľúčový faktor pri výstavbe novej metropoly.

Grand Paris Express je projekt pozostávajúci z nových rýchlych liniek a predĺženia existujúcich liniek, ktoré sa budujú v regióne Île-de-France vo Francúzsku. Vytvorenie Grand Paris Express má za cieľ sprístupniť niektoré nedostatočne obsluhované oblasti, a tak zvýšiť ponuku bývania v Île-de-France vrátane sociálneho bývania. Tieto nové stavby musia byť súčasťou nového modelu trvalo udržateľného mesta.