

# Beijing express on line

by

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CHINA-BOUND travellers may soon go all the way from Hongkong to Beijing by train if the Kowloon-Canton Railway Corporation (KCRC) has its way.

The commercial director of the corporation, Mr Abraham Razack, told *The Standard* that the Hongkong-Beijing direct train is expected to make its maiden journey in the middle of next year.

Negotiations are now being conducted with the Guangzhou Railway Administration on the frequency and other operational details of the new service, he said.

It is understood that in the initial stage there will be one train going in each direction every day.

Mr Razack said that travelling time should be about 36 hours one way and the compartments of the train will be partitioned into small cabins, each of which will accommodate four passengers.

"It will be a comfortable journey. We hope we can make use of the service to contribute to tourist development on the mainland.

"Indeed we would like to make the Kowloon-Canton Railway a real gateway to China," he said.

If the planned service were to materialise, it would certainly provide a very attractive alternative for local or foreign tourists to go to the Chinese capital.

At present, the only direct link between Hongkong and Beijing is by air. But due to an increasing volume of passenger traffic, it is becoming difficult to get a ticket for the journey.

If one travels by land, one would have to go first to Guangzhou and then take the north-bound train to Beijing.

Fares for the proposed train service are being worked out but it is believed that they will be much less than the air fares and are expected to be close to the sum passengers now pay for the Guangzhou-Beijing journey.

As in the direct trains to Guangzhou, all ticketing operations will be handled by China Travel Service.

Mr Razack said that the Hongkong-Beijing direct train is only a part of the corporation's ambitious plan to promote international travel.

He said that the service, if it proves successful, might be extended later to other mainland cities which are favourite tourist destinations.

The Kowloon-Canton section may also become the last leg of the famous Orient Express in two years, he said.

Arrangements are in the pipeline to extend the journey of the luxurious train tour, which starts off in Europe, to China and finally to end in Hongkong.

Talking about the existing direct train service to Guangzhou, Mr Razack said that a fourth train is likely to be scheduled early next year.

He added that the railway authorities, in both Hongkong and Guangzhou, are fully geared for the additional service but the manpower constraints of the local immigration department may slow down the pace.