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Czech-French cooperation on high-speed lines celebrates its 5th anniversary

Správa železnic and the French state railways group SNCF have been working together on the Czech high-speed lines (HSL) for 5 years. During this time, a detailed manual on how to design, build and operate the lines has been prepared. Thanks to this cooperation, the Czech Republic is already designing more than 300 km of new lines. Their technical design takes into account all the experience gained by French colleagues during more than 40 years of operation of TGV trains and the high-speed line system.

The cooperation continues from 2021 onwards based on an eight-year contract concluded between Správa železnic and SNCF Réseau. The French colleagues provide the Czech ones with expert services for the design, construction, operation and inspection of new lines as well as their experience in the management of the preparation of large infrastructure projects. Jiří Svoboda, Director General of Správa železnic, confirms that the close ties between the companies contribute to accelerating the preparation of the HSL: *"We could come up with our own technical solutions. However, years ago, the decision was made to take inspiration from a working system that is efficient, tested and will help us offer high-speed service to passengers as soon as possible. The preparations progress so far confirms that we made the right decision."* But cooperation is not only at the level of infrastructure managers. A bilateral working group at the level of the Czech and French ministries of transport is also involved in the project.

Správa železnic can also draw inspiration from the financing of HSL and the introduction of modern technologies. This is not only the subject of the ongoing Czech – French Railway Days 2023, which are organised by the French Embassy, Business France ČR and the Association for Infrastructure Development. On the agenda, there are discussions on the functioning of PPP railway projects, the issue of green bonds and the risks related to planning new infrastructure.

Správa železnic is currently designing more than 300 km of high-speed lines. The furthest along are the sections of the VRT Moravská brána (HSL Moravian Gate) between Prosenice and Ostrava, the VRT Jižní Morava (HSL South Moravia) between Modřice and Šakvice or the VRT Polabí (HSL Elbe Flatlands) from Prague to Poříčany. Intensive preparation is also underway on the arm from Prague to Dresden, where contractors are preparing documentation for zoning decision for the section of the VRT Podřipsko (HSL Říp Flatlands) between the capital and the Lovosice exit. The future longest tunnel in Central Europe is also getting its technical design. The Krušnohorský tunel (Ore Mountains Tunnel), with a length of at least 26 kilometres, is also the most complex infrastructure construction on the Czech HSL network.

The Czech Republic will operate lines at 320 km/h, similar to TGV in the land of high-speed trains. The French solution prefers to build the lines on the ground, which means fewer artificial structures such as tunnels or bridges. This result in lower construction and maintenance costs and the railway can be better integrated into the landscape.