

High-Speed Trains

Every day in places around the world, special trains called high-speed trains travel between cities at amazingly fast speeds. Passengers everywhere seem to love the ride these trains provide. Adam Lee, a teacher, recently rode a high-speed train in France. "I felt as if I was gliding along on a sheet of ice," he reported.

One type of high-speed train was first introduced in Japan about forty years ago. The train is low to the ground, and its nose looks somewhat like the nose of a jet. Because of its sleek design, the train is called a bullet train. Early bullet trains provided the first passenger service that moved at a speed of one hundred miles per hour. Today, bullet trains are even faster, traveling at speeds of almost two hundred miles per hour.

There are many reasons that high-speed trains are popular. For one thing, the trains have excellent safety records. In Japan, three billion passengers have ridden on bullet trains, and yet not one person has ever been injured. In addition, high-speed trains do not use as much fuel as other forms of transportation. They are powered by electricity that comes from a wire running above the train. As a result, they burn less fuel than older trains and jets.

Another reason that high-speed trains are popular is their comfort. Passengers sit in wide, comfortable seats and watch the passing view from wide windows. In some trains, these happy customers are even served food and drinks.

Experts are using technology to design ever faster high-speed trains. One of the newest types makes use of magnets in the train

tracks. The magnets turn on and off rapidly, causing the train to “float” above the tracks. One train of this type can travel more than thirteen miles in just seven minutes!

In the future, high-speed trains will, no doubt, be even faster than they are today. In the meantime, if you ever have a chance to ride a high-speed train, don’t hesitate for a second. You may just miss your chance.

A Streetcar Museum

During the early part of the twentieth century, people rode trolleys, or streetcars, in some cities. These streetcars were small railroad cars that operated on tracks. The earliest streetcars were pulled by horses. They were introduced in New York City almost two hundred years ago. Later streetcars were powered by electricity, which came from overhead wires or from underground rails. The use of streetcars decreased after the first World War, when city leaders began to replace streetcars with buses.

Today, people can still ride streetcars in a few of our nation's cities. They can also see examples of streetcars at museums. For example, the Shore Line Trolley Museum has almost one hundred streetcars. The people who created this museum carefully selected the streetcars on display. They wanted to show their visitors all the different kinds of streetcars that once existed. Visitors learn that most streetcars were built during a thirty-year period now called the streetcar's "glory days." The oldest streetcar at the museum is about one hundred and forty years old, and still looks in good shape.

People who visit the museum usually start with a guided tour of the exhibits. They learn about the history of streetcars, how streetcars used power to run, and how streetcars affected people's lives. They also see objects such as photographs, streetcar schedules, and tickets. Next, they may stop by the workshop at the museum. There, they can watch workers repairing streetcars and preparing them for display.

Most visitors end their visit to the museum with a ride on a streetcar. The ride takes the passengers along a scenic three-mile

route, traveling on rails that have been in place for a hundred years. Like the other streetcars at the museum, these streetcars are furnished to look just like those used long ago. As the passengers listen to the screech of the brakes and feel the side-to-side movement of the cars, they travel far more than just the three-mile route—they also travel back in time.

What Now?

As the school bus pulled away from the school, Julia looked at her watch. Her class was headed to a park for the end-of-year picnic. The park was located about thirty miles outside of town, and the trip usually took about an hour. Even though she knew the bus trip would pass quickly, Julia was eager to get there. Her class had planned for relay races, swimming, and softball, and she couldn't wait for the fun to get started.

Julia sat in the back of the bus with her four best friends. When the bus went past the last building in town, the girls decided to sing songs to help the time pass more quickly. By the time they had sung "Row, Row, Row Your Boat," "On Top of Old Smoky," and "Puff the Magic Dragon," everyone on the bus was singing in loud, laughing voices.

When the class had been singing for about half an hour, the bus slowed down and pulled to a stop at the side of the road. The bus driver, looking puzzled, turned the key and listened as the engine made a whining sound and then died with a cough. Then he got off the bus, looked under the hood, and scratched his head. When he explained that he'd have to call for another bus, all the students moaned in disappointment.

About that time, a car appeared at the top of a hill. As it pulled to the side of the road and parked behind the bus, Julia recognized the driver as her grumpy neighbor Mr. Lewis. "He's so grumpy, I doubt that he'd ever want to help a busload of children," Julia thought.

Mr. Lewis got a box of tools from the trunk of his car and walked to the front of the bus. A few minutes later, the bus

engine was humming, and all the students were cheering for Mr. Lewis.

“I guess I shouldn’t have been so quick to judge my neighbor,” Julia thought, getting out of her seat to thank him for his help.