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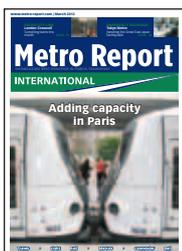
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Front Cover:
Nose to nose. Capacity is at a premium on RER Line A in Paris, but the crush should soon start to ease as more of these double-deck MI09 trainsets built by Alstom and Bombardier enter service. The full story is on p28.

The brakes are coming off the market



If anyone should doubt that the urban rail market is riding high, consider the following. Plans for nearly 500 route-km of metro are shaping up in the Middle East. Contracts for the first phase of a network that may ultimately stretch to more than 210 km have been let in Qatar, and funding for the initial phase of a 131 km metro network has been approved in Abu Dhabi. Expressions of interest in a public-private partnership to supply railway systems for the Metropolitan Rapid Transit System are expected shortly in Kuwait, which has plans for a 160 km network. Cities in Saudi Arabia have similarly ambitious plans, while work is progressing rapidly in several Iranian cities; there are even suggestions that plans for a metro in Baghdad are being revived. In Dubai, which pioneered driverless metro operation in the region, the Roads & Transport Authority has confirmed that it plans to proceed with extensions to both the Red and Green metro lines, adding 32 km to the present network. A US\$675m finance package for the delayed Al Sufouh Tram project has also been agreed. We shall look forward to reporting on all these projects as they move from paper to steel and concrete.

For some time now we have become accustomed to reporting on ambitious metro projects in China, where cities are adding new metro lines at a phenomenal pace. On the face of it, we would not expect to find such grandiose schemes in western cities with mature networks, but there is at least one exception, and that is Paris. This issue offers a series of special reports on developments in the French capital, where tram lines, metro extensions and additions to the already extensive RER network are forging ahead.

All these are eclipsed, however, by the Grand Paris Express scheme to construct four orbital automated orbital metro lines. Taken with a package of other improvements and modernisation works, this project has a price tag of €32.4bn. We are assured that funding has been structured in such a way that it will not be subject to the whims of politicians. If this is so, Grand Paris Express could turn out to be a long-lasting and practical monument to President Sarkozy rather than merely a dream — construction is due to start next year.

Given the scale and volume of projects in Paris, we should pay tribute to French planners and politicians who appear to have properly grasped the need to boost public transport on both radial and orbital corridors — and not just in Paris. The growth of light rail projects across France is a striking phenomenon which may prove to be an early example of the UITP's PTx2 campaign being taken seriously, but there is other evidence too.

Siemens estimates that there will be 100 metro projects and no fewer than 500 light rail schemes coming forward over the next few years, positing an annual growth rate of 4% to 5% in the urban rolling stock market which it values at €7bn a year. SCI Verkehr puts the figure for metro cars alone at €5bn a year, noting that there were 138 metro networks with a combined route length of 9 500 km in operation in 2011 compared with 107 in 2000. Another 3 700 km are expected to enter service by 2016, with a further 3 200 km after that. Truly, this is a growth market.

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