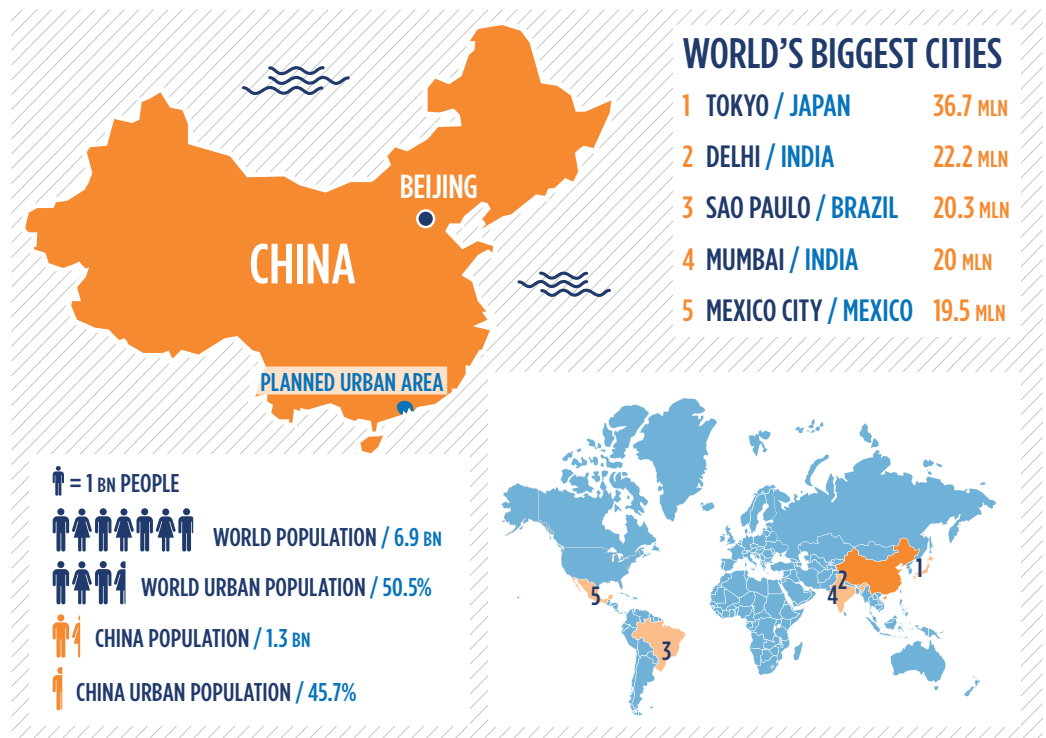


# With planned megacity, China thinks big

Size – twice as big as Wales. Population – 42 million. Cost – 190 billion pounds. Meet China's record-breaking solution to urban drift.



ECONOMICS  
GEOGRAPHY  
HISTORY & POLITICS

**W**ith its turbo-powered economy, and huge population, the People's Republic of China already boasts two of the world's largest cities.

Now, according to the Telegraph newspaper, Chinese urban planners are proposing a new development that would leave the world's other megacities in the shade. By joining up nine towns in the south of the country, planners hope to create the biggest urban area on the planet.

The new city would cover an area twice the size of Wales, and would have a population of 42 million – more people than live in the whole of Canada. Rail lines, connecting the different suburbs, will run for 3100 miles – enough to stretch from London to Moscow and back again.

Of course, all this work is expensive. The cost of the new infrastructure is estimated at £190 billion.

So why would China invest so much time and money? The problem they face is that millions of workers from rural areas have been moving to coastal cities to find work in the country's booming industrial sector.

In 1980, only one in five Chinese lived in cities. Now it's nearly one in two, and set to rise. Over the next two decades, as many as 400 million more migrants are set to arrive.

Migrants crowd into outlying villages where housing is cheap, turning sleepy hamlets into bustling suburbs within as little as five years. Soon, property prices rise, prompting developers to build on new land and expand the boundaries of over-crowded cities.

This 'urban drift' is being mirrored all over the developing world, as millions flock to cities in the hope of a better life. Around 3.4 billion people now live in urban areas – half the world's population.

It's estimated that 2.9 billion more migrants will add to that number by 2050.

## CITY SLICKERS?

In some ways, this is good news. Chinese officials encourage urbanisation because it gives people access to jobs and education, taking them out of unproductive agricultural work and growing the economy.

But the results aren't always so rosy. In countries with weaker economies, newly arrived city-dwellers often find themselves without work or housing, living in dangerous slums.

And even in prosperous China, the lightning growth of cities creates problems. Roads jam up. The air fills with smog. Sudden economic changes can cause waves of unemployment and potential political instability. China is desperate to take advantage of its growth, but a megacity can become a major disaster.

## Q & A

**Q Why are so many people leaving the countryside?**

**A** The main job in the countryside is farming and, these days, peasant farmers struggle to make a decent living. Also, as more farm labour is done by machines, farms need fewer workers.

**Q And why is it happening mostly in the**

## developing world?

**A** In most rich countries, rural to urban migration has already happened. In Britain, farm labourers came to cities in huge numbers in the 19th Century, flooding into new manufacturing towns like Manchester or Sheffield.

**Q And migrants end up in slums?**

**A** Sometimes. When there aren't enough houses or jobs, migrants live wherever they can, often in improvised shelters in areas

where no one else wants to live. Slums often lack electricity and running water, and lack of proper policing makes them easy prey for criminal gangs.

## SOME PEOPLE SAY...

**'Living in cities is unnatural. We all need to get back to nature and return to the countryside.'**

**WHAT DO YOU THINK?**