

INFRASTRUCTURE

New mega link brings high hopes for bay area economy

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After seven years of construction, a massive connector spanning the Pearl River Delta – known as the Shenzhen-Zhongshan link – the newest component of a sprawling infrastructure plan for the Greater Bay Area, is due to open at the end of the month, with hopes that it will stimulate closer economic integration in the mega city cluster.

The 24km cross-sea span, which will connect the city of Zhongshan with the tech hub of Shenzhen across the Pearl River estuary, comprises two bridges, two artificial islands and one undersea tunnel that is 6.8km long and 46 metres wide, making it the world's largest and widest undersea steel shell concrete tube tunnel, according to the Shenzhen government website.

The Lingdingyang Bridge, a key part of the link, with a main span of 1,666 metres, is the world's largest offshore steel box girder suspension bridge, the website says.

The two-way, eight-lane mega project is expected to shorten the drive from two hours to less than



The Shenzhen-Zhongshan bridge is part of a cross-sea span that will boost economic integration in the Greater Bay Area. Photo: Getty Images

30 minutes between the two cities, according to an article this month in China Highway, a magazine published by China Communications Construction Group.

The connector is situated between two other major bridges – the Humen Bridge 30km to the north linking Guangzhou and Dongguan, and the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macau Bridge 31km to the south.

The 44.69 billion yuan (HK\$48.12 billion) project is expected to be a key link in the

Greater Bay Area, a mega city plan designed on the scale of similar metropolitan areas in Tokyo Bay, New York and San Francisco.

The Greater Bay Area is one of the world's most densely populated bay areas, and consists of Hong Kong and Macau and nine major cities in Guangdong province: Guangzhou, Foshan, Zhaoqing, Shenzhen, Dongguan, Huizhou, Zhuhai, Zhongshan and Jiangmen.

In 2023, the region generated 14 trillion yuan in economic out-

put, equivalent to 11 per cent of China's gross domestic product.

Shenzhen is considered China's Silicon Valley and is home to tech and manufacturing giants including DJI, Tencent and BYD, with many manufacturing plants located in the district of Baoan, the starting point of the bridge in Shenzhen.

Baoan had an average of 18 hi-tech enterprises per square kilometre, 15 times the density of the rest of the Greater Bay Area, state broadcaster CCTV reported last year.

Zhongshan, at the other end of the bridge, is a traditional manufacturing city that is expected to directly benefit from the new link by providing a cheaper option to companies and industries wishing to locate away from the more expensive area of Shenzhen.

The city has floated the idea of a link connecting it to Shenzhen since the 1990s, according to a report by Zhongshan Daily last November.

Aside from improved connectivity within the Greater Bay Area, the link is expected to help address the imbalance in economic development between the eastern and western parts of the Pearl River Delta.