

I'm not robot!

In Dec 2018, Craig Moore sends an updated report from Tianjin: Introduction As the port and traditional gateway for Beijing, Tianjin has long had a strategic and commercial importance, and during the 'concessions' the city was controlled by no less than eight European powers (IT,DE,FR,RU,UK,OS,BE), as well as Japan. Today, this large city is one of four municipalities directly reporting to the central government (not belonging to a Province). Within a Chinese context, Tianjin also has an urban rail legacy, being the second city after Beijing to build and operate a Metro. Opening in 1984 with a mere 7.4km service in the central area, the Tianjin Metro has not had a typically incremental expansion, but a quite fractured development. Despite a lengthy building process, Line 1 was constructed economically and, as other Metros in the near-region began operations, this small, unappealing system did not fare well in comparison. As a result, in 2001, just 16 years after opening, the system closed for five years for modernisation and expansion. During this period, the mainly elevated and separately operated BMT Binhai Line (now Line 9) opened. A second Tianjin Metro line (Line 2), opened in 2012, but suffered flooding and the line had to operate as two separate shuttles for one year. Since then however, operations have stabilised and there has been a steady expansion of the system with the openings of Lines 3, 5 and 6. The system now offers 206.6km of service (18th longest in world), two-thirds of which is underground (138.4km), and houses 140 stations. The Tianjin Metro has two operating companies (Tianjin Metro (Lines 1/2/3/6) and BMT (Line 5/9) and in the past, there were distinct differences between the two companies. Now, branding and ticketing is unified and there is an overarching body (Tianjin Rail Transit-TRT) which is the primary identity for the Metro. To all intent and purpose, this is a single system. Lines Line 1 is 27.0km in length and has a mix of underground running (17.2km) in the central area, and is elevated/grade in the periphery. The oldest and busiest of the lines, it uses third rail power and has 6min base headways on the 50min journey. The new stock is smart with a red-black livery and, unusual for China, it has windows into the driver's cab for good views of the line. The stock is CNR and made up of 6-carriage sets with side seating. The stations on Line 1 have the usual ticket hall layout but platforms are quite distinctive with half screens, and a worn feel. They are also very dim and have quite narrow platforms with grey/white tiling and large red Chinese characters mounted on the wall as station names. Line 2 also operates 7min headways and uses 6-car CNR stock. The line is third rail powered and runs east-west for 24.9km and is totally underground save a short 1.4km grade section at Konggangjingjiqu (side platforms) before heading on a 5min run south to the impressive airport (total journey time 47mins). The street entrances on this line (and Line 1) are quite basic, but the stations are smart and clean and very much of the Chinese template with full platform screens and information in Mandarin and English (electronic and audio). At Tianjinzhan (a huge station) the line provides cross-platform interchange with Line 9 but the interconnection to Line 3 involves a very long walk, such is the size of the station (see below). The opening of Line 3 started to improve the style of the system. This line runs from the north to southwest for 33.4km again utilising third-rail power supply. There is a mix of alignments with a lengthy 23.5km underground section in the north and centre, and grade/elevated running in the far north and the southwest around Gaoxinqu. The underground station interiors are stylish as are the elevated stations, with their huge canopied roofs. There is a mix of side and island platforms. Smart CSR Qingdao stock is used in 6-car formations, although headways are 8mins and dwell times are longer on this line than others, making the entire journey 59mins. The latest addition to the system, Line 5, is fully underground and has to be one of the most beautiful lines in China (a country with many beautiful lines!). Its' 29.9km houses beautiful bright white and bold orange stations with interesting ceiling designs, spacious entrance areas and wonderful calligraphic station names. Platforms have been built for seven cars but stylish six car CRRC stock operates (overhead power supply) at 8min headways. The line meanders across the city connecting with all other lines on the system and, together with line 6, it forms a loop around the main central area of Tianjin, massively improving transfer connectivity for the former radial lines. The southern part of the line includes a 2.3km shared section with Line 6, the two western stations having cross platform transfer on stacked platforms, whilst Wenhuzhongxin involves a lengthy transfer but is a stunningly beautiful station. Line 6 opened in two stages and, at 42.2km (0.9km above ground), it is the longest full metro line on the system. It runs from the north-east and skirts the outer areas of the western city before heading south west to Meilinlu. Using new 6-car CRRC stock the line runs at 8min frequencies and the stations have quite a distinctive style with the stair walls and shafts on the platform being of brick form, as well as offering different motifs across various stations. Line 9 is more distinctive than the other lines. This is partly a result of its differentiated ownership at its inception, with different stock and brand; and partly because it is mainly elevated and operates as a regional metro service. The originally titled Binhai Mass Transit Line (BMT) it is now fully branded as part of the TRT system. The line runs from the centre of Tianjin to the Binhai New District, via the TEDA economic zone. The 51.5km line is only underground within the Tianjin city area (3.8km underground). At the western terminus of Tianjinzhan the service pulls into a central single line with two island platforms on either side. Entry and exit is via either side and allows for cross platform interchange in either direction to Line 2 services. The underground section runs very slowly and the stations have a pale blue, slightly dated feel. After Zhongshanmen the line is also known as the Jinbin Light Rail and forms a rapid transit link between the Tianjin urban area and the Binhai port. On this elevated section the train speed increases but the stations (all elevated with side platforms) look slightly shabby and dated, with half platform screens, no next-train information and a very ugly strip map. These stations were built for 6-car lengths but the CNR sets on this service are powered by overhead lines and run as 4-car trains. They are also more unkempt than the metro trains and operate 8min headways, with a full journey taking 1h03. This line also provides interchange with the TEDA tram at Taida. Using the system The ease of using the system has improved in recent years and it is now straight forward with simple, barrier-free interchange across all lines and reasonable distance-based fares (2-9 Yuan) offered in green RFID token form. Services run from 0600-2200/2230 and transfer between lines is well signed, colour coded and is very easy. Signage and all electronic and audio communication is in Mandarin and English. The audio is important on Line 1 as some 1 stations have no Pinyin wall plates. There are, however, a couple of issues with navigation which are all the more evident as other systems in China improve and simplify this aspect of operations. The first issue is Tianjingzhang station. This is the largest and busiest station on the metro system and also the main rail station in the city for national rail services and so is the first point of access to the Tianjin Metro for many people. The subway station here hosts three lines (2/3/9) and is a huge circular structure lying below the main rail station. It is however, one of the most, if not 'the' most, frustrating metro station in China. Its cavernous pale surroundings create a very sterile hollow environment. It is a sea of barriers which steer passengers to entry points at the peripheries of the space. Here the ticket machines are tucked away in little corners and there are too few for demand. Directional signage to lines/platforms has improved in the last 18 months but it remains an issue that schematic maps of the system are difficult to find at this level and so new users to the system may be confused as to which line they require. This is made more frustrating by the fact that the customer information centre has no hard copy information (nor do any other booths in any station-except some introductory brochures at Line 5 stations) and you are shown a photocopy of the map and pointed to an area of the station where there is access to the appropriate platform. At other stations there are schematic maps at the entrance level and at platform level but they are quite small and part of the information boards. On the older lines, these boards are not well located and so, unless you know the terminus station you may well be unsure of which direction you need to take. The newer lines have addressed this and have much improved the location of maps and wayfinding in general. Nonetheless, Tianjin is the only major system in China not to offer hard copy maps. At stations, the map is in landscape form and is a truer geographic representation but on trains it is in portrait and a different style. In both cases the font is so small that it is almost impossible to read. And so.....the new expanded system in Tianjin is impressive in so many ways and overall this is a nice metro, but a couple of minor points are a little irritating, especially in a country where wayfinding is generally flawless.



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