



At the forefront of China's opening-up, the modern international metropolis in South China is among the most preferred destinations for investment. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Guangzhou's vision of glimmering future

Conference courts massive investment in modern facilities

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Guangzhou, capital of South China's Guangdong province, sponsored the first Guangzhou Annual Investment Conference on March 26 to court investment for further modernization.

The city proposed 21 large projects with a price tag totaling more than 110 billion yuan (\$17.7 billion). Most are related to infrastructure, environmental protection and public facilities.

Various districts in the city proposed 140 projects to potential investors with total investment of 239.5 billion yuan that range from advanced manufacturing to information technology, commerce, financial services and healthcare.

Addressing the opening of the conference, Guangzhou Mayor Chen Jianhua said "the city will open more projects to domestic and international investors and will seek to cooperate with industrial leaders including the world's

top 500 companies."

He promised that Guangzhou will be friendly to investors, assisting them and bringing benefits as always.

Guangzhou had 25,516 foreign-funded enterprises by the end of 2014 and 236 of the world's top 500 companies. The 236 companies have launched 656 projects with investment totaling \$45.85 billion, according to official statistics.

New investments are expected to accelerate the city's development and enhance its position as one of China's five central cities along with Beijing, Shanghai, Tianjin and Chongqing.

"Guangzhou is striving to become an international trade and shipping hub, a globally renowned cultural city, a transportation hub in South China and an international metropolis," Chen said. "The new prospect will mean immense business opportunities."

He said Guangzhou now has new opportunities in the New Silk Road, 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road initiatives and

the city's Nansha Free Trade Zone that will become operational soon.

As a hub of the Maritime Silk Road, Guangzhou is well-positioned for a leading role in the nation's opening-up strategy, the mayor said.

He said Guangzhou will seek to boost trade and investment with the countries and regions along the route.

Chen also said the city has ambitions to become a hub for international shipping, logistics and trade.

The mayor said that by drawing in global resources using international practices, the future of Guangzhou will reside in the Nansha Free Trade Zone.

Finance, research and development, shipping and logistics, the marine economy and advanced equipment manufacturing will be prioritized in the zone.

Chen said the city will highlight development of modern services and advanced manufacturing industries for an optimized industrial structure.

He added that special attention will be given to the financial service sector, which is set to become a pillar of Guangzhou's modern service industry.

In addition to the Nansha free trade zone, Chen said the city will also strengthen the development of Sino-Singaporean Guangzhou Knowledge City, and the Zengcheng Economic and Technological Development Zone, making them preferred destinations for investors.

He added that the city is applying to the central government to become a national model zone for independent innovation that will include both the Guangzhou High-Tech Development Zone and Sino-Singaporean Guangzhou Knowledge City.

Guangzhou is making progress in adjusting its economic structure, promoting innovation, deepening overall reform, opening further to the world and promoting the rule of law, Ren Xuefeng, the city's Party chief, said during a conference earlier this year.



Cars rolls off a production facility at Guangzhou Automobile Group. The company is the joint venture partner of renowned foreign automaker such as Toyota, Honda and Fiat. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Ranked No 1 for business climate

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In the eyes of Hubert Xu, the competitive business environment has always been an ace Guangzhou can play to win the hearts of investors.

Xu is the president of CDC Group in the Guangzhou Development District and a senior advisor to the city's international investment board. His company has a lot of contact with foreign investors, many of them top 500 global conglomerates.

"Business operations in Guangzhou are much easier and much more efficient," he told China Daily, due to the city government's move to streamline administrative procedures and alleviate government intervention in the market.

One example he cites is business registration reform that city implemented early last year that exempts a foreign-funded project from needing a permit before applying for a business license. The business license itself can be ready in three days compared to 15 working days before.

"The reform ended the history when a new company had months of torture before it had the license to start," he explained.

"The change was definitely significant, especially for a foreign-funded enterprise,"

he noted.

Xu lauded the city government's investor-friendly and ready-for-service attitudes, awareness of market mechanisms and adherence to fair play and international practices.

He also cited Guangzhou's proximity to Hong Kong and Macao as well as convenient public facilities in daily life, an improved traffic network, good air quality, the well-developed supply chain and logistics system. Rich human resources add another winning card to attract investors, he said.

"I've heard from quite a few of my clients that they enjoy doing business and enjoy their life here," he said.

Xu's remarks are echoed by senior executives of foreign-funded enterprises attending the first Guangzhou Annual Investment Conference on March 26.

"The local government's awareness of service and its administrative efficiency have impressed me deeply," said Peng Wei, president of Carl Zeiss China.

"That was a crucial reason why Carl Zeiss finally decided to invest in Guangzhou," he said.

Keith Williams, president and CEO of US-based Underwriters Laboratories Inc, also had complementary remarks.

The transformation of Guangzhou from what it was

25 years ago when he first came "is absolutely beyond description," he said.

He said the residents — the region's strongest asset — are another reason why UL continues to invest in South China.

UL has five testing labs in China, two in Guangzhou.

"If you're not in Guangzhou, you're not in China," Williams said.

Guangzhou's ideal business climate has also earned wide recognition.

Forbes China magazine ranked Guangzhou the No 1 city in the country for business four times from 2010 to 2014.

The city also topped studies evaluating city government performances in 2014.

Yet even with all the accolades, the local authorities are all not content. Top officials of the city have pledged on several occasions recently to further the efforts to improve the business climate by sticking to market mechanisms, international practices and the rule of law.

Mayor Chen Jianhua said during the city's People's Congress session in early February that it "will enhance its administrative transparency and efficiency with innovative services, create a market climate for disciplined competition by improving market supervision, and improve law enforcement for business operations".



Business representatives from home and abroad meet at the Guangzhou conference to hear about a range of new opportunities. ZOU ZHONGPIN / CHINA DAILY

Ambitious plans for historic port

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Guangzhou has unveiled an ambitious plan to develop the ancient port city into an international shipping hub within three years, said local authorities.

Major efforts will be given to the expanding the port's handling capacity, which includes development of more shipping lanes, and terminals for containers, oil and bulk cargo, according to the Guangzhou Port Authority.

Construction on the third phase of Nansha Port, which can currently handle 10 million containers a year, will be completed soon and put into operation in September, said the authority.

Nansha is a major component of Guangzhou Port, which includes four seaports

and some river ports along the Pearl River.

Guangzhou Port now has 868 berths that handled 500 million tons of cargo last year, making it the world's fifth-largest port, according to the authority.

In an address to an annual investment conference in Guangzhou on Mar 26, Mayor Chen Jianhua said renowned companies from home and abroad have shown increased interest in investing in Nansha following the city's plan to develop into an international shipping hub.

One is China State Shipbuilding Corp, which plans to open a ship chartering business in Nansha, according to the local Nanfang Daily.

Construction on a cruise liner home port in Nansha will be completed in 2018. Royal Caribbean, the world's second-

largest cruise ship operator, will soon open a passenger route to Guangzhou, according to the newspaper.

During the city's annual People's Congress session in February, Chen said enhanced shipping and logistics services facilitate development of the newly approved free trade zone in Nansha.

"We will also push development of infrastructure including an airport, expressways, subways and railways to build closer links between the zone, the downtown area and neighboring cities," Chen said.

The city will invest about 1 billion yuan (\$160.1 million) to build a commercial airport in Nansha, said the mayor.

The Nansha Free Trade Zone is part of the Guangdong Free Trade Zone, which also includes Hengqin in Zhuhai

and Qianhai and Shekou in Shenzhen.

"We are determined to build the Nansha Free Trade Zone into a fast and efficient shipping and logistics center, which will help expand the local economy," Chen said.

According to the local port authority, Guangzhou Port has developed links with more than 400 ports in over 100 countries and regions.

In addition to developing the shipping hub, authorities have also mapped out a plan to build the city into an international aviation hub.

During a recent visit to the Guangzhou Airport Economic Zone in early March, Guangzhou Party chief Ren Xuefeng said rapid growth in passenger numbers and cargo through Guangzhou Baiyun International Airport lays a solid foundation for develop-



Crucial to city plans to become an international shipping hub, Nansha Port already handles 10 million containers a year. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

ing an international aviation hub.

According to the port authority, the Guangzhou airport, one of the top three civil aviation centers in China, now

has more than 110 routes to over 100 domestic and overseas cities.

It accommodated about 55 million passengers in 2014, with cargo throughput reach-

ing 1.4 million tons, according to the authority.

Guangzhou Baiyun International currently serves 33 airline companies, according to the authority.