

Israel plans to name high-speed rail line station in Jerusalem after Donald Trump

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Jerusalem: Israel's transportation minister is pushing ahead with a plan to extend Jerusalem's soon-to-open high speed rail line to the Western Wall, where he wants to name a future station after President Donald Trump.

Yisrael Katz's plan, currently in the initial planning stage, involves constructing two underground stations and excavating over 2 miles (3 kilometers) of tunnel beneath downtown Jerusalem and under the politically and historically sensitive Old City. The Western Wall is the holiest site where Jews can pray.

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Katz's office said in a statement that the minister advanced the plan in a recent meeting with Israel Railways executives, and has fast-tracked it in the planning committees.

Katz said a high speed rail station would allow visitors to reach "the beating heart of the Jewish people -- the Western Wall and the Temple Mount." He proposed naming the future station after Trump "for his brave and historic decision to recognize Jerusalem as Israel's capital" earlier this month.

Trump's announcement has enraged the Palestinians and much of the Muslim world. The United Nations General Assembly adopted a resolution last week rejecting the U.S.'s recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital, with several traditional American allies voting in favor of the motion.

The Western Wall train proposal will likely face opposition from the international community, which doesn't recognize Israeli sovereignty over east Jerusalem and the Old City, which Israel captured in the 1967 Mideast war and later annexed. The Palestinians seek east Jerusalem and the Old City, home to Muslim, Christian and Jewish holy sites, as capital of a future state.

Digging railway tunnels to the Western Wall would also entail excavating in Jerusalem's Old City, where religious and political sensitivities "as well as layers of archaeological remains from the city's 3,000-year history" could prove a logistical and legal quagmire.

Despite the likely opposition to the project, Ovadia said he expects the plans to be approved in the coming year, barring major complications. The Tel Aviv-Jerusalem high-speed line is expected to open next spring.

"There's no reason why this train won't be built," he said. "We already know how to deal with no less difficult opposition."

Katz has previously proposed other ambitious infrastructure projects, including an artificial island off the coast of the Gaza Strip that would serve as an air and seaport for the Palestinian territory, and a railway connecting Israel with Saudi Arabia.

- AP