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Back to the future: new-look trams change face of downtown Rio ahead of Olympic Games



One of the state-of-the-art trams makes its way through the new-look waterfront district of Rio de Janeiro (Photo: Porto Maravilha/Bruno Bartholini)

Known as the VLT, the light rail system started running in June and represents the latest chapter in the transformation of Rio's city centre

A new light rail service in Rio de Janeiro has become one of the Olympic city's most popular attractions since it began operating in June.

The high-tech trams have transformed public transport in the city centre and given a futuristic look to the business district and the bustling region around the port.

The trams currently connect Santos Dumont domestic airport to the long-distance bus station, running through the waterfront leisure district and stopping along the way at brand-new museums and the busy cruise ship terminal.



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More than 200,000 people have already used the service, which is known locally as the VLT after the Portuguese initials for light rail transit.

When fully operational later this year, the 28km (17 mile) tram network will transport an estimated 300,000 people per day.

The service is currently free to use. By the beginning of the Olympic Games on 5 August, a fare of 3.80 reais (US\$1.15) will be charged. The trams will also accept the special RioCard travel card for Rio 2016.



A new tram passes through Praça Mauá opposite the Museo do Amanhã (Museum of Tomorrow) in Rio's renovated port district (Photo: Bouygues)



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'Rio 2016 is ready to welcome the world,' says IOC after final visit before Olympic Games
Regeneration

The arrival of the VLT is the latest chapter in the spectacular transformation and regeneration of the port region of Rio. The renovated district has emerged as new culture and leisure hotspot in the run-up to the Olympic Games, attracting thousands of pleasure-seekers every day.

Keep calm and come to Rio: foreign tourists fall in love with Olympic city

Praça Mauá, the square at the heart of the waterfront region, is home to two must-see new museums: the award-winning Art Museum of Rio and the spectacular Museu do Amanhã (Museum of Tomorrow), designed by Spanish 'starchitect' Santiago Calatrava.

Live music, street performers, food trucks, an arts and crafts market, not to mention breathtaking views over Guanabara Bay, all make for a great day or night out.

During the Rio 2016 Olympic Games, the entire waterfront area will be transformed into a giant entertainment and amusement zone, with big screens for watching the events, musicians from Brazil and beyond, fireworks and light shows.



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A tram heads out of the port area and towards Santos Dumont airport

(Photo: Rio City Hall/J.P.Engelbrecht)

So far, service on the VLT has begun with 16 stops; by the end of the year, a further 16 stops will be added to the network, connecting the main commuter train station and the ferry terminal.

Many of the VLT stops will be integrated with existing metro stations, boarding points for the city's bus rapid transit (BRT) network and other modes of public transport.

Rio authorities are ramping up the service gradually in order to get road users and pedestrians used to the new trams. The city is also running a public awareness campaign to educate residents about the VLT.

The trams are running at reduced speed during the first months of operation; the complete journey from the bus station to Santos Dumont airport currently takes around 45 minutes.

Speeds will be increased as locals become familiar with the new service.



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Each of the 32 trams, which are made of up seven cars and are 44 metres long, has the capacity to carry 420 passengers.

This is the first time that commuter trams have been seen in central Rio since the end of the 1960s, although there is a limited service in the hilly neighbourhood of Santa Teresa mainly for tourists.

New face of Rio

The construction of the VLT network forms part of a series of major investments in transport infrastructure in Rio ahead of the Games.

The city's international airport has opened a new building that has almost doubled its passenger capacity. The road linking Barra to southern Rio has been expanded, increasing its traffic capacity by 30 per cent.

On 9 July, the city inaugurated its latest BRT expressway, linking the major Olympic zones of Barra and Deodoro.

A new metro line to Barra is scheduled to start operating on 1 August.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ff2ZLq4XgzI>

Courtesy : *BY MARK BERESFORD RIO 2016*