



Station Reinvention: From "A Place to Pass Through" to "A Place to Be"

Station Renaissance. Reinventing the very nature of the station. The act of transforming stations into places where people wish to spend their time is expected to create a ripple effect of prosperity. We are continuing to evolve our stations, while aiming for positive coexistence with the local community.

Our First Major Station Renovation: *Ecute Omiya*

On March 5, 2005, *Ecute Omiya* in JR Omiya Station celebrated its grand opening after completion of major renovations. It appeared on the scene with a bold impact and challenged conventional thinking about how train stations should be. When you leave the train platform and rise by escalator to the concourse, you are under the illusion of somehow having found your way into a department store, or a shopping center, with rows of food shops, fashion stores and restaurants. To your surprise, however, you are actually still inside the ticket-paid area of a JR station.

A total of 68 shops make up *Ecute Omiya* – designed as a conceptual 'market avenue' with everything a person might need in daily life. It boasts many shops in an innovative business concept taking advantage of its location inside the station. There are escalators, elevators, multi-function restrooms, and restaurants with menus in braille and designed for easy wheelchair access. In addition, all employees of JR East Station Retailing Co. Ltd., which operates *Ecute Omiya*, including the president, have obtained Service Assistance^{*1} certification, one of many measures taken to ensure that the facilities provide "barrier-free" access to all users. This is the first train station in Japan with such a major in-station development – in every corner we tested the potential for the next generation of train stations.

^{*1} Official certification by the non-profit Japan Care Fit Service Association. This association certifies that persons working in industries providing direct service to customers (railways, hotels, restaurants, etc.) have obtained the skills to provide proper care for the elderly and persons with disabilities, etc.

Station Renaissance. Not "Passengers" but "Customers"

Station Renaissance is the concept of reinventing stations through a variety of initiatives. It is at the core of the medium-term business plan *New Frontier 21*, which was announced by JR East in November 2000, and the *New Frontier 2008* plan that followed it. The start of this was the re-opening of the renovated Ueno Station in 2002. Later, major improvements were made at 11 locations, including Asagaya, Nishi-Funabashi, and Koriyama, as well as various upgrades, including those in medium and small size stations.

As the culmination of these efforts and the starting point of the next big step in this process, Omiya Station was redeveloped with construction of a manmade ground level above the tracks, and station improvements covering 5,000 square meters (including previously-existing sections). As a result, besides ensuring usability as a railway facility that offers comfort and spaciousness, and providing easy-to-read signage to guide those passengers changing trains, the bold move of placing *Ecute Omiya's* retail facilities inside the ticket-paid area was made.

The promotional catchphrase for *Station Renaissance* is "From 'A Place to Pass Through' to 'A Place to Be'." This is the concept that a station is not just a place for getting on and off trains but – if we can increase its comfort and convenience – it can become a place where people will want to spend time.

"It meant re-thinking things, by seeing the people who use the stations no longer as merely passengers, which



Food section with fresh items on display. In a station, products can be purchased both in bulk and in small packages, but it's important to ensure that purchases can be made quickly.



Ecute Omiya, where railway facilities and shops co-exist. All are located inside the ticket-paid area for convenience.

we did in the past, but rather as customers who have various needs – the station is then based on a holistic customer-oriented perspective. The shift in thinking was huge," says Nobuhiro Matsuhashi, Manager of the Lifestyle Business Development Headquarters. "It is true that stores have been located in stations in the past. But, their response to the diverse needs of customers was far from adequate. What the *Station Renaissance* aims for is to create an appealing place where people will want to go even if they don't have to go to the station to ride a train, or where they will want to get off the train even if they don't have to make a transfer there."



Ecute Omiya boasts 68 shops, including fashion, general goods and food shops, a supermarket, a drugstore, and more. All purchases can be made using Suica cards.

Nobuhiro Matsuhashi

Station Renaissance Project Group Leader
Manager, Property Promotion Division
Life-Style Business Development Headquarters, JR East

"We aim to re-think the station from the perspective of the customer. Of course, safety is important, but we are also aiming for convenience and comfort."



Aiming to stimulate and coexist with local communities

"About 600,000 customers use Omiya Station every day, including people making transfers between trains. What kind of services do these customers need? That was the starting point of our thinking," says Koichi Egoshi, General Manager of Ecute Omiya. The date was three months after the opening of Ecute Omiya. The crowds have continued to arrive since the opening as "a place where people want to be" which is the aim of Station Renaissance. The evidence is in the lines that appear every day in front of popular shops, and the passengers who intentionally get off the train at Omiya just to do something here.

After Ecute Omiya was completed, the number of customers getting off trains at Omiya Station reportedly increased by about 8,000 people per day. Says Mr. Matsuhashi, "By attracting people to the station, I am hoping we can also help to stimulate local business. I would like to continue promoting the Station Renaissance that can create those effects, and to coexist positively with the local community." "Because a station is also one of the landmarks in a town, I believe that making a station more attractive also helps to make a town more attractive," says Mr. Egoshi. The evolution to JR East stations is going to continue.

Koichi Egoshi

General Manager, *ecute Omiya*
JR East Station Retailing Co., Ltd.

"Because many of our customers use the station every day, there is a tendency for them to lose interest quickly. We would like to learn from experience and continue to evolve."



Ueno Station concourse before major reinventions was cluttered and poorly lit.



Ueno Station, the starting point for JR East's *Station Renaissance*. Major reinvention completed in February 2002.

Cooperating with the Local Community, Working to Develop Omiya

As station manager, what pleases me the most is that the station was reborn through the *Station Renaissance*, particularly that it became a barrier-free station and has become more convenient for customers to use. We are making an effort – not only on the physical infrastructure aspects, but also on the human aspects – to boost the level of service.

We told local businesses, "We want this station to attract customers. Let's work together to get customers leaving the station and visiting local shops too." For the 120th anniversary of the opening of Omiya Station, we worked with local shops to promote what we called "Hiking from the Station," and about 2,000 people participated. In the future, we aim to continue a mutually-beneficial coexistence between the station and local businesses.



Takeshi Yamaguchi
Omiya Stationmaster, JR East