

► Our Relationship with Stakeholders

**Dialogue with Stakeholders:
Railways and Sustainable Society**

On April 26th, 2005, JR East invited experts from a range of fields to our second Stakeholders' Dialogue, this time on the theme of "Intermodal Transportation Strategies for a Sustainable Society."

Railways: Transforming communities

Dr. Nakamura: While corporations are expected to succeed in their core businesses, they are also expected to contribute to the realization of sustainable society. Today, I would like to focus our discussion on issues such as: What is the potential for a railway to move society toward "sustainable mobility"? And how should a railway be involved in issues that concern local communities?

Making stations user-friendly for all

Ms. Murakami: I think that Japan's urban planning these days prioritises automobile use. But, as the aging of Japanese society continues, there will be a growing number of people who are unable to drive. A concern of mine is that if we fail to keep this in mind, and take preemptive action in terms of urban design, road-building, and transportation policies, we may well end up with a country where

people can't get around without cars.

Considering train station users from the same perspective, about half of all train stations have so many stairs as to make things difficult for a lot of people. It's not an easy feat climbing stairs with, for example, an infant in one arm and big packages in the other.

In that sense, I think it's a positive thing that elevators are being installed in more stations. Still, it remains quite difficult to find out which stations have elevators and where they are located. It would be helpful if anyone who wants to know could check on the Internet for this information before leaving home – particularly wheelchair users, or parents with small children.

This is just one example, but I think it's essential to consider ways in which more and more people can enjoy traveling and getting around without hindrance. For that purpose, it's important

that people from all walks of life are able to share their opinions and participate in planning. If citizens participate in the planning process, I think that more people would also support the systems after they've been implemented.

Dr. Makimura: In the course of my involvement in work related to research and policy proposals for road transport, something we have heard more and more about in recent years is the shift in emphasis from *quantity* to *quality*. I am keen on the thought of 'quality' as a keyword in the functioning of transportation nodes and 'waiting' areas. It is also important to make improvements facilitating smooth transfers between different modes of transportation.

Some well-known examples from overseas include Hannover, Germany, where people can transfer from train to bus by walking just five paces across a platform. Or Perth, Australia, where the

Participants**Fumihiko Nakamura** (Chair)

Professor, Department of Civil Engineering
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Specialist in urban transportation planning. While involved in many public activities, including serving on the Planning Subcommittee of the Transportation Policy Advisory Council of the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure and Transport, Dr. Nakamura is also on an editorial committee to review research papers for the Japan Society of Civil Engineers. A prolific author, his books include "Urban Transportation Planning," and "Bringing Back the Buses" (in Japanese).

**Hiroshige Ohana**

Section Chief, Department of Public Works, Urban Planning Bureau, Urban Policy Division, Niigata Prefectural Government

After joining the Niigata Prefectural government as a public servant in 1988, Mr. Ohana has focused mainly on road transport policy. In 1997 was assigned to the Snow Research Center, and from 2002 to 2004 was in charge of the third survey on person-trip movement in Great Niigata Region.

**Harumi Suda**

Officer, The Coalition of Local Governments for Environmental Initiative, Japan

Active in citizen's movement for many years with a special focus on local democracy and local government reforms. Mr. Suda also co-founded the Citizen's Action Center in 1980, and since 1982 has been the primary representative of the organization. Other roles include heading both the secretariat of the Coalition of Local Government for Environmental Initiative (1992–present) and the Japan Center for Climate Change Actions (1999–2003).

**Kazuhiko Makimura**

Director, Transport Research Division, The Institute of Behavioral Sciences

A specialist in transportation planning, transportation engineering and intelligent transportation systems, Dr. Makimura has been active in various roles including serving as a member of the Research Society on Transportation Engineering, Transportation and Urban Design, and has been involved with the Japan Subcommittee of the ISO Public Transportation Expert Committee. He has published many books, including "Park-and-Ride Successes and Failures: A View from the Marketing Perspective," which he co-authored (in Japanese).

**Chisato Murakami**

Member, Environment Committee Nippon Association of Consumer Specialists (NACS)

Ms. Murakami aided the establishment of the Japan Ecology Center (an environmental information center for corporations and citizens with a new interest in environmental issues), and the Global Environment Information Centre (an environmental information center under the auspices of the Ministry of the Environment), and has been a member of the NACS Environmental Committee since 2002.



trains are on level one, and buses are on level two in a station. These spaces are extremely important, and I believe that railways could be the ones to take the lead to move in this direction. There are information booths in many other countries called an "i Center," similar to JR East's "Midori no Madoguchi" (ticket sales counters). But the "i Center" not only issues train tickets, but also provides information – about public transportation and its environmental merits, for example. I think this type of information dissemination is also an important task. In addition, I think that there will be a more pressing need in the future for route maps of entire metropolitan areas that cover *all* modes of public transportation, including trains, buses, and so on.

I can give you another example from overseas. In the European Union some cities are conducting publicity campaigns that appeal to the emotions of public transport users. The campaigns use television commercials, station posters, and other media, to point out to people that "public transportation is a great thing, and it's user-friendly and comfortable." I think that there are still so many approaches that haven't been tried yet in Japan.

Railways: A public good, sustained by the people

Mr. Suda: The time has now come for railways to play a bigger role. But I suspect that they have already lost the structures and assets that could facilitate such an undertaking, as a result

of past public policies promoting deregulation and divestiture. In other words, I sense that they have already lost the capacity to deal with new strategies or policies. This is because we have witnessed a steady process of separating off the railways, which as far as we were concerned were once a valuable backyard asset.

We're now at the point where we as a society need to consider what must be done in order to give back to the railways resources that are today concentrated in roads and highways. Ultimately, I think that railway lands and tracks must be adequately supported by public tax money. I think these are issues that should be tackled as a part of public policy. I think that JR East, as a corporation in the midst of all these issues, should be taking a stance on these things and clearly expressing its opinions. From now on, railways are something that must be cared for by its users – in other words, by the citizens of this country.

Therefore, in the process of devising new schemes, it would be best if citizens' groups and JR East could work together, to create a society that really makes the most of its railways.

The role of railways in addressing urban issues

Mr. Ohana: I came here from Niigata, so I'd like to highlight some instances from the perspective of a provincial city. I was involved in a person trip survey in fiscal 2002 in Great Niigata Region, to which 62,000 persons responded. One finding was that, associated with an increasing amount of free time that people now have, there has also been an increase in trips made for personal purposes, such as shopping, pastimes, and recreation. In terms of modes of transportation, automobile use has been steadily growing, to the point that about 70% of respondents now use their cars to get around. Users of public





transportation were only a small fraction, at 2.8% for trains, and 2.6% for buses.

Among those who go out for personal purposes, those who move around by car had risen from 39% in 1988 to 65% in 2002. As for the mode of transportation to get to the train station, again, car use has increased similarly – notably, for high school students and older commuting to school, those who have their parents drive them to the station have increased from 1.8% to 20.2%. When we asked for input about the railways, we uncovered considerable dissatisfaction with parking facilities around train stations.

This is perhaps a point that governments should contemplate more deeply, but we have in the past decades been putting government institutions, hospitals and so on out in the suburbs, away from the city center. The data from our survey reveal the outcomes of those policies. Learning from this, these days we have taken a

novel approach. Based on the concept of the "compact city," we are promoting land-use models that create areas where people can live with everything within walking distance, situated compactly in the midst of green countryside and then networked by public transportation.

Mr. Yamazaki: What is happening in Niigata will also eventually happen in Tokyo. In Tokyo, until now, railways have continued to grow by building housing in the suburbs and then carrying people back and forth. But starting in 2015, the city will begin to shrink due to the declining population. Baby boomers are retiring, youngsters for the most part are starting to live in the city center, and the suburbs are starting to turn into ghost towns. As that happens, the number of customers using rail transport for commuting to work will decline. Among other things, this could create a huge problem with the deterioration of suburban towns, and we at the railway companies



perceive the dangers of this process.

This is why it is so important now to think about urban planning so that people, including seniors, have all that they need within walking distance, or can take advantage of light rail transit (LRT) and bus transport. In other words, we need to rebuild our cities. I think that we must also think about ways to facilitate the use of railways themselves by for example ensuring better networking with other modes of transportation, providing more services from the station to the local town, or making the public squares and open spaces more attractive. If these initiatives succeed, I think we can provide a model of how to solve a problem that a lot of regional cities are facing – that is, the hollowing-out of their central shopping districts.

Using the train station to recreate the community

Mr. Suda: As I move around the country quite a lot giving lectures and so on, I sometimes find myself at smaller stations that have perhaps only ten trains a day passing through. These are no longer places where people gather, and the area around the stations is very quiet due to local depopulation. I see many such places. When things reach this stage, some good judgment is required to attract people to the stations for a different function other than just to carry them off somewhere.

Ms. Murakami: I think a good place to start would be to look to train stations to provide a space for community development, or town development in regional communities. I think you would find a lot of promising ideas coming out of those who might assemble there.

For example, how about something like "station day-care" for children? Grandparents gathering at the station's cultural center could accept children for day care. This would mean that parents would feel more comfortable leaving

their children there in the grandparents' care because it's someone they know, and could then go out for their own shopping or whatever. I think stations are perfectly suited to be places to answer the particular needs of the people who live in that particular community.

Mr. Soga: Since it's connected with this idea of attracting people to stations, I would like to introduce a tourism development initiative we are conducting together with local communities. We looked at this by asking a question: Is it possible to create a scheme to get a lot of people to go out and interact with others in a way that would stimulate the local economy, and as a result make the local community more sustainable? There are three basic tourism development approaches behind this: "balanced," "culturally-oriented," and "spontaneous."

I think that today's touristic resources are the very *lifestyles* of people in local communities. I think that it's important to discover the charming – but perhaps, undiscovered – local attractions, and to convey these to customers using new modes of presentation. Protection of the natural



environment; creation of an atmosphere that can sustain the spirit of hospitality among local people; operation of the railway network as a lifestyle infrastructure of the local people – such concepts are being combined as we work to develop tourism and aim for schemes that will ultimately provide economic benefits for the local community.

In the development of new products and services, we at JR East play a pivotal supporting role for those local people wishing to attract tourists, and work together with them to create a driving force for development.

Educating children about public transportation

Dr. Makimura: As we heard in the example of Niigata, there is an increasing number of children who have never taken a ride on public transportation. We must think about what will happen when they become adults. Recently I was asked to teach elementary school children how to use public transportation. Through opportunities such as this, I would like to win children over to railways, by getting across the message that railways are good for the environment and good for people. Children who have never been on a train would not understand such things otherwise.

Mr. Ohana: JR East has its Niitsu Rolling Stock Manufacturing Factory in Niigata. The facility is open to the public once a year on National Railway Day, and people have said they found it very

enjoyable. I think it would be a very good idea to organize programs specially for children at events like this.

Dr. Nakamura: In our discussion today, you have all raised many key issues and offered a variety of suggestions on the theme of railways. Through the discussion, some of the points that emerged include issues about usability: adding value to the time people spend in stations; conducting urban development using the train station as a key concept; educating children; and various potential opportunities for railways in the future.

Mr. Kogure: Thank you to everyone today for sharing your views with us. We at JR East would like to keep these views in mind for future planning. We welcome any comments or thoughts you might have, not only today, but at any time.

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