

JAPAN Railway & Transport REVIEW

Special Feature

Railways and Large Cities

Japanese Railway History 4

Nationalisation of Railways and Dispute over
Reconstruction to Standard Gauge



March 1995 Number 4

JAPAN RAILWAY AND TRANSPORT REVIEW

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JAPAN RAILWAY AND TRANSPORT REVIEW is published quarterly by East Japan Railway Culture Foundation (EJRCF).

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■ Central Tokyo JR Commuter Trains
(H. Morokawa)

Editorial

Difficult Solutions for Urban Railways

Throughout the world, there are a number of large cities with millions of inhabitants. Some are lucky and others are not so lucky as far as transport is concerned. The lucky ones are European cities like London, Paris, Hamburg, Moscow, etc., North-American cities like New York and Chicago, and Japanese cities like Tokyo and Osaka. These cities had built the framework of today's urban and suburban rail networks by the first half of this century when motor transport was not so dominant. The not-so-lucky cities are mostly African and Asian cities which have so far failed to build substantial rail networks and where people are forced to move by road.

There are some exceptionally unlucky towns in Europe and in North America; one is Berlin which once boasted a well-built rail network, but later suffered serious war damage and the post-war political split. Los Angeles is another city where people enjoyed the American dream of owning a car and forgot the efficiency of rail transport.

But the good news is now that Germany has been reunited, work has started on rebuilding and reinforcing Berlin's U- and S-Bahn networks. Angelenos have also realised the importance of mass transit and have opened their first metro line.

There is some good news in Asia and Africa, too. Cities like Hong Kong, Singapore, Cairo and Shanghai have succeeded in introducing rail transit systems in recent years. But many cities in developing countries still suffer from the lack of mass transit, and above all from the lack of technical, financial and human resources to solve their transport problems.

Even in the lucky European, North American and Japanese cities, there are problems. Over-ripe industrialised (or one might say post-industrial) society and multi-racial urban communities have loosened traditional social ties and discipline to a considerable extent; railways in large cities suffer from violence and crime on trains and in stations. In this sense, Tokyo's railways are safer than their European and American counterparts. Surprisingly, they are still making money too, but profitability is achieved at the cost of almost unbearable overcrowding, and it has become almost impossible, both technically and financially, to build a new railway in such a densely-populated metropolis.

Today's urban transport issues cover a vast range of problems, and this is an area where market economics has failed to find a better solution. Solutions may differ from country-to-country and city-to-city, but we need universal political wisdom and initiative to coordinate technical and socio-economic possibilities.

[T. SUGA]

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