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FEATURE: New Urban Transit Systems

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Suspended monorail with Chiba Monorail Station Building in background (Chiba Urban Monorail Co., Ltd.)

Editorial

The Right Place

The recent financial setback is hindering the miraculous growth of Asian economies, and the transport problems in many large cities in the region seem likely to remain unsolved. Tokyo was able to build its rail network before cars became popular; Seoul built its extensive rail network by starting subway construction in the 1970s. Hong Kong and Singapore have built their excellent subway networks since the 1980s, and Taipei is making good progress. However, despite serious efforts and some good results, other major cities like Bangkok, Manila, Jakarta, as well as Shanghai and other major cities in China, still suffer from lack of mass transit systems.

Development of rail transport becomes harder once motor vehicles come into widespread use, because of political difficulties in building a consensus giving investment priority to rail over road. Firm political leadership is required to develop rail transport systems. Politicians are often capricious, and some seem now curious about the novelty and lower costs of new guided transport systems.

The recent developments in this field in various countries are really remarkable, but new guided transport systems are far inferior to conventional suburban railways or full-size metros in terms of transport capacity. They are not a fundamental solution to the problems of public transport in very large cities. However, they can be a good solution if built in the right place with moderate transport demand.

T. SUGA

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