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FEATURE: Latest Trends in Air-Rail Links

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2-2, Yoyogi 2-chome, Shibuya-ku,
Tokyo 151-8578, Japan
Tel (81 3) 5334 0623
Fax (81 3) 5334 0624
Email info@jrtr.net

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Aerial view of Central Japan
International Airport (CENTRAIR) in
Aichi Prefecture, scheduled to open
on 17 February 2005. The railway line
connecting the airport and central
Nagoya starts provisional operation in
October 2004.

(Photo: CENTRAIR)

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Editorial

Superiority of air-rail links

One in three passengers passing through New Tokyo International Airport (Narita) are non-Japanese. With no geographical knowledge, very few people have the courage to drive a vehicle when they are overseas due to differences in traffic regulations and driving habits. Not only do foreign travellers create a large demand for public transport, the huge numbers of other people using large airports also creates massive demand for large-capacity fast transport between cities and their airports. Appropriate new links with existing national railway networks are needed to expand the convenience in all directions beyond the end-to-end services like those offered by some of today's dedicated air-rail links, such as monorails.

Although airport operators usually adopt a passive attitude towards building and managing air-rail links, such links offer potential for both large profits to railway operators and great convenience for air passengers. For example, railway operators can offer nation-wide transport service using rail networks described above, luggage check-in and check-out services at railway stations, issuing of boarding passes while on the train to the airport, selling ancillary travel services such travel insurance, booking and confirming connecting flights and hotel reservations, business and communications facilities such as telephones, Internet connections and loan PCs—none of which can be provided easily by other transport links to airports.

Railways that can perfect and offer these value-added services will take the lead from all other modes. However, although railways also have many years of experience in the principle task of providing reliable, regular and comfortable rail services, it goes without saying that they must still work hard to convince air passengers to put their faith in the reliability of railways to get them to the airport on time.

K. AOKI

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