

Japan Railway & Transport Review

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Feature: New Urban Railway Projects

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- Sakai City LRT Plan
- Man'yo Line—Revitalized Tramway
- Kyoto Subway Projects and Extension of Tozai Line
- Overview of Aonami Line



Editorial

The King of Kansai Railways

When looking back at the formative period of Japan's railway network in the Kansai district (region around Osaka–Kyoto–Kobe), Jutaro Matsumoto comes back to mind. Born in 1844 in what was Tango Town in northern Kyoto Prefecture, he left home and went to Kyoto City at age 10 to escape extreme poverty. In the same year, Zenjiro Yasuda (1838–1921), the future founder of Nippon Electric Railway¹, left his home in today's Toyama Prefecture and went to Edo (now Tokyo). Matsumoto was apprenticed in Osaka and was soon a successful fabric wholesaler with widening interests in mills, finance, transport, breweries, etc.

In the Meiji period (1868–1912), Japan's business world was often characterized as divided into Eiichi Shibusawa's² east and Jutaro Matsumoto's west. Matsumoto's business empire included seven railway companies, such as Hankai Railway (now Nankai Electric Railway), San'yo Railway (now JR West's San'yo main line), and Hankaku Railway (now JR West's Fukuchiyama Line). He was also a mediator in the stormy merger of Kansai Railway and Osaka Railway, leading to the forerunner of today's Kansai main line run jointly by JR West and JR Central. In 1899, Matsumoto made his first trip to the west, visiting Andrew Carnegie (1835–1919) in Scotland where he was warmly welcomed at a dinner party reception held by Carnegie and his wife. He was deeply impressed by his conversations with Carnegie and the visit was a great success. The subsequent failure of the Dai Hyaku Sanju Bank saw Matsumoto's fortune collapse, but he died in 1913 unconcerned with the trappings of wealth. Although he was the archetypal Osaka businessman having a strong competitive rivalry with Tokyo and a healthy distrust of government, he was a philanthropist who donated large parts of his fortune to support Kansai culture, such as Yamato-ya, the famous old traditional Osaka restaurant where renowned geisha performed, and Koyasan in Wakayama Prefecture, the site of a Buddhist temple built in the 9th century as the headquarters of the Shingon school of Buddhism.

I long for a hero of Kansai, like Jutaro Matsumoto, to help promote development of a better east–west balance in the midst of continuing overcentralization on Tokyo today.

¹ Nippon Electric Railway was established in 1900 with the intent of linking Tokyo and Osaka in 6 hours.

² Eiichi Shibusawa (1840–1931) was a prominent industrialist in the Meiji period, holding positions such as President of the First National Bank and founder of Nippon Yusen Kabushiki Kaisha (NYK Line) and Ishikawajima-Harima Heavy Industries.

K. Aoki

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Kobe New Transit's new Series 2000 *Port Liner*. The new barrier-free stock has longer and wider body and higher ceiling to increase passenger capacity and space for luggage. (Kobe New Transit)

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