

JRTR

Japan Railway & Transport Review

Feature

Public Transportation in Provincial Areas

- Trends and Problems in Regional Railway Policy in Japan
- Compact City Development Using Public Transport
- New Rejuvenation Model for Regional Railways in Japan—The Case of Wakayama Electric Railway's Kishigawa Line
- Rural Railways—The British Experience
- Significance of Freight Transport in Regional Railways
- Regional Rail Companies in Germany

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Editorial

Tama

In Japan, 'Tama' is a common name for a pet cat—it might be hard for *JRTR* readers outside Japan to believe, but a stray cat called Tama living in a railway station as well as the pet dog of a station employee have both been given 'stationmaster' status. Perhaps Japan has achieved a 'specism-free' society where even animals are given promotional opportunities? Joking aside, it is true that these animals have been made 'stationmasters.' In addition to making animal stationmasters, some railway operators are selling their own brand of soft rice crackers and have even decorated the interiors and livery of cars with pictures of popular comic book characters. These activities have all been implemented by railway companies calling for novel ideas and putting them into action as measures to overcome the effects of poor business performance and increase income, irrespective of appearances. Of course, this was done after taking many demand-growing measures, such as repeatedly encouraging trackside residents to use railways for commuting and shopping and promoting tourist attractions.

While there are exceptions, many of Japan's private regional railways are small-scale in terms of capital and they have long faced difficult business conditions. Contrast this situation with that of Japan's 8 car manufacturers (excluding bus and truck companies) listed on the Tokyo Stock Exchange and topped by Toyota. Their influence over industry, government, and people is tremendous; their advertising features top Hollywood stars—while regional railways use stray cats. This disparity clearly demonstrates the difference in power between the two transport modes. Although financial and competitive strengths may not be the same thing, in Japan, where free competition decides the survival of transport systems, the day when services on many regional lines are slashed in half is probably coming soon after managements have exhausted all promotional efforts and no buyers appear. From then on, it is only a short downhill ride to closure.

K. Aoki

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