

Marketing Opening of Tohoku Shinkansen Extension to Shin Aomori

JR East Marketing Department

Promoting Direct Service to Aomori and Shorter Travel Times

The entire Tohoku Shinkansen was opened between Tokyo and Shin Aomori on 4 December 2010 following the completion of the extension to Shin Aomori. At the opening, Series E2 *Hayate* trains currently making 15 daily returns between Tokyo and Hachinohe will run on to Shin Aomori, completing the entire trip in 3 hours and 20 minutes (39 minutes shorter than the current travel time). In addition, other *Hayate* services will make one return trip each day between Sendai and Shin Aomori and between Morioka and Shin Aomori, for a total of 17 daily arrivals and departures at/ from Shin Aomori. With through travel on one shinkansen, the Aomori area instantly becomes more accessible from Tokyo as well as from Sendai and other cities in almost the same time as by air (including travel time to and from airports). As a result, rail is expected to become the predominant transport mode for access to the Aomori area where air has held the advantage until now.

In line with the extension to Shin Aomori, JR East is promoting the reduced travel time to take market share from airlines. The company is also going forward with systematic development of tourism, advertising, and product planning with the aim of increasing tourist numbers. To promote the attractiveness of the Aomori brand and northern Tohoku region as a whole, tourism materials focussing on local gourmet foods and experiences available only in Aomori are being developed. This is in addition to standard tourism events (cherry blossom viewing, summer festivals, autumn leaves viewing) promoted so far.

We are also expanding travel products to Tsugaru, Shimokita, Towada, and other locations to spread the shinkansen effect through the Aomori area as a whole. This includes establishing counters to promote rental car use, deploying only environmentally compatible rental cars, such as hybrids (Shichinohe-Towada office), and establishing and expanding tourist taxis that can be used directly from the station.

New resort trains with hybrid systems will be introduced



Series E5 *Hayabusa* Pre-Production Model

(JR East)

on conventional lines connecting with the shinkansen, such as the Ominato Line, Tsugaru Line, and Gono Line. We are also broadening the menu of tourism choices along those lines and enhancing the tourist environment with other modes of transport for further onward travel, such as buses and taxis.

Marketing Strategy in Line with Introduction of Series E5 Cars in March 2011

Strategy at start of Series E5 300 km/h operation

The Series E5 new high-speed shinkansen carriages are being introduced between Tokyo and Shin Aomori in spring of 2011 when *Hayabusa* services running at the initial maximum speed of 300 km/h (compared to 275 km/h for current *Hayate*) will link Tokyo and Shin Aomori in 3 hours and 10 minutes. The speed is scheduled to increase to 320 km/h by the end of FY2012, reducing travel time to 3 hours and 5 minutes. In addition to high-speed performance, the Series E5 carriages have greatly improved amenities, such as upgraded furnishings and service equipment. The reduced travel time due to higher speeds is an excellent opportunity to boost shinkansen use. Specific measures include events to publicize the attractiveness of the Series E5 and gain media and public attention, as well as promoting the *Hayabusa* high-speed performance and amenities to foster a desire to travel by train.

More leg room and better comfort

To improve ride comfort all Series E5 carriages feature fully active suspension that reduces left and right sway as well as body tilt devices alleviating centrifugal force in curves. Attention is also being paid to interior designs, walls and seat patterns with colours evoking an image of nature to give

a warm, relaxed feel. Seat spacing is wider and barrier-free measures are ongoing in an effort to provide a comfortable space to as many passengers as possible.

GranClass marketing strategy

In addition to standard and Green (first class) cars, a '*GranClass*' car exceeding Green cars in quiet and comfort will provide some of the best services on any railway worldwide. *GranClass* will have 18 seats per car, and the space per person will be 1.4 times that of Green cars. We are aiming for seat specifications on a par with first class in international flights, featuring a pitch of 1300 mm and reclining angle of 45 degrees.

The air-conditioning system will have anti-odour and anti-bacteria functions using bacteria-removing ions. Attention to detail extends even to reading lights, foot lights, interior lighting, power outlets, and other equipment. Special attendants will provide drinks and light meals. Other services are also being considered from a variety of perspectives to make time spent onboard more pleasant.

With the introduction of *GranClass*, we aim to capture new customer segments, such as business executives and wealthy seniors. In targeting these segments, we will run advertisements featuring TV personalities and carry out promotions at stations using actual *GranClass* seats.

Tourism Development

JR East's shinkansen network extends from Tokyo in five directions to Tohoku, Akita, Yamagata, Joetsu, and Nagano. The network will be almost complete with the extension to Shin Aomori. Further expanding and enhancing the network improves the transport convenience and stimulates interaction between regions.

Regional economies are facing severe conditions due to economic hollowing out and the effects of the recent recession, which is affecting JR East regional lines, so rejuvenating regional economies is an important issue for us.

The extension of the Tohoku Shinkansen to Shin Aomori provides great opportunities for local communities as well as JR East. Consequently, we are making major efforts in regional development through the broad tourism industry, so large economic effects are expected. It is important for JR East and people in regional communities to work together on ideas to get the Tokyo travel market to consider the Tohoku area and travel there, so we are teaming with regional communities to discover the local attractions.



Interior of luxury E5 *GranClass* car

(JR East)

Aomori Prefecture is home to the ancient Sannai Maruyama site dating from the Jomon period (12,000 to 2500 BP) as well as the Shimokita peninsula famous for Mt Osore and the Hotokegaura rock formations, the Tsugaru peninsula with Cape Tappi and Lake Jusan, Mt Hakkoda, and Lake Towada. It is a treasure trove of attractive tourism resources, such as the hidden hot springs that dot the prefecture.

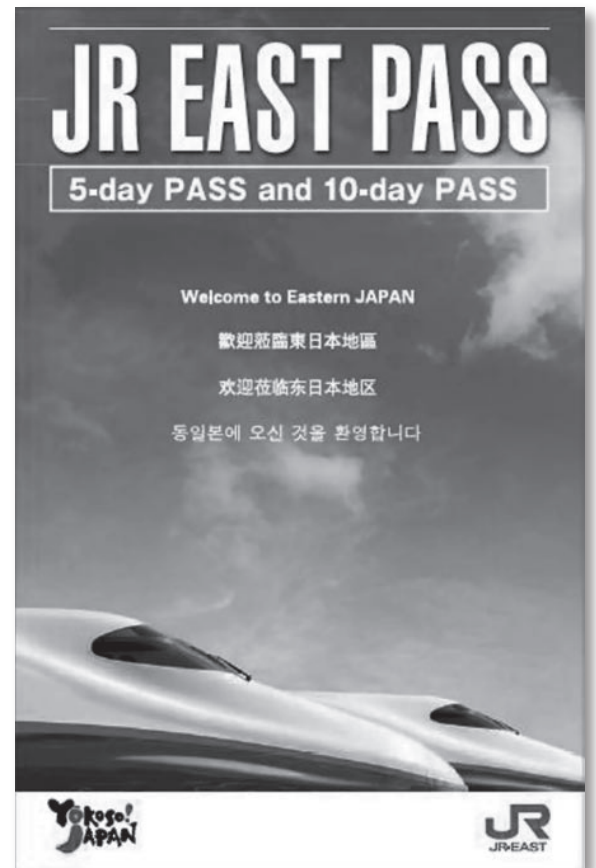
Tourism today is undergoing a change from traditional day excursions to places of historic interest and scenic beauty to come into closer contact with the region and gain an understanding of it. For example, demand for long-stay trips where one can experience local life and culture are on the rise. Meeting the needs for such tourism requires partnership with the local community.

To help develop tourism, JR East is holding a campaign from December 2010 to March 2011 followed by The Aomori Destination Campaign of the six JR passenger companies from April 2011. These campaigns tie up with local governments and community members to discover new Aomori attractions, and will work to create excursion routes within Aomori Prefecture as well as to Akita and Iwate. For example, new resort-type hybrid carriages were introduced in autumn 2010 on the Tsugaru, Gono, and Ominato lines. We are also working to provide station rental cars, JR group buses, regularly scheduled tour buses, route buses, tourist taxis, and other modes of transport in partnership with the local community at Shichinohe-Towada Station and Shin Aomori Station, so passengers can take excursions to the Tsugaru and Shimokita peninsulas, Lake Towada, and Shirakami Sanchi.

As part of a project to stimulate communities, JR East is deploying 'Tabi Ichi' travel products based on the concepts of 'customs and culture tied to the community,' 'local production and local consumption,' and 'human interaction.' To create new tourism routes, we will be working in partnership with local people who have close knowledge of the area's attractiveness such as the history, culture, nature, and food. To build up momentum, we are going forward steadily in working with the local community to discover tourism materials and promoting connections with other modes of transport for onward travel.

Measures for Inbound Travellers

JR East's area in eastern Japan is still less recognized by travellers from abroad than the so-called 'golden route' (Tokyo–Mt Fuji–Kyoto/Osaka), and overseas travellers are unaware of the attractiveness of the eastern area. To help overcome this problem, JR East sells the regional JR EAST PASS to encourage visitors from abroad to enjoy the area. We also present information via websites and overseas media to promote the area. We are certain that



Regional JR EAST PASS

(JR East)

the extension of the Tohoku Shinkansen to Shin Aomori provides an opportunity to accelerate promotion of the area to foreign visitors.

The beautiful seasons of the Aomori area typified by the Hirosaki cherry blossoms and local culture, such as the *Neputa* festival, provide opportunities for travellers seeking the out-of-the-ordinary not found in their own countries to discover the appeal of Japan. While fully communicating the start of direct services from Tokyo and the short travel time of just 3 hours and 20 minutes, we are promoting sales of new products during the Aomori Destination Campaign held in conjunction with the melting of winter snows.

Advertising Strategy

Advertising in three phases

Unlike past shinkansen launches (December 2002 opening of Tohoku Shinkansen between Morioka and Hachinohe, October 1997 opening of Nagano Shinkansen, etc.), the introduction of new carriages is separate from the opening of the shinkansen extension to Shin Aomori. To capitalize on this separation, large campaigns are scheduled after the two events, with unified long-range advertising used dynamically in each of the following three phases.



'MY FIRST AOMORI' Campaign Poster

(JR East)

- Phase 1 Opening of Tohoku Shinkansen extension to Shin Aomori on 4 December 2010
- Phase 2 Start of Series E5 *Hayabusa* operation and introduction of *GranClass* in March 2011
- Phase 3 Aomori Destination Campaign for 3 months from 23 April 2011

Each phase has its own promotional content and targets, so advertising is planned to meet those objectives.

Phase 1

Previous advertising in conjunction with the opening of new lines was deployed from Tokyo based on a Tokyo perspective. However, this time the community and JR East will work together to present locally based information under a co-creation strategy of brainstorming with the local community. The plan is to first create momentum within Aomori Prefecture, and then propagate the excitement to the Tokyo metropolitan area to create even greater momentum.

The first action was deciding a name for the campaign around which everything else revolves and an overall scheme. 'MY FIRST AOMORI' was chosen based on expectations of the local people that Aomori Prefecture will be newly discovered following the opening of the extension to Shin Aomori. The campaign used a series of TV commercials with story elements just in Aomori Prefecture.

The 'heroine' was chosen from 2500 candidates living in the prefecture. Seven commercials aired in Aomori Prefecture until September and then in Tokyo from October.

Phase 2 and later advertising

Phase 2 advertising started in January 2011. It features the Series E5 carriage in a dynamic manner coinciding with the start of E5 operations. The greater luxury in a relaxing transport space along with associated services will be promoted for *GranClass* deployed for the first time on a domestic shinkansen.

With Phase 3—the Aomori Destination Campaign—Aomori Prefecture and the six JR passenger operators will deploy unified advertising. Commercials for JR East's '*Otona no Kyujitsu*' (Holiday for Adults) Club targeting active seniors are also scheduled to be filmed in Aomori Prefecture and broadcast from March 2011. ■

Acknowledgment

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