

# International Conference of Railway Museums

Juri Kondo

## Background to Conference

The world's railways have different histories in each country and region based on geography and culture, and there are many railway-themed museums telling these histories to future generations. The Railway Museum in Saitama is one such museum working to deepen understanding of railway culture. To kindle inter-museum friendship for a brighter future in the railway world and as a first step in creating mutual understanding between railway cultures, The Railway Museum formed a sister museum partnership with the UK's National Railway Museum in December 2012.

This partnership led naturally to the planning of an international conference to spread similar interactions globally. In holding the conference, The Railway Museum was supported by its sister museum the National Railway Museum, as well as by the DB Museum, with which JR East

has strong connections, and other world railway museums. Japanese railway museums were invited too, resulting in a global railway museum conference with the participation of 10 museums from 7 countries.

The six overseas museum participants were Cité du Train (Mulhouse, France), DB Museum (Nuremberg, Germany), Korea Railroad Museum (Uiwang, South Korea), Swiss Museum of Transport (Luzern, Switzerland), National Railway Museum (York, UK), and Baltimore & Ohio Railroad Museum (Baltimore, USA). The Japanese participants were the Kyushu Railway History Museum (Kitakyushu), the Modern Transportation Museum (Osaka), the SCMAGLEV and Railway Park (Nagoya), and The Railway Museum (Saitama). The event lasted 3 days from 6 to 8 November, consisting of the main conference on 7 November as well as a reception and optional excursions.



Group photo of delegates taken before the conference

(The Railway Museum)

## Conference Details

The conference was held at the Teppaku Hall in the Railway Museum and started with the opening address from Satoshi Seino, Chairman of the East Japan Railway Culture Foundation (EJRCF), which operates the Railway Museum. He expressed his hopes that, through presentations and discussions by individual museums, participants would share ideas and have meaningful debate on future cooperation and interaction between museums. The programme included presentations on the individual museums and their efforts as well as discussions on holding future conferences.

## Presentations by Museums

The presentations by the individual museums are summarized below:

### The Railway Museum: Director Toru Sekine



Formed in 2007 to commemorate the 20th anniversary of the establishment of JR East, The Railway Museum is run by EJRCF based on a three-theme concept of functioning



Delegates listening to presentation

(The Railway Museum)

as a railway museum, historical museum, and educational museum. The exhibit space has 8 zones, including the History Zone where scenes are re-created and actual rolling stock is exhibited, and the Learning Zone where the principles and mechanisms of railways can be learned via simulations. There are also hands-on exhibits such as a steam locomotive simulator and a miniature operating train.

Balancing a museum's academic aspects with features to attract visitors was a discussion issue, and the museum has been working on:

- Enhancing hands-on exhibits with entertainment aspects while deepening understanding of railway systems and cultures
- Building an organization where the curatorial department handling academic aspects, and the marketing department in charge of attracting visitors understand each other and can work together
- Increasing the ability and hospitality of volunteers who explain exhibits

In future, the museum aims to raise its academic level and attract visitors by becoming a museum where visitors learn through enjoyable hands-on experiences. One means to accomplish this goal is by being a base for cooperation in railway research and education to systematically explain the past, present, and future of railway systems as a whole. More attention will also be given to drawing more visitors by portraying the attractiveness and appeal of railways.



Presentation of The Railway Museum

(The Railway Museum)

**Modern Transportation Museum:  
Director Isamu Hyoto**



The Modern Transportation Museum was opened by Japanese National Railways (JNR) in 1962 to commemorate the start of the Osaka Loop Line. It fulfils a role as an institution for social education by various means, such as displaying items in a manner that stresses historical significance, opening its library to the public, and holding exhibitions and lectures in the auditorium. The museum has 7 exhibit rooms introducing the history from the birth of railways, the relationship between railways and society and culture, high-speed railways, and principles such as the mechanisms of railways and the structure of transport. There are also 20 railcars on display. At over 50 years old, the aging museum building is closing in April 2014 for renovation and is scheduled to reopen as a new railway museum in spring 2016 when it merges with the Umekoji Steam Locomotive Museum. It will have high-quality, lively exhibits that stimulate interest in learning about railways through

visual and sensory sensations to be an attractive museum in step with the community and promote the features of these two historic and traditional museums.

**Q&A Session**

Participants asked about the transition from closing to opening of the new museum and Mr Hyoto explained that the Modern Transportation Museum is closing during the transition, but the Umekoji Steam Locomotive Museum will still be exhibiting and operating steam locomotives as usual. Furthermore, while the Modern Transportation Museum features aircraft, automobiles, and ships in addition to railways, the new museum will specialize in railways only.

**Kyushu Railway History Museum:  
Director Masaaki Sato**



The Kyushu Railway History Museum opened in August 2003 in the building that used to be the headquarters of Kyushu Railway, the oldest and historically most valuable



Delegates during Q &amp; A session

(The Railway Museum)

building in the red-brick Mojiko Retro Town. As a railway promotion and culture site, and an attractive tourist site, it creates a nostalgic atmosphere where daily cares can be forgotten for some reflective thinking on what really counts. Based on this concept, the museum is a fun place, attracting a wide range of people, from railway fans to day-tripping families. It has a driving simulator and the 'Kyushu Railway Panorama' HO gauge model railway, along with exhibits of life-size passengers and conductor inside passenger carriages from the Meiji period (1868–1912) with sound effects to enhance the mood. As a result, the museum functions both as a history lesson explaining the importance of Kyushu's railways to future generations and as a theme park featuring delights such as a mini-train park and a train driving simulator.

#### Q&A Session

Participants asked about whether there is a cooperative network between Japan's railway museums and were told how the museums work hand-in-hand as exemplified by lending materials for special exhibitions. Another question was asked about commissioning management to local governments and the various management styles, such as being run directly, or by a foundation, or outsourced. It was explained that a designated manager system came into effect in 2005, but only JR Kyushu applied because many

aspects are difficult to handle for an organization other than a railway company.

#### SCMAGLEV and Railway Park: Director Toshiharu Kaneko



The SCMAGLEV and Railway Park opened in March 2011 in conjunction with Nagoya City's 'Monozukuri (manufacturing) Culture Exchange Area Project'. The concepts behind the museum are: introducing high-speed railway technology using exhibits from conventional lines to Superconducting Maglev with emphasis on the Tokaido Shinkansen; presenting a venue for learning about the impact of railways on society from various perspectives; and providing a

space to learn in a fun way using models, simulators, and more. Exhibits feature 39 pieces of rolling stock, including three that set world speed records (a steam locomotive, a shinkansen carriage, and a Superconducting Maglev car) as well as a corner for introducing high-speed railway technology, a diorama re-creating 24 hours in the life of a railway, and a Superconducting Maglev exhibit using video and vibration to give visitors a realistic experience of travelling at 500 km/h. In the 2.5 years since opening, the museum has hosted some 2.16 million visitors from Japan and abroad. By providing events throughout the year and special services for school groups, the museum continues serving as a venue to talk about dreams and memories through railway rolling stock and as a hands-on venue to give children dreams and hopes that may perhaps encourage some of them to enter the world of monozukuri (manufacturing).

### Q&A Session

Participants asked about the programme for children and the system of cooperation with Nagoya City. Mr Kaneko explained that to motivate children, the park provides opportunities to actually touch exhibits when drivers' cabs are opened to the public, and also holds programmes where drivers and conductors introduce their jobs and show simulator operations to children. Cooperation from Nagoya City is mainly for attracting visitors using tie-ups such as having the SCMAGLEV and Railway Park as a destination

for walking events. On the question of whether the railway park deals with issues about citizens opposed to Maglev technology, he replied that the railway park only introduces history and technology. A separate special department at JR Central deals with opposing opinion.

### Korea Railroad Museum: Director Gil Shin Son



The Korea Railroad Museum was opened in 1988 by Korean National Railroad to play a key role in contributing to the growth of railway culture through collection, preservation, and exhibition of railway-related materials, education about railway history, and promotion of railways in Korea. It has a collection of 10,389 items and sees exchanges with other museums within and outside Korea as indispensable



Discussion during Q & A session

(The Railway Museum)

to its development. As a result, it invites directors of other museums in the Korean Museum Association and is planning exchanges with overseas railway museums.

The museum collection includes photographs of the ground-breaking ceremony for Korea's first railway in 1897 and models of steam locomotives, along with a room explaining the history of railways in Korea. It also has a rolling stock room to view the mechanisms and changes in locomotives, passenger cars and freight wagons, a model-railway diorama showing day and night scenes, and a future railway room introducing the direction for Korean railways and rolling stock development. An actual presidential train is on display outside the museum too. Research materials include a database with content introducing railway history stories for children and railway-related materials designated as cultural properties.

#### Q&A Session

Asked whether the project of visiting museums abroad with museum directors in Korea will continue, Mr Son introduced a recent visit to Kanazawa in Japan and said they would like to continue with the project.

#### DB Museum:

##### Deputy Director of Public Relations Rainer Mertens



Founded in 1899, DB Museum is the oldest railway museum in the world. It became the official corporate museum of Deutsche Bahn (DB) in 1996. Today, it boasts the world's largest collection of rolling stock under its management (569 pieces). In addition to rolling stock and technology, it also exhibits railway culture itself in a way that incorporates political and economic aspects. This includes the role of railways in the Holocaust during WWII and the merger of railways at reunification of East and West Germany. From the perspective of railway legends, exhibits include the palace car of Bavarian King Ludwig II, the first steam locomotive to reach 200 km/h, a replica of the ICE, and more. The museum also makes efforts in education and services, holding various guided tours for target audiences. In

January 2013, it opened a new exhibit area called KIBALA where children aged 3 to 12 can learn interactively. A *Kinderbeirat* (Children's Advisory Board) was also involved in planning this exhibit area to reflect the opinions of children, and the number of visitors increased by 50% since the exhibit opened.

#### Q&A Session

Participants asked about the Children's Advisory Board, and were told how the museum listened to what some 20 members aged 6 to 12 expected from the museum. Their proposals included big changes, such as switching exhibits from steam locomotives to modern high-speed ICE trains. Asked about the guided tours, it was explained the 14 guides are mostly freelance students.

#### Baltimore & Ohio Railroad Museum: Executive Director Courtney B. Wilson



Baltimore is the birthplace of American railways. The roundhouse at the centre of the museum features a platform and passenger carriage works, and a maintenance and repair depot for handling full-size locomotives opened there 8 years ago. The venue is very popular and is even hired out for weddings and dinners. The museum has also partnered with the Smithsonian Institution in an educational programme for young children, which has received many awards. Special exhibits are held every year, and because this year marks the 150th anniversary of the American Civil War, locomotives used as strategic weapons at the time are scheduled for display. The museum is also active in volunteer activities, maintaining the trains and lines that the museum operates and holding historical dramas with actors in period costumes.

The \$10 million a year required to operate the museum is covered by admission fees, membership fees, and donations from corporations and philanthropic organizations, with no government support. Financing is the major issue faced by the museum, and much of the income goes to maintaining and preserving the museum and its collections. Currently,

the museum is developing a smartphone application for tours and children's games. With a constant view to the future, the museum operates by focusing on how to keep at the cutting edge of technology.

#### **Q&A Session**

Participants asked about online activities, storage and maintenance of rolling stock, and the status of volunteers. Mr Wilson explained that short movies are produced about once a year as activities using social media, and achieve more than 1 million views. Most of the 200 carriages are stored outdoors with about 40 on exhibit at the same time. While it is difficult to maintain the livery paint condition, carriages with high historic value have priority for repairs. He also explained that the museum is supported strongly by volunteers who work just as hard as the paid staff.

#### **Swiss Museum of Transport: Director Martin Buetikofer**



The Swiss Museum of Transport exhibits more than just railways, featuring road transport, ships, cable cars, and aircraft as well. Founded in 1959, this museum has been visited by 725,000 people, or about 10% of the Swiss population. In addition to exhibits of a snow blower, Abt rack-and-pinion train, and steam locomotives with names like *Elephant*, *Crocodile*, and *Landi*, the museum also holds educational events using steam locomotives. A miniature steam locomotive gives children rides through the gardens. There are hands-on educational programmes for children and events where participants get experience in railway repair by working together. Hands-on educational programmes are mainly for children aged 2 to 16 where they can learn about 110 jobs related to transportation. They can even experience track construction and learn a variety of things, such as why track is ballasted. It is hoped this will motivate more children to want to work in the railway industry.

The museum is funded 10% by public funds and 90% by earnings, of which 50% comes from admission fees. In

addition to earnings from operating an adjacent cinema and conference centre, after-hours events such as weddings and birthday parties are an important source of funds. To attract visitors, new attractions are put in place by unique efforts such as viewing illuminated locomotives and listening to the sound of engines in dark night exhibits. A special exhibit was held in 2013 with the cooperation of 45 corporate partners to display shipping containers as part of the history of freight management systems and how goods reach Switzerland.

#### **Q&A Session**

Participants asked about after-hours private events, rolling-stock exhibits, and hands-on events for children. On events, Mr Buetikofer explained that four staff members work on advertising and operations to meet customers' needs. The 40 to 50 car exhibits are mostly on loan from outside bodies. Some offers are made to donate exhibits, but are refused for reasons such as inability to maintain them. Hands-on events are targeted at children aged 2 to 16, with work experience programmes for those from 14 to 18. It is believed that work experience programmes will help children get interested in the Swiss transport industry.

#### **Cité du Train: President Philippe Mirville**



Cité du Train was built in 1971 on the site of the former Mulhouse steam locomotive depot; it introduces the 185 years of history from steam locomotives to the newest Eurostar along with many items of rolling stock. One thousand items and 100 carriages were on exhibit in 2013. The collection is owned by SNCF, the French national railway, so the museum could be called the SNCF museum. Its mission is to tell the history of the national railway as well as conserve historic assets and tell the history of train rides in France. Of the 238 historic railcars, 100 are on exhibit and 40 are in storage repositories across France but are moved to Mulhouse for special exhibits. Exhibits include Train Trail, where animatronics is used to tell the history of individual carriages; Le Parcours Spectacle, where carriages are



Presentation by Swiss Museum of Transport

(The Railway Museum)

exhibited based on six themes, such as railways and holidays and the world of travel; The Platforms of History where the history of railways from 1844 to the present is exhibited; and The Railway Panorama, where actual trains are run outdoors for visitors to see.

In terms of operations, the museum sees 100,000 visitors a year and earns about €1 million from admission fees. However, the museum still needs a further €470,000 to operate; letting out the museum space at night for parties and seminars started a few years ago and is an important source of revenue.

#### Q&A Session

Participants asked about the steam demonstration for steam locomotives and major renovation in recent years. General Director Sylvain Vernerey explained that an oil-based medium is used instead of water vapour, meaning that a steam loco atmosphere is achieved without environmentally harmful exhaust. Mr. Mirville also said that the large-scale renovation is a gamble, but they are working towards success with the small crew of 11 thanks to the efforts of employees.

#### National Railway Museum: Director Paul Kirkman



The National Railway Museum was founded in 1975 when the Science Museum railway collection merged with Clapham Museum. Housing the world's largest railway collection, the museum is home to Stephenson's *Rocket*, more than 1 million photographs, tens of thousands of posters and artworks, and other items. The City of York is visited by 7 million tourists a year, so the museum has the potential to attract even more visitors.





Mr Sekine serving as the moderator

(The Railway Museum)

The museum is well received as a key tourist spot and has many strong points, such as partnerships with other railway museums, but also faces issues. The biggest problem is a shortfall in funding. Since it is a national museum, it cannot charge for admittance. The Great Hall main exhibit area is aging and renovation is an urgent issue, but large-scale projects with the City of York were abandoned due to the 2008 financial crisis, and they have not progressed since then. Currently, the museum is working to change its financing model, managing costs by means such as charging for special exhibits, night exhibits, mini train rides and the like, and by making use of volunteers.

The museum has a 10-year master plan that it is working steadily to fulfil. Specific planned efforts are enhancing links between the station and museum, setting up a welcome gallery, remodelling the Great Hall to better show rolling stock and history, and smoothing visitor flows by building a tunnel to connect the properties and connecting buildings. The plan also includes providing green spaces, expanding the art gallery to target young people, and carrying out projects to secure further sources of revenue.

### Q&A Session

To questions about the number of visitors and staff members, Mr Kirkman explained that the museum has 750,000 visitors a year, with the Shildon site alone getting more than 200,000. As for staff levels, catering and some functions are outsourced, but most jobs are done by the 120 museum employees, 15 of whom are curators.

## Discussions on Next Conference

Discussions started with the moderator Mr Sekine expressing his hope that the conference not be a one-time event and that it continue to be held in the future. All participants approved the aim that the conference continue to be held and future themes were considered. Mr Sekine proposed four themes: rolling stock exhibition, use of volunteers, measures to increase visitors, and the future of railway museums.

Modern Transportation Museum Director Isamu Hyoto said that, while they were all good themes, he was most interested in promotional activities to increase numbers of visitors.

Swiss Museum of Transport Director Martin Buetikofer touched on the fact that museums are struggling with public and private sector cooperation efforts and in persuading industry to provide exhibits. And he expressed an opinion that a fifth theme of funding and financing be added.

National Railway Museum Director Paul Kirkman proposed that a sixth theme of exhibits of present and future railways be taken up. He raised a point that although museums are good at exhibiting the past, discussion should be held on what to do to attract people today.

Finally, Mr Sekine said that based on the presentations of the directors, he had discovered the importance of using social media in projects and promotions, and he proposed that as a seventh theme. Themes for the next conference will be narrowed down from these seven.



Tour of the museum

(The Railway Museum)

A call was made for candidates to host the next world railway museum conference. DB Museum Director Russalka Nikolov proposed that it be held in 2015 in Germany. Courtney Wilson of Baltimore & Ohio Railroad Museum offered his support to Ms Nikolov and the host site for 2015 was unanimously approved.

## Social Events

### Reception

A reception was held on 6 November at Tokyo Station Hotel, which was renovated in November 2012 as part of the preservation and restoration of Tokyo Station. The conference participants, along with their spouses, attended as guests. Friendships and exchanges were deepened at this gathering where EJRCF executives and executives of JR East, who had been very supportive in staging the conference, participated as hosts.

### Museum Tour

A tour of The Railway Museum was held on the morning of 7 November. The participants toured in two groups to view the full-size rolling stock and other collections at the History Zone and the model railway diorama as well as exhibits in the Learning Zone. The tour closed with a viewing of a Class C57 steam locomotive being turned on the turntable followed

by a group photograph. Lunch was taken on the lunch train (real rolling stock reserved to provide eating space for visitors), where the group had a chance to experience one of the delights synonymous with Japanese railways—*ekiben* box meals.

### Programme for People Accompanying Representatives

While the conference was in progress on 7 November, people accompanying the representatives took the opportunity to go sightseeing in Saitama City. Three of the participants from overseas museums and the wife of The Railway Museum's director visited Hikawa Shrine followed by the Omiya Bonsai Art Museum and Bonsai House of the four seasons where they tried Japanese kimono and participated in a tea ceremony.

### After Conference Party

After the conference closing, a party was held with participants as well as dignitaries from the Railway Bureau of the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism, and Saitama City. Saitama City Mayor Hayato Shimizu expressed his welcome and raised a toast for the success of the next conference in Germany. A *koto* harp performance provided a relaxed atmosphere in which participants furthered exchanges.



Excursion to Nikko

(The Railway Museum)

### Excursion

Guests made a short trip to Nikko on 8 November, 1 day after the conference. They travelled by shinkansen first and then transferred to the Nikko Line. Upon arrival at Nikko Station, they received an explanation about the Imperial guest room at the station. After enjoying lunch at the Nikko Kanaya Hotel, the group took a bus to Nikko Toshogu Shrine where they were greeted by the beautiful red and gold leaves of autumn. They listened intently to the guide's explanation and took many photographs; some emulated locals on how to pay respects at the shrine. The day's events came to a close with the participating museum directors expressing their appreciation for the first conference.

Much of this first conference was taken up by introducing the individual museums, so the next conference in Nuremberg in 2015 will be the actual first step. However, the global exchanges furthered over these 3 days has encouraged interaction as a community of railway museums, and will benefit the activities of individual museums in the future. ■

## Conference Significance, Benefits and Plans for Future

Various themes were presented for the next conference, and some participants requested consideration of ways to overcome issues and situations by exchanging opinions and sharing information with other museums that handle railways. This conference has been of particular significance in laying the foundations for discussion and sharing as an international conference.



**Juri Kondo**

Mr Kondo is an assistant manager of Administration Department at The Railway Museum