

JRTR

Japan Railway & Transport Review

Feature

Transportation Policy in Japan

- Overcoming Difficulties Faced by Local Railway Transport and Role of Basic Act on Transport Policy
- On Trajectory for Resurgence of Local Public Transport Created Together with Tama The Stationmaster Cat
- Background and Overview of 'Appealing Train' Measures

Special Feature

- JR East EV-E301 Catenary and Battery-Powered Hybrid Railcar

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Clockwise from top left: Hiroshima Electric Railways' Green mover Max (Hiroshima Electric Railway), Toyama Light Rail (Toyama Light Rail Co., Ltd), Izuhakone Railways' Series 7000 (Izu Hakone Railway), Hitachinaka Seaside Railways' Series Kiha 205 (Hitachinaka Seaside Railway), Oigawa Railways' steam locomotive (Oigawa Railway), Wakasa Railways' railcar (Wakasa Railway)

Automobiles First?

When I was working in a provincial region, the track of a rail line along the Sea of Japan coastline collapsed due to scouring. It happened as the ground under the track had been cut away by years of wave action, falling into the sea along with the track. A line of power poles on the ocean side of the track and the overhead contact line supported by those poles fell into the sea first, and a train that passed through afterward lost power and eventually came to a stop. The cause of the power loss was not clear because it was night, and maintenance engineers who arrived later at the scene found that the track had already been sucked into the sea. If the train had passed just a little later, it would have been engulfed along with its passengers by the raging night sea. By luck, a major accident was avoided by a hairbreadth. But it still took 3 months to restore service.

Aerial photographs show that the railway line runs parallel to a prefectural highway at the accident site, with the two crossing back and forth to repeatedly come close to the shoreline. Looking closer at the photographs, wave-dissipating tetrapods can be seen on the shore where the highway runs close by. But coastal reinforcement is not visible where the railway runs along the shore. From this, one can see absurdity in the great disparity of operators bearing the burden of protecting lives from natural disasters for railways but taxes being used for that role in the case of roads.

Roads are built and maintained by taxes, and there are even systems whereby automobile users receive a substantial amount of money when purchasing an automobile, such as subsidies to help cover the costs of introducing clean energy vehicles (CEV). Railways are built and maintained by the funds of railway operators themselves. There are no fare subsidies for passengers using hybrid railcars, so modes of transport cannot be said to be treated equally. I cannot help but think that such unequal competitive conditions are behind the situation of unending closures of railway lines in Japan.

K. Aoki

CONTENTS

Feature: Transportation Policy in Japan

Overcoming Difficulties Faced by Local Railway Transport and Role of Basic Act on Transport Policy	6
On Trajectory for Resurgence of Local Public Transport Created Together with Tama The Stationmaster Cat	18
Background and Overview of 'Appealing Train' Measures	28

Special Feature

JR East EV-E301 Catenary and Battery-Powered Hybrid Railcar	36
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Another Perspective

One Shovelful at a Time –Volunteering in Tohoku–	44
--	----

Topics	48
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Photostory

Revitalising Local Rail Business	2, 57
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