

JRTR

Japan Railway & Transport Review

Feature

Development of Japanese High-speed Rail Network

- Overview of Hokkaido Shinkansen (Opening between Shin-Aomori and Shin-Hakodate-Hokuto)
- Chuo Shinkansen Project using Superconducting Maglev System
- One Year After Hokuriku Shinkansen Opening

Special Feature

- Recent Developments in Local Railways in Japan
- Overview of Kyoto Railway Museum

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2-2, Yoyogi 2-chome, Shibuya-ku,
Tokyo 151-0053, Japan
Tel (81 3) 5334 0623
Fax (81 3) 5334 0624

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Editorial Design:

Keiichi Aimon

Translation & Production:

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Shinkansen cars of Hokkaido, Chuo (using SCMAGLEV), and Hokuriku Shinkansen. Top: Series H7 car (Kotsu Shimbunsha), bottom left: Series L0 car (JR Central) bottom right: Series W7 car (JR West)

Issues in Expansion of Japan's High-speed Rail Network

A report produced by a certain bank's surveying department forecast the economic effect of opening the Tohoku Shinkansen a few years ahead of the June 1982 start of service on that line. More than 30 years later, we find that actual figures exceed those that were forecast. The ripple effect on society from the start of shinkansen service has thus been proved to be extremely large. For the Hokkaido Shinkansen, which opened to Hakodate in March 2016, a bank in Hokkaido has produced a report forecasting the economic effect of that. We have to wonder what will the results will show a few tens of years down the road?

High-speed rail investment is made starting from sections with high marginal utility, so the effects of high-speed rail later, including in Hokkaido, will diminish. Not only will the expected economic effects lessen, a long time for return on investment will also be needed. When expanding the high-speed rail network with priority on the policies of improving the quality of citizens' lives and stimulating the economy, consideration needs to be taken for the railway company that operates the high-speed railway. On the other hand, schemes have been adopted where conventional lines parallel to new high-speed railways are run by quasi-public operators. The business environment clearly worsens. In order to correct that, measures need to be pushed forward to promote use of conventional lines using the strengths of local governments involved, such as building infrastructure including city halls, hospitals, community centres, and other public facilities in conjunction with stations. And of course, that must be done under a perspective looking at the overall transportation system of the region. What can be said for both high-speed railways and conventional railways is that it is crucial to actively expand the external economies with those and to create mechanisms that can be introduced to management and make the effort to introduce those mechanisms.

JRTR Editorial Team

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