Overview of the Public Transport System and Policy in Japan

Ryo WATANABE
Policy Bureau, MLIT
Japan
1. **Overview of the Public Transport System**

The public transport services in Japan are basically provided by private transport business entities as private businesses. The National Government secures supply of safe and smooth transport services by conducting supervision to the transport business entities and, in addition, provides necessary supports for the transport business entities in accordance with the particular policy objectives.

By international standards, Japanese passenger transportation share of the public transport system is quite high.

As described above, the public transport system in Japan is remarkably characterized in that:

1. It has developed utilizing the energy of the private sector, and
2. It is proud of its high share in the passenger transportation.

2. **Overview of the Public Transport Policy**

   (1) **After the World War II**

   After the World War II, when the Japanese society as a whole was working hard toward economic development with a clear objective of catching up with European countries and the U. S. A priority issue was to improve the transport capacity so that the transport system would not be the bottleneck for the economic development. The government, therefore, rushed to upgrade the transportation infrastructure and at the same time tried to stabilize the transport business management by imposing the restrictions on transport supply and demand by business category and to secure providing stable supply of the transport service.

   (2) **In 90’s**

   In 90’s, however, it was desired to promote de-regulation in many aspects of the social and economic systems because the Japanese society and economy was well matured. Additionally, the public needs of the transport had been diversified and sophisticated. These circumstances forced the government to change the traditional public transport policy and as a result, the government decided to abolish the restrictions on transport supply and demand.

   (3) **Abolishment of the Restrictions on Transport Supply and Demand**

   The government decided to abolish the restrictions on transport supply and demand, which is the basic approach in the traditional transport administration, and to implement the deregulation from 2000 to 2002. The purposes were to facilitate the free competition among the transport businesses entities in compliance with market and self responsibility principles, to enhance and diversify the transport services and to promote lower transport fares/fees and diversified fare-setting system through more efficient and active business activities in the transport industry.
3. Today's Tasks of Public Transport

As for the public transport policy, the National Government considered that it is the basis that maintenance of the transport services and improvement of the convenience for users would be facilitated by the economic activities of the private business entities based on the market principles; and the National Government has provided various supports as measures to complement the basis.

However, recently there are growing needs for the government to take some countermeasures against the following conditions;

- Many cases where obvious improvement can not be facilitated by relying only on the market principles have been seen in the sections connecting business entities and connecting modes;
- While some transport business entities have fallen into difficulty in management due to decrease of the number of users caused by the development of motorization and the progress of the trend towards fewer children and an aging society, etc., the cases have been seen where local residents independently took measures for facilitating the maintenance and improvement of the public transport services.

<Today's Tasks of Public Transport>

1. Realization of Seamless Public Transport

It is urgent to realize the seamless connection in the public transport system as the first step and then to take necessary actions from the inter-modal viewpoint by utilizing railways, buses, and so on from in compliance with the policy goals. To achieve these, it is necessary to establish the mechanism to improve interline guidance, to realize more convenient train connections at the same platform, to introduce and standardize IC cards, to introduce discount fare system for interline passengers, to realize more convenient changes of buses, to develop rules on usage of the traffic nodes, to coordinate lay-overs, etc.

2. Promotion of Diverse Participation of Local Residents, etc

In some areas, the local public transport has difficulty in maintenance and improvement only by the transport business entities and the administration.

Therefore, it is necessary to establish the mechanism to promote the participation from diversified sources, including the local communities.

⇒ In order to appropriately cope with such new tasks, discussions are being carried out in the National Government currently including experts (to be concluded in June in this year)

4. Today's Meaning of Public Transport

(1) The Basic Approaches for the Public Transport

The public transport shall be developed basically utilizing the energy of the private sector continuously also from now on. Based on this, introduction of a new policy that takes into account the following meanings is demanded.
(2) Today's Meaning of Public Transport

1. Solution for the Environmental Problems

CO2 emission from private cars increased by 40% in the past ten years in Japan. It is one of ecological solutions to let automobile commuters use the public transport.

2. An Effective Measure for the Society of Fewer Children and Aging

Because of the falling birthrate and the aging population, the population in Japan is expected to show negative growth from 2007. Under such circumstances, it is necessary to provide various options of the transportation mode to satisfy the diversified needs in local communities. In addition, considering the fact that users will be aging, it is more important to offer more user-friendly public transport system.

3. A Tool for the Promotion of the Local Community

In various places in Japan, more efforts have been made, focusing on revitalizing areas through expanded exchanges in and out of the areas, promoting the tourism and invigorating central urban areas. With this trend, it is more important to activate the public transport system in line with renovation activities in communities.

(3) The Public Transport Policy in the Future

Based on the above meanings, Japan has so far implemented:

- Improvement of the environment that facilitates reaching agreement among those who are concerned; and
- "Transportation Demand Management",

and has obtained results at a satisfactory level.

From now on, it is necessary to push:

- Improvement of environment that facilitates reaching further agreement among those who are concerned; and
- "Mobility management" of the local residents and providing incentives to the local residents in order to enhance their awareness for themselves to support the maintenance and improvement of the public transport.

Ryo WATANABE
Director for the Regional Development of
The Transport Planning Division
Policy Bureau, MLIT