

PRESENT STATE AND ISSUES CONCERNING BARRIER-FREE TRANSPORTATION IN JAPAN AS OF 2006

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<THE NUMBER OF RAILROAD STATIONS EQUIPPED WITH ELEVATORS>

Working toward “public transportation that is easy for anyone to get on and off,” we have implemented simultaneous activities to demand barrier-free transportation once a year jointly with many various organizations for persons with disabilities and negotiated our requests with regional railroad and bus companies, local governments, and the national Government for many years.

We were deeply involved in the Traffic Barrier-Free Law (Law for Promoting Easily Accessible Public transportation Infrastructure for the Elderly and Disabled Persons) that was enacted in 2000. With this law, the accessibility of public transportation has effectively increased compared with the time before the enactment of this law.

The number of railroad stations with elevators, which we have endeavored to enhance most, has significantly increased. For example, four out of ten major subways in Japan have equipped all their stations with elevators (*1).

(*1) These four are the subways of Sendai City, Kyoto City, Kobe City, and Fukuoka City. The rest are the subways of Yokohama City, Sapporo City, Nagoya City, Tokyo Metropolitan, Tokyo Metro Co., Ltd., and Osaka City. They intend to secure at least one route which is thoroughly barrier-free from outside station to a platform (‘one barrier-free route’, hereunder) in all the stations by the year 2010 (*2).

(*2) Yokohama City, Sapporo City, and Osaka City are most likely to secure ‘one barrier-free route’ by installing elevators. According to information sources, however, Nagoya City, Tokyo Metropolitan, and Tokyo Metro Co., Ltd. include wheelchair-accessible escalators and other lifts such as stair-lifts (called Escal) etc. as the measures to guarantee ‘one barrier-free route.’

492 out of a total of 600 subway stations have elevators (82%).

As for all the railroad stations in Japan including subways, 1,762 out of a total of 9,566 stations have elevators, (18%).

Wheelchair-accessible toilets are installed at 2,388 out of a total of 9,566 stations (25%). As to subway stations alone, 508 out of a total of 600 (85%) stations have toilets

for wheelchair users.

<MAKING THE LEVEL DIFFERENCE AND THE GAP BETWEEN PLATFORMS AND TRAINS BARRIER FREE>

The wheelchair users, the elderly and those with baby carriages have difficulties when transferring. The level difference and the gap between a platform and a train is a big barrier when they are transferring from a station building to a train. Especially, with such barriers, wheelchair users require the help of station attendants in getting on and off a train, which is a big factor in preventing them from moving independently. Barrier-Free Standard (Smooth Moving Standard) of the aforementioned law is set to clear the level difference and the gap between a platform and a train. Due to the effect of this standard, some railroad lines have accomplished removing this barrier as seen in Nanakuma Line of Fukuoka Municipal Subway, opened on February 3, 2005, which we can be proud of to the world. In this aspect, currently, we do not have goal indicators including numerical targets to indicate removal of barriers. In this regard, the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure and Transport, in annual meetings with us, avoids disclosing their numerical targets, including the setting of objectives regarding this issue.

According to the verbal response received from the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure and Transport for the first time last year, as an effective measure to provisionally clear the level difference and the gap between a platform and a train, portable ramps are used at over 6,000 out of 9,566 stations in Japan.

<PLATFORM GATES (THE BEST MEASURE TO PREVENT PERSONS WITH VISUAL IMPAIRMENTS FROM FALLING OFF PLATFORMS)>

The most effective facilities to prevent persons with visual impairments from falling off platforms are the platform door and the platform gate. New transport systems, monorails, and subways are more inclined to install such facilities.

There is a tendency that these facilities are installed at newly established lines among regular railroad lines. Currently, 304 stations of 26 lines in Japan have introduced them, which cover only 3% of all the railroad stations.

It is desirable that many platform gates be installed as soon as possible so that there will be no more accident where persons with visual impairments die from falling off platforms.

<ACCESSIBILITY OF ROUTE BUSES>

As for route buses, 19 non-step buses were introduced for the first time in 1996. Currently its number exceeds 7,850. Also, the total number of one-step buses with a ramp and buses with a lift is estimated to be over 8,000. One of the points for discussion when revising the Barrier-Free Standard (Smooth Moving Standard) from now on will be the inclination of ramps.

As to the introduction of non-step buses, there is a problem of regional disparity. No non-step bus has been introduced in Akita Prefecture and Okinawa Prefecture. They are concentrated in Tokyo metropolitan and other large urban areas.

Furthermore, the operation of wheelchair-accessible buses (non-step buses, one-step buses with a ramp, and buses with a lift) has “no specific route, no specific time, and no announcement of time schedule.” This can be considered as a discrimination against persons with disabilities as wheelchair users cannot utilize the services as needed and also because only wheelchair users are treated in such an unfair way and not other passengers.

<ACCESSIBILITY OF STREETCARS>

There are 19 streetcar companies in Japan. After streetcars are made barrier free by introducing a new type of low-floor vehicles and by raising the level of platforms, it is recognized that streetcars are the easiest to get on and off and the most convenient for wheelchair users, the elderly, and others.

Especially on the Toyama Port Line (nicknamed as the Portram) of Toyama Light Rail Co., Ltd., which opened in April 2006, all vehicles and stations are accessible in accordance with “universal design.” Accessibility improvement in streetcars has finally begun on its full scale.

The accessibility of existing streetcars are also being challenged well. In Tokyo, all the stations on the Toei Streetcar (Toden) Arakawa Line and the Tokyu Setagaya Line are barrier-free. It is very easy for wheelchair users, the elderly, and those with a baby carriage to get on and off at barrier-free stations of super-low-floor streetcars in Hiroshima City, Okayama City, and Kagoshima City. Currently, in various places in Japan, planning for streetcar operations is under consideration.

<ACCESSIBILITY OF TAXIS AND COMMUNITY BUSES>

The existing Traffic Barrier-Free Law was not applicable to taxis, but the New Traffic Barrier-Free Law requires taxis to be barrier-free. Attention is being paid in deciding content details and setting numerical targets.

In Tokyo, taxis equipped with a lift or a ramp has started to operate. Still, only 5,000 out of a total of 260,000 taxis (only 2%) in Japan are barrier-free.

Also in recent years, local governments are operating "community buses" to secure transportation for those who have difficulties in transferring such as persons with disabilities, the elderly, and citizens living in areas where transportation is insufficient within their administrative regions.

More than 900 cities, towns, and villages operate community buses. Some community buses are equipped with a lift or ramp and also the number of non-step buses is increasing. Accessibility stated in the new law is also applicable to community buses. From now, it is necessary to appeal to local governments to require that a community bus should be a non-step bus.

<TASKS AND OUTLOOK>

Thus, measures towards accessibility in public transportation in Japan are becoming increasingly diversified. However, the problem of regional disparity is becoming serious.

In urban areas, barrier removal in railroads and buses is progressing. On the other hand, in local areas, a state of no public transportation is occurring due to the abolition or decrease of railroad and bus lines.

Furthermore, there are serious cases of refusal to give services to persons with disabilities in cars, planes, boats, facilities, and accommodations, due to the lack of understanding, prejudice and discrimination towards them.

Also, wheelchair users meet accidents often when using equipments for traffic accessibility. For example, there are accidents such as falls and turnovers from a wheelchair-accessible escalator or from 'Chair Mate' (a caterpillar type of lift for going up and down a staircase). Falls from platforms at railroad stations among persons with visual impairments and wheelchair users are still occurring.

We also have an issue wherein persons with disabilities using an electric wheelchair with a steering wheel are refused to enter into facilities and vehicles which accessibility should be guaranteed. This is not logical. The rights of mobility of persons with

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disabilities and the elderly to get around using public transport seems violated by the arbitrary policies of railroad companies.

Furthermore, it was revealed that Toyoko Inn Co.,Ltd., a major business hotel chain, illegally renovated its facilities and violated both the 'Heart Building Law (Law for Building Accessible to and Usable by the Elderly and Physically Disabled Persons)' and the ordinance to build a comfortable living environments for persons with disabilities. This has made persons with disabilities and the elderly aware of being consumers as hotel guests.

We have been working so that those who have difficulties in transferring such as persons with disabilities and the elderly will become more aware of their rights as passengers, thereby truly ensuring their free, safe, and smooth participation in society.

Moreover, aiming for information accessibility, railroad, bus, airline, and shipping companies has made information on accessible facilities open and public through homepages and at stations. This has been promoted increasingly after the establishment of the Traffic Barrier-Free Law. However, access to the information we need is not sufficient enough yet. It is necessary that we demand more accessibility to information which we need.

We also need to actively cooperate in deciding the basic concepts under the New Traffic Barrier-Free Law and also participate from the planning stage in creating accessible transportation carried out by various companies. Once a traffic barrier-free project is accomplished, it will be used for tens of years. Therefore our participation carries heavy responsibility. Under the concept of universal design, it is necessary to strive for accessibility through 'spiral-up*' development so that anyone can move and use facilities safely and smoothly.

*spiral-up: It is a staged and continuous process in which users participate actively from the preliminary study stage to the post-project evaluation stage and share knowledge obtained through their participation process to apply it to other projects.

ANNEX

Accessibility Experience Tour

By Mr. Yoshiaki IMAFUKU

【Schedule】

- 10:10-11:00 Lecture: “Accessibility in Japan”
- 11:00-11:10 Break
- 11:10-12:00 Lecture: “The problem of the accessibility in Japan in the future”
- 12:00-13:00 Lunch
- 13:00-16:00 Accessibility Experience Tour

【Route】

Yoyogi-uehara Station



↓(Odakyu Line)



Gotokuji Station

↓(Observe the Multi-style Toilet for all users by Universal Design)

↓(Tokyu Setagaya Line)

↓(Observe the Japanese style Light Rail Transit (LRT)/streetcars)

Shimotakaido Station

↓(Observe the ‘through right-angle elevator’ which has an exit in the right-angle direction from an entrance)

↓(Keio Line)

Meidaimae Station



↓(Keio Inogashira Line)



Shimokitazawa Station

↓(Observe the stairlift for a wheelchair)

↓(Odakyu Line)



Shinjuku Station

(Get on a non-step bus for all users by Universal Design)