Transportation Problems in Tokyo

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Tokyo is a gigantic metropolis. However, unlike many other big cities in the world, Tokyo is relatively free of serious urban problems. Although Tokyoites complain about the high cost of living, most belong to the middle class. Tokyo has no inner-city problems and has some of the lowest crime rates. Nevertheless, Tokyo does have more serious transportation problems than metropolises in comparable industrial countries.

Tokyo versus Tokyo Metropolitan Area

The metropolis of Tokyo has a population of 11 million. It is not as populous as Mexico City or Sao Paulo when viewed as an administrative unit, but we must remember that Tokyo is surrounded by many cities .

. The moderate climate, relative abundance of water, and the wide stretch of flat land in Tokyo and adjacent areas drew more people and industries from other parts of the country. Thus, Tokyo continued to extend its urban area. An extensive green belt, such as that in London, was planned around Tokyo in order to contain the never-ending expansion.

But the plan proved powerless against the pressure of urbanisation and the demands of groups favouring further expansion. Dispersion of population and industries to other areas was always the most important objective in every national development plan which was revised almost every decade. As a result, manufacturing industry was reasonably dispersed to other parts of the country, but commercial, information and service industries remained and kept growing in the TMA. Education, culture, and a few other activities also grew more than in any other areas. As a result, urban land use has been sprawling in TMA and both population and industrial development has become more and more intensive.

These manufacturers also create large demand for freight transport in and out of Tokyo, including

international shipping. Tokyo's bayside area also houses electric power plants, gas plants, steel production facilities, petroleum refineries and other heavy industries that serve the giant demand of the megacity.

Transportation problems

The biggest problem of urban railways in the TMA is the congestion during rush hours. In fact, railway congestion is one of the most serious social problems in the area.

For many years, complaints have been made about the low speed of the suburban railways and the unpleasantly- crowded rides. Considerable improvements have been made in the past few years in terms of trains and station facilities such as high-performance cars, air conditioning, etc

Train fares in the TMA are not high. In fact, they are quite low compared to the generally high prices of other items in the area. One shortcoming of public transport services in the TMA is that joint fare systems common in European cities have yet to be introduced.

. There are many railway operators varying greatly in business efficiency. Railways in the TMA are already so widely utilized, that there is a lack of incentive to encourage people to transfer from automobiles to railways. As a result, passengers suffer from the complex fare systems. Each time they change trains run by different operators, they must pay extra and show their tickets at wickets more often.

However, the lack of large parking spaces is not as serious a problem in central Tokyo as it is elsewhere. People rely more on public transport than on cars and do not use their own cars so often. In addition, as parking space is required in all large buildings parking space is not very scarce in most of the business districts.

Efforts toward solution

Many attempts have been made to stop heavy concentration of population and economic activities in the TMA, and to disperse them to remote areas. But these attempts have never provided noticeable changes.

More recently, the population in-flow to the TMA has stopped, and more people are moving out, due partly to the stagnating Japanese economy and the shift of industrial production bases to overseas. This trend is being promoted also by the recent increase of urban attractiveness of big cities away from Tokyo.

Naturally, such a trend is desirable from the standpoint of reducing transportation problems in the TMA. It is important to apply continued control to new industrial locations within the TMA, thereby encouraging further distribution of population and industries to other parts of the country.

The current efforts aimed at structural improvement of cities include the transfer of central Tokyo's

functions to several key cities within the TMA. They also include promotion of new housing projects in central Tokyo.

These plans are expected to reduce long-distance transportation, although the results will not be seen for many years. Projects are currently under way in many places involving redevelopment of existing urban areas and land readjustment. These and other projects aim to enhance living environments, as well as improve streets and other transportation facilities.

Transportation facilities are being reinforced in many places. The relevant projects include construction of large-scale transportation facilities such as urban railways and arterial roads. But they are far from sufficient, and more projects are needed. Conventionally, financial requirements for the necessary investment for building new urban railways and expressways has been paid for by the users of these facilities.

Tokyo do suppress car transport in the TMA. Staggered commuting is being encouraged to spread rush-hour demand, although it has not yielded very noticeable results. Peak-load pricing and other fare-based systems are deemed necessary to control demand for railways and urban expressways in a more explicit manner.

In the near future, implementation of new technologies such as automated toll collection on railways and toll roads, and travel information systems for automobiles by dual direction telecommunication are expected. These developments in electronic fare or toll collecting systems will undoubtly reduce the technical difficulties in introducing economic ways of demand control mentioned above. New concepts for an underground transport network for freight are in the initial development stage, and experiments are scheduled in the near future. Research and development for such projects is being made mainly by transportation enterprises and equipment manufacturers.