



Newsletter on the  
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# Railway Technology Avalanche

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## The Need for Balance and Co-operation in Railway Technologies

**Nobuyuki MATSUMOTO**

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Today, the advantages of railways are being re-evaluated in various countries of the world from the point of view of environmental impact and from the point of view of how to reduce the cost of resources. Railways are also being viewed as a way to mitigate the effects of road traffic congestion in urban areas. Many mass media have reported on and highlighted this phenomenon as a renaissance of the railway age. I am delighted to see, as a railway engineer, the current promising situation for railways which has become very reliable and stable.

In these circumstances, I think it likely that railway related industries across the world will seize this opportunity to enhance their business. We should welcome this development to build up a high performance and efficient railway system based on the principle of competition. I should like to suggest, however, that the safety of rail transport is vitally important and not to be compromised by rough-and-ready decisions made for economic reasons. I should also like to emphasize the need to avoid feelings of frustration in terms of technical development likely to arise in a monopoly market which emerges as the result of mergers and acquisitions in the manufacturing industry.

Moreover, regarding the international standardization of railway technologies now in progress, I should like to mention that appropriate degrees of freedom are essential to facilitate the future development of railway technologies, although I agree that certain technical unifications are required. It may sound extreme, but if systems are unified or standardized too much in pursuit of the convenience offered by interoperability, for example, no new or innovative technologies

will be born in the future. This will ultimately lead to stagnation in the development of new railway technology - you could even say

that it would become an endangered species.

I believe that promotion of the continuous development of similar technologies in several different locations with balance and variations is necessary for the future development of railway technologies in the world, although this may not be strictly economic. In order to enhance technical development, information and personal exchanges are important between engineers in the same fields. The Railway Technical Research Institute is making efforts to facilitate such international exchanges by receiving 200 to 300 overseas visitors and sending almost the same number of its researchers abroad. The Division the author belongs to is implementing and supporting such activities along with collaborative research with overseas railway organizations and universities. It would give me the greatest pleasure if I have the chance to meet you at these situations in the near future.

