



Newsletter on the
Latest Technologies
Developed by RTRI

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Technical Support Extended to Local Railways

Akira YONEZAWA
Executive Director

In Japan, we have about 90 operators that conduct railway business in not-so-populated local areas. They provide services on passenger railways other than Shinkansen railways, conventional main lines, and railways operating in greater metropolitan areas. These passenger railways vary in size, for example from a short railway line of 5 km to a relatively long railway line of up to about 100 km. They play an important role as a means of transport not only for residents living along the lines but also for tourists.

However, there are problems in facilities and equipment used in these local railways. There are many tunnels and bridges that are 50 years or older and vehicles that have been in service for 30 years or more. Along with a decrease in the number of railway users, those operators are working hard to cope with the difficult management environment. For this reason, the central government and local governments provide financial aid to cover part of renewal costs of facilities and equipment. However, the operators have been reducing the total number of employees, retaining only a minimum number of engineers and technicians for maintenance.

RTRI organized a special unit dedicated to offering technical support for these local railway operators, as it has for about 20 years. The requests from local railway opera-



tors have been directed to RTRI through e-mails or by telephone. RTRI researchers respond to these requests usually by conducting field surveys and investigations or by providing technical information. During fiscal 2013, we handled almost 100 requests in total. They were related to track, civil engineering structures, electrical equipment, signal equipment and communication facilities, vehicles, and various other topics. To cite three examples; we took up a site investigation and guided an operator in taking measures against rail wear in a curved section; advised an operator in rectifying a problem with unusual wear of a wheel; and performed a soundness degree diagnosis of a bridge.

For our technical support, local railway operators express great appreciation to RTRI. We will continue to take advantage of our technical capabilities to extend more support to them.