

The 150th Transport Policy Colloquium
Washington Report XIV

**Comments on “Environmental Changes
Surrounding Urban Railroads in the U.S. and
Strategies for Recovery from the COVID-19
Pandemic” (Presentation by Mr. Okabe)**

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Overview of My Comments

- Goal and Research Questions of Presentation
- Conclusions of Presentation
- Comments on Presentation
- Questions to the Presenter

Goal of Mr. Okabe's Presentation

- In the U.S., there are two conflicting views on the necessity of urban railroads
- Under sluggish demand caused by the Covid pandemic, value of urban railroads has been called into question.



- Goal of today's presentation was to report recent changes in U.S. urban railroad market and the latest government's strategies on urban railroads.

Research Questions

Mr. Okabe attempted to answer the following questions:

1. “How has the Covid-19 pandemic impacted on urban railroads in the United States?”
2. “What are expected effects from financial assistance for public transit in the U.S. on urban railroad market?”

“How did the Covid-19 pandemic impact on urban railroads in the United States?”

Mr. Okabe's Conclusions

- It is widely considered that urban railroads would provide public transport service for socially vulnerable individuals in U.S.
- Ridership of urban commuter rail has declined significantly under the Covid pandemic, and it has not yet recovered.
- If the ridership would remain poor, it is afraid that lower priority of government's budget allocation could be given to public transit.

“How did the Covid-19 pandemic impact on urban railroads in the United States?”

Mr. Okabe's Conclusions

- It is widely considered that urban railroads would provide public transport service for socially vulnerable individuals in U.S.
- Ridership of urban commuter rail has declined significantly under the Covid pandemic, and it has not yet recovered.
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Question:

If low-income employees without car ownership would be major urban rail users, commuter rail demand should not significantly decline because they are essential workers. Why declined?

“How did the Covid-19 pandemic impact on urban railroads in the United States?” (conti.)

Current Status of Public Transit in U.S.

Professor Brian Taylor (UCLA)

The U.S. public transit system provides services to two different types of users:

- User type 1: Relatively wealthy people who own cars, but use public transit due to shortage of parking spaces or high cost of parking near their workplaces in the city center.
- User type 2: Essential workers who are non-white, have low-income, and do not own cars.

“How did the Covid-19 pandemic impact on urban railroads in the United States?” (conti.)

Effects of the Covid-19 Pandemic on Public Transit Use in U.S.

Professor Brian Taylor (continued)

- Impacts of Covid-19 pandemic
 - User type 1= Significant decrease in public transit users under popularization of remote working
 - User type 2= Insignificant effect



The aspect of public transit as a social service was brought to the forefront as a social issue.

Impact of Covid-19 on Urban Railroads in U.S. (hypothesis)

Popularization of remote working among white-collared workers in the Covid pandemic



A shift in some affluent people away from public transport contributed to operators' reduced profits



Decrease in service levels caused by reduced profits had a negative effect on the mobility of the low-income class

“What are expected effects from financial assistance for public transit in the U.S. on urban railroad market?”

Mr. Okabe’s Conclusions

- The “CARES Act” and “American Rescue Plan Act” functioned as emergency relief measures for operators in response to the Covid-19 pandemic.
- The “Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act” aimed to update/improve aging infrastructure, which was a long-standing problem.
- It is a good opportunity for public transit, including urban railroads, but operators are at a critical phase where it remains to be seen whether they can make the most of this opportunity.

“What are expected effects from financial assistance for public transit in the U.S. on urban railroad market?” (Conti.)

Mr. Okabe’s Conclusions

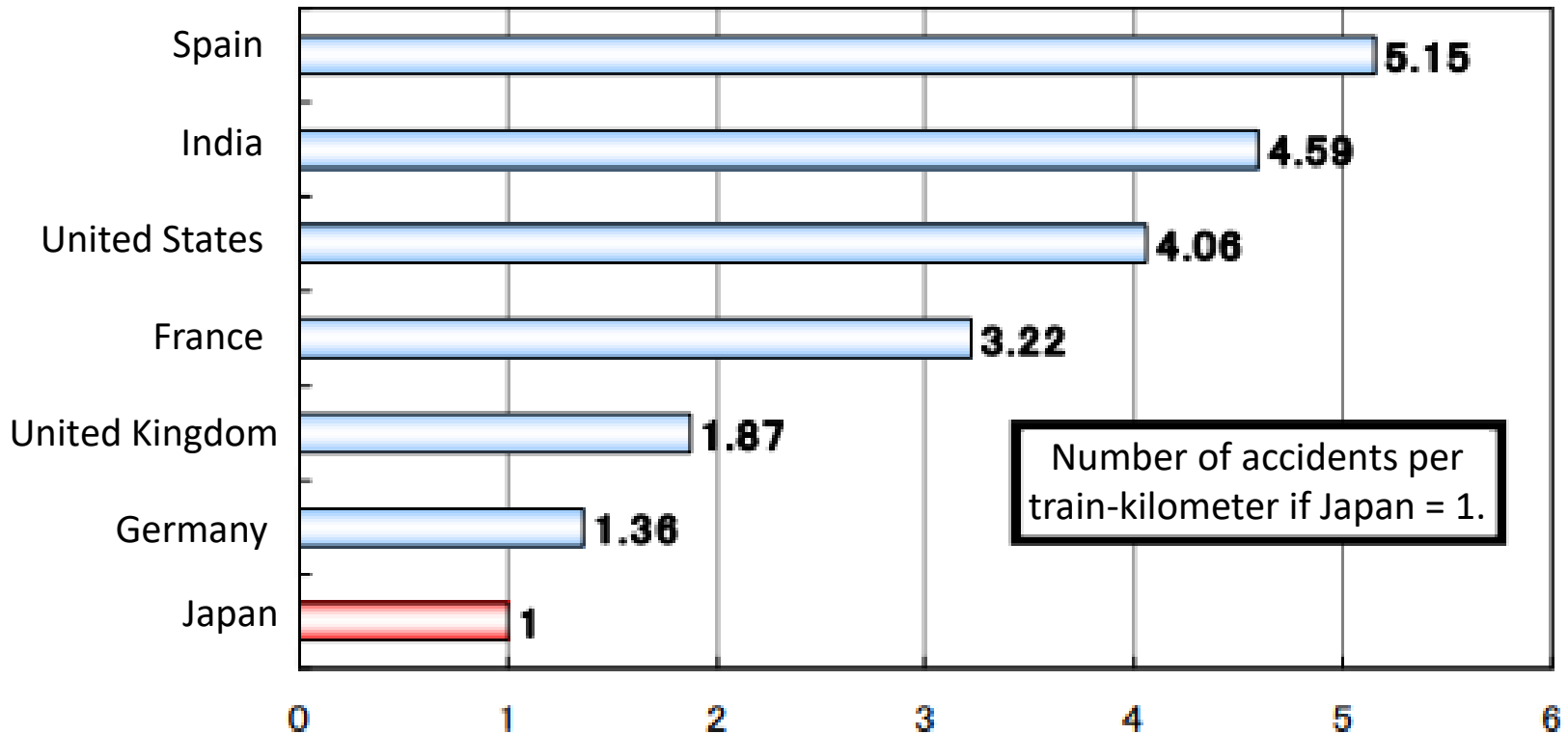
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Question:

Are the public transit services in U.S. horrible so that they get poor support from local people?

Safety of U.S. Railroads

U.S. railroads suffer four times as many accidents as in Japan.

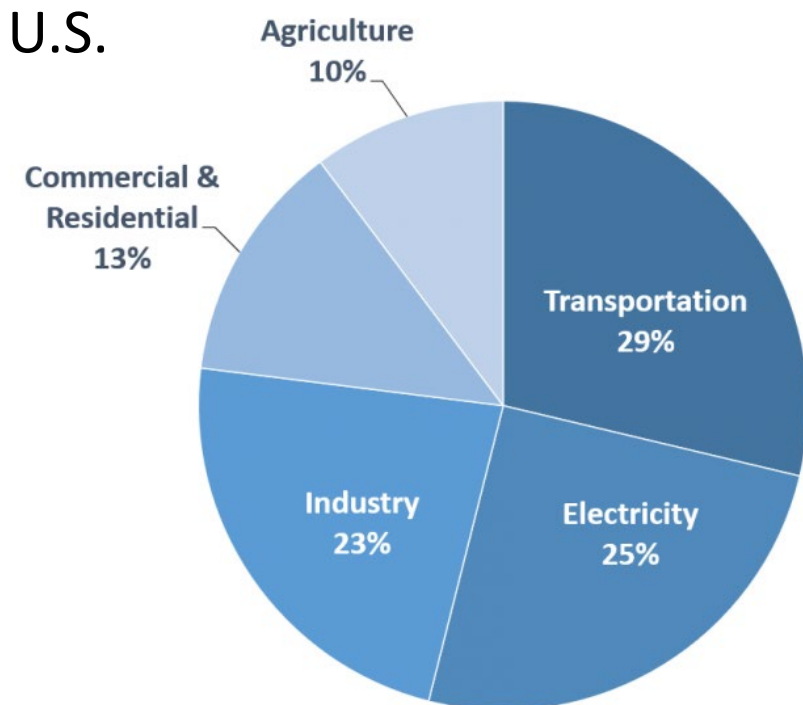


Source: "FY2005 Research report on rail safety reinforcement measures based on the sharing of accident information with major nations" (February 2006 Japan Railway Technical Service)

Source: Materials of Mr. Shunya Shiozaki, Railway Bureau of the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, and Transport

Greenhouse Gas Emissions from Transportation Sector in U. S.

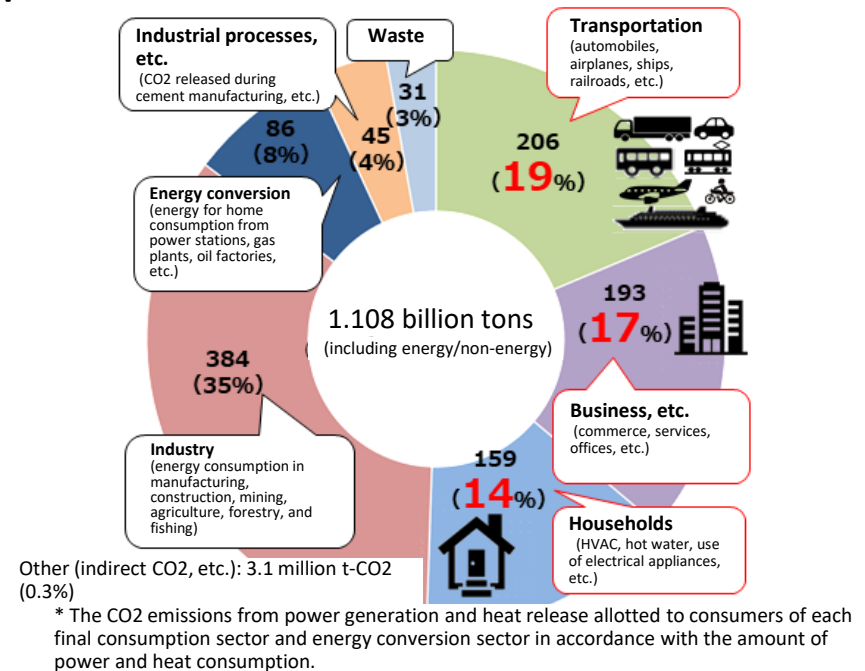
Percentage of transportation sector regarding the greenhouse gas emissions in U.S. is significantly higher than that in Japan.



Source: U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)

<https://www.epa.gov/ghgemissions/sources-greenhouse-gas-emissions>

Japan



Source: Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, and Transport materials

What kind of effect can financial assistance for public transit in the U.S. have on urban railroads? (continued)

Americans' Attitude towards Urban Railroads

Mr. Jarrett Walker (U.S. transportation consultant)

- It is widely believed that Americans does not have great mass transit because the country is too spread out, but this is a myth.
 - Though sprawling, Canada still manages to have adequate transport in all its major cities.
- Americans mistakenly prioritize “reach” over “frequency” of public transit.
 - “I’m not saying Americans are stupid,” he says. “It’s understandable, considering there is so much less transit, that they don’t get it.”

What kind of effect can financial assistance for public transit in the U.S. have on urban railroads? (continued)

Lack of investment in urban railroads in U.S.

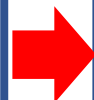
Professor Emeritus Robert Cervero (UC Berkley)

- The U.S. failed to invest in modernization of urban railroads over past 25 years.
 - Urban rail development was last conducted in 2001 for the Washington D.C. Metro.

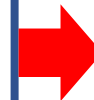
Shrikant, A. (2018). Why US public transportation is so bad — and why Americans don't care: How American mass transit measures up against the rest of the world's. Vox, <https://www.vox.com/the-goods/2018/9/26/17903146/mass-transit-public-transit-rail-subway-bus-car>

Expected Effects of Investment in U.S. on Urban Railroads

Significant improvement in service frequency/safety with large-scale investment in urban railroads



Fundamental change in people's perceptions of public transportation



Increased demand for urban railroads along with greater understanding with regards to investment, resulting in a virtuous cycle

“Can urban railroads in U.S. truly recover as expected?”

Will the large-scale financial assistance lead to recovery of U.S. urban railroads ?

Professor Emeritus Robert Cervero (UC Berkley)

- In order for promoting urban railroads in U.S., a rise in gas prices or “auto disincentives” will likely be necessary.
- Typical liberal, who supports public transit, weigh the choices and just end up driving when it comes to trip-to-trip decision-making.

Shrikant, A. (2018). Why US public transportation is so bad — and why Americans don't care: How American mass transit measures up against the rest of the world's. Vox, <https://www.vox.com/the-goods/2018/9/26/17903146/mass-transit-public-transit-rail-subway-bus-car>

Question on Mr. Okabe's Presentation 1

- The presentation indicated that the keywords of “Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act” in U.S. are “safety,” “modernization,” “climate,” and “fairness.”

Question 1 : In your opinion, does this proposed strategic framework work sufficiently for rehabilitation of urban railroads in the U.S.?

✓ Note that the keywords in the Tokyo Metropolitan Area were “international competitiveness,” “prosperous life,” “urban development,” “station space,” “reliability/security,” and “disaster prevention” (Council for Transport Policy Report 198).

Question on Mr. Okabe's Presentation 2

- The presentation showed that there is a conflict between those for and against public transit assistance in U.S. while we have not so far seen such a situation in Japan.

Question 2 : Do you expect that political conflicts regarding public transit funding similar to U.S could take place also in Japan in the future?

✓ Is the conflict in U.S. caused by a reason specific to the U.S. such as two-party system and ethnic diversity, or another reason that could be also found in Japan?

Question on Mr. Okabe's Presentation 3

- The presentation revealed that the large-scale budget under the “Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act” in U.S. may be a favorable opportunity for recovery of the nation’s public transit.

Question 3: Do you think there is any room for Japanese companies to enter into the U.S. urban rail business after the introduction of the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act?

- ✓ Japan’s Government’s strategy on overseas infrastructure development may not cover developing countries only.
- ✓ Can we expect to see new possibilities for extending Japan’s technology/ knowledge such as rolling stocks, maintenance, and urban development to developed countries?