

Remarks by H.E. Mr. HAYASHI Hajime,
Ambassador of Japan to the UK,
at the Reception for 150th Anniversary of UK-JAPAN Railway Friendship
on 17th October 2023

Honorable Members of Parliament,
Distinguished Guests,

It is a great pleasure to welcome you all to the Embassy of Japan and hold this event in order to commemorate 150 years of friendship through railways between Japan and the United Kingdom. My wife and I very much appreciate the presence of Mr Huw Merriman, Minister of State (Rail and HS2), Mr Greg Clark, Chair of the Japan All Party Parliamentary Group, and many other guests representing a wide range of stakeholders in railways from both countries. Being joined by many participants this evening, this event is a clear testament to the deep ties our countries have forged and solidified in railways over the past century and a half.

As many of today's participants may well know, it was in 1872, more precisely 14th October 1872, that Japan's first rail service started between Shimbashi Station in Tokyo and Yokohama Station. This was fifty years after the first rail line in the world had started to operate here in the UK. It is quite important to note that this first Japanese rail line also represented the beginning of Japanese and British cooperation through railways. The first trains to run on the Japanese line were hauled by steam locomotives imported from Britain at that time. Around 300 foreign engineers, mostly from the UK, including Edmund Morel, widely known as the father of the Japanese railways, lent their expertise to Japan, overseeing construction projects and educating their Japanese counterparts to help them become experts in their own right.

In 1893, Japan built its first domestically produced locomotive with the help

of Richard Francis Trevithick, grandson of famous British inventor Richard Trevithick. Subsequently many other British experts contributed to the groundwork for the Japanese railway network. This groundwork culminated in the development of *Shinkansen* trains, which started operating in 1964, almost a century after the first manifestation of Japan-UK rail cooperation.

Since then continuing efforts and hard work had been made to develop railway technologies. As a result, Japan has become one of the world's most advanced countries to enjoy high standard of the railway system. It is also one of the major producers of advanced rolling stock and railway equipment.

Under such circumstances, I feel it very natural that Japan started to contribute to railways abroad. Here certainly comes the United Kingdom, which had helped to build the Japanese railways for a long time. Now many Japanese, both individuals and industries, wish to return the favour to the UK so that our friendship in railways will further continue and flourish.

Today our two countries are actively working together to share expertise and technologies in this sector. For instance, Hitachi received an order for high-speed rolling stock for HS1 in 2005 and for the Intercity Express Programme in 2012, and has also contributed to the British economy by building factories and creating jobs across the UK. In 2021 the Hitachi-Alstom consortium was awarded the contract to provide rolling stock for the HS2 project upon its completion. Mitsui & Co has entered the UK railway operation business, further contributing to the transport system in this country. In addition, for more than 30 years JR Central has been operating an expert exchange programme in which more than 220 personnel from both countries have had the opportunity to take part. Indeed, I am pleased to be joined this evening by more than 50 guests from the UK side who have completed the training programme in Japan as well as ten more who are to travel to Japan for the same purpose this year.

The governments of both countries have also developed strong railway ties to enhance our cooperation. The Japan-UK Rail Working Group, a framework for dialogue between the relevant departments and industries, has had a meeting once every year since 2002 to discuss the common challenges we face and to further enhance our cooperation. There is no doubt that the achievements we are celebrating today have been made possible by the efforts of people from both countries and from both the public and private sectors. Moreover, our cooperation will be continued by the next generations. As some of you might know, many UK and Japanese children watch Thomas the Tank Engine, in which a Japanese engine called Hiro depicted as “the Hero of the Rails” has a special friendship with Thomas.

Let me conclude by saying how proud I am to look back on our shared history and long lasting friendship with you this evening, and that I strongly believe that there is huge potential for further cooperation in the rail sector. I dearly hope we can continue to work together to help realise this potential not only for the betterment of the rail industry but also for the overall prosperity of the people of both countries long into the future.

Thank you very much indeed.