

Remarks by H.E. Mr SUZUKI Hiroshi,
Ambassador of Japan to the UK,
at the 18th UK-Japan Rail Working Group
on 9th December 2024

My Lord, distinguished guests,

I am delighted to be here with you at the 18th iteration of the Japan-UK Rail Working Group. I would particularly like to thank Lord Hendy, the Minister of State for Rail, for being here today. As we understand, this is the first time the UK Minister has appeared at this Rail Working Group. To tell the truth, it is also the first time the Ambassador of Japan has made an address here. It is a significant moment for us both, I believe, in the already illustrious history of this group's contribution to Japan-UK rail relations.

Railways have long been an important foundation of Japan-UK relations, with a tradition of cooperation stretching back more than 150 years. British experts contributed long ago to the development of Japan's first rail network, between Shimbashi Station in Tokyo and Yokohama Station. The first trains to run on this line included steam locomotives imported from Britain. In more recent times, both countries have continued to share railway expertise and technology. We have established a network of mutually beneficial relationships involving a wide range of railway stakeholders from both countries, as evidenced by your attendance here today.

Very recently, in fact just late last month, we received the fantastic news that Tokyo Metro and Sumitomo Corporation, in collaboration with the UK rail and bus operator Go Ahead, were awarded the contract to operate the Elizabeth Line, beginning in May next year. Looking back, the history of underground railways in Japan goes back to 1927, when the first metro line, the Ginza Line, was opened. That project also enjoyed a valuable contribution from British engineers. We are very pleased that Japanese companies are now able to return this favour from 100 years ago, together with their British partners.

We are also collaborating extensively in the field of human resources, nurturing new talent, and fostering the next generation of railway professionals. JR Central has been operating an expert exchange programme with the UK for more than 30 years, involving more than 200 personnel from both countries so far.

As these examples show, railways are a key area where a wide range of cooperation has been conducted between our two countries.

I am confident that, going forwards, an even greater breadth of collaboration can be expected in the future. I have also heard that, at this Rail Working Group, the possibility of cooperation with third countries will be discussed.

With the UK finally and formally joining the CPTPP in December, the Japan-UK relationship is about to embark on a new phase. The creation of an economic area accounting for 15% of global GDP, surpassing the EU in terms of population and almost equalling it in economic size, will unleash the potential to promote new flows of investment and services, and create supply chains that we have not seen before.

In addition, ‘Expo 2025 Osaka-Kansai Japan’ will take place next year, opening on 13th April. Originally, the first World Expo – the Great Exhibition – took place in London in 1851. We very much look forward to active participation from the UK next year. We hope that Expo 2025 will provide an opportunity for British companies and local governments to deepen their efforts to develop ties of cooperation with Japan.

It is my great hope that today’s discussions will prove fruitful and enlightening for you all. Let me conclude by stating my strong belief that, through this Japan-UK Rail Working Group, we can continue to promote cooperation between Japan and the UK in the railways, not just for the rail industry itself, but more generally for the prosperity of the people of both countries long into the future.

Thank you very much.