

【Local City Transportation's Best Practice to Be: Momotaro Line (Kibi Line)】

Hello, I'm Masao Omori, Mayor of Okayama.

On the other day, the City of Okayama, Soja City and West Japan Railway Company concluded an agreement on the allocation of roles and cost regarding the plan which we have been considering for many years. The plan is about implementing light rail transit (LRT) for JR Momotaro Line (Kibi Line).

I would like to explain about "LRT implementation" as it might sound difficult. LRT assumed this time is what runs on both types of sections. One is the section where low-floor vehicles having a tram-like appearance share roads with automobiles. The other is where the light rail vehicles run as fast as a train that runs on railroads.

By changing the existing one to LRT, the scale of station buildings and platforms can be small (Imagine the stops of trams.) and it will be easier to set a new station. Also, train, bus and taxi stops can be closer to each other, which will be very accessible.

Furthermore, for example, at the west side of Bizen Mikado Station (in front of Kansai High School), which is famous as a high traffic jam location, traffic congestion can be eased by eliminating railroad crossings and by managing cars and LRT with traffic signals together.

In addition, in this project, benefits such as promotion of town development around the railway lines and surrounding areas are expected as increasing the number of stations and flights will improve convenience.

LRT, which has already been actively implemented in Europe and the United States and is expected to have many merits, the journey leading up to this agreement was not easy. Even after West Japan Railway Company announced the concept of LRT in 2003, no detailed study was commenced.

In 2014, after I took office as the Mayor of Okayama, finally the three of us shared the usefulness of this project and entered into actual discussion. However, even after that, sometimes there was the possibility of relinquishment as it wasn't easy to clear differences of opinion regarding the allocation of roles and cost.

However, we have committed serious discussion and have compromised, and in the past few months, the situation has come to the point where we were able to find the common ground.

The LRT project will proceed to the next step (development of the basic plan), but there are still many problems to be solved. I believe that this LRT implementation is important in delineating a picture of the future of Okayama City, so I would like to achieve this project as soon as possible with the three of us working together.