

October 16, 2020

“Maintain and expand the public transportation system that supports the citizens’ daily lives”

Hello Neighbor, this is OMORI Masao, Mayor of Okayama City.

The 7th Public Transportation Network Formation Conference was held earlier this month. We discussed how to enhance the convenience of public transportation in Okayama City with bus operators and their users, etc. based on the concrete reform plans for maintaining and expanding city’s bus services presented by us.

We are entering a society with a rapidly declining population. Under these circumstances, what we should do to ensure that Okayama City facilitates sustainable development into the future and that everyone, from children to the elderly, can live a safe and comfortable life is as follows;

- Integrate advanced urban service functions in the city center to lead overall economic and interactive activities
- Enhance everyday life service functions such as medicine, welfare, commerce, etc. at the respective regional bases and
- Connect the city center, regional bases and daily living areas with highly convenient public transportation

We consider it crucial to keep a medium- to long-term perspective in mind as we proceed with the above urban development.

There are three key points to achieve the above targets.

1. Make the city center comfortable, attractive and bustling, enhance and revitalize the functions of the regional bases and thereby enhance our daily lives
2. Provide a stable public transportation system so that people living in the surrounding areas can also enjoy the bustle of the regional center and
3. Ensure transportation for daily living in the surrounding areas

Looking at the center of the city, there are a lot of activities initiated by the private sector, including urban redevelopment. Okayama City is also working to create a more lively atmosphere by merging the lanes into one on Prefectural Office Street or Kencho-dori, developing the Okayama Arts Center, and planning to construct a tram stop right in front of Okayama Station. We see the seeds we've sown so far are sprouting.

At the same time, public transport is facing a harsh reality now. Over the past 25 years, the total length of the route bus service has decreased by about 26%. Even in the last two years, the

service on Route 180 has been suspended and bus services on more than 10 major routes connecting the city center and surrounding areas have been reduced.

Furthermore, the number of users has been declining due to the effects of COVID-19. This poses a serious problem for citizens who use public transportation on a daily basis. We believe that we must take quick action to maintain and expand our public transportation system.

For this reason, three specific pillars were presented at the council this time.

1. "Review of service routes" to streamline operations by consolidating overlapping routes
2. "Review of city center fares"; fares in the central area are putting pressure on corporate profits through excessive price competition and
3. "Fare discounts (by 50%)" for the elderly and disabled at the expense of Okayama City

And we received various responses from the attendees to the above ideas. At this point in time, no agreement has been reached among bus operators.

I have a strong feeling that this bus service issue needs immediate attention in order to protect our citizens' important means of transportation.

We have had discussions and many rounds of negotiations with each bus operator for nearly three years. Therefore, I believe that all operators are fully aware of the intentions of Okayama City.

We will continue to make adjustments based on the feedback we received at this council meeting and will aim to reach consensus among all business operators at the next council meeting.

In addition, we would like to deepen the discussion on how to enhance our daily life transportation, and to put these public transportation measures into effect in the fiscal year 2021.