

Chapter 5 Creating a Comfortable Living Space

Section 1 Realizing Affluent Residential Living

1 Securing Stability of Residential Living and Advancing its Betterment

In accordance with the new release of the Housing Life Master Plan approved at the March 2011 Cabinet meeting, covering FY 2011 to FY 2020, to reflect the full-scale emergence of an aging society with falling birth-rates, declining population and families, changes in the socio-economic climate such as difficult employment and income environment, needs for housing life support services and more, the MLIT is advancing the implementation of measures aimed at securing the stability of residential living and its betterment with the following goals: a. Building a living environment that supports safe, secure and affluent residential living; b. Proper management and revitalization of housing; c. Preparing the environment for a housing market in which diverse housing needs are properly fulfilled; and d. Assuring the stability of housing for those who require special housing consideration.

(1) Building a living environment that supports safe, secure and affluent residential living

To create safe, secure housing and residential environments, we are advancing earthquake-resistant construction of houses and buildings to be better prepared for large-scale earthquakes, while at the same time promoting “Smart Wellness Residences and Cities,” where different types of residences—such as households with elderly people, households with disabled people, or households raising children—can interact to create places to live that are safe and healthy. It also encourages the construction of housing with better energy-saving performance, utilization of local wood, etc. to get closer to the goal of realizing a low-carbon society.

The MLIT is also keen to preserve and form townscape and scenic beauty to add to the comfort and affluence of residential life, while enhancing the convenience of houses for people like the elderly living in urban areas, based on the concept of universal designs.

(2) Proper management and renewal of housing

Apartments have become a vital mode of housing for the public, with the number of dwelling units stocked reached about 6.13 million (as of the end of 2014). In promoting appropriate maintenance and regeneration of them, we need to respond to various challenges such as shortages of bearers of management associations and failed management due to delinquency in paying service charges on the back of aging population and other changes.

Therefore, in March 2016, we revised the Standard Apartment House Management Bylaws that set forth, among other things, use of external specialists, measures against delinquency in payment of service charges, and disclosure of building management status.

In order to facilitate the renewal of aging apartment buildings, the “Law to Revise a Part of Laws related to the Facilitation of the Reconstruction of Apartment Buildings”—which contains the establishment of an apartment building premises sale system as well as special provision for easing the floor-area ratio—was established in June 2014 and put into effect in December of the same year.

Furthermore, the Bill to Partially Amend the Act on Special Measures concerning Urban Reconstruction was decided by the Cabinet in February 2016 and submitted to the Diet.

(3) Preparing the environment for a housing market in which diverse housing needs are properly fulfilled

a. Preparing a market that facilitates the smooth trading of existing houses

Based on the “Used Housing/Renovation Total Plan” (March 2012) and the “Research Report on the Distribution Promotion/Utilization of Used Housing” (June 2013), efforts of (a) and (b) were promoted to set up a market that facilitates

the use of existing housing.

In addition to improving the building evaluation technique, in order to establish said improvements in the existing housing market and the home financing market, the “Used Housings Market Activation Roundtable” was held from September 2013 as a means for the private businesses and financial institutions involved in the existing housing distribution to exchange opinions. In March 2015 the results from these discussions were summarized in the “Used Housings Market Activation Roundtable Report”.

In addition, the FY 2014 tax reform expanded the scope of existing houses qualifying for special tax treatments (such as tax credit for residential mortgages) to include those to which earthquake resistant retrofitting works were conducted after acquisition, irrespective of the limitation on the number of years from construction. Also, in the FY 2014 revision to the taxation system, a preferential measure for the registration license tax related to housing purchases in the buyback-resale business was created as a potential catalyst for expanding the existing housing/renovation market, and the FY 2016 tax reform extended the application for an additional two-year period. Further, in the FY 2015 revision to the taxation system, a new measure was created to reduce the real estate acquisition tax that is imposed on the buyback-resale businesses.

(a) Preparing the market environment in which consumers can remodel their homes without worry

Consumers planning to remodel their homes are concerned about how much the remodeling will cost them and how to select the right contractors. Reassuring worried consumers is essential to expanding the home remodeling market.

Efforts currently taken in this regard include the Check Quoted Remodeling Costs for Free service available from the Housing Telephone Consultation Desk at the Center for Housing Renovation and Dispute Settlement Support, in which consumers can receive consultation on specific quotations, and Free Expert Consultation Programs at local bar associations. In FY 2015, there were 9,836 telephone inquiries regarding remodeling, 820 calls for checking quoted remodeling costs, and 899 calls for expert consultation regarding remodeling.

In FY 2015, there were 3,421 subscriptions to the Remodeling Defect Liability Insurance Program, an insurance package that combines an inspection on remodeling works in progress with warranties against possible defects in the works, and subscriptions to the large-scale repair work liability insurance program for large-scale apartment building repairs were filed for 955 apartments.

Contractors seeking to be insured are registered with the Housing Defect Liability Insurance Corporation, subject to their possession of a construction business license, proven performance, etc. The Program allows consumers to browse through a list of registered contractors at an Association of Housing Warranty Insurance website as a helpful tool in choosing contractors.

Further, under the “Housing Renovation Business Organization Registration System”, we are working on building an environment where there is a healthy development of the housing renovation business and consumers renovate their homes with confidence, by having housing renovation business operators that meet certain standards registered to ensure that the work of housing renovation businesses is properly managed and information can be provided to the consumers.

(b) Developing a market environment in which consumers can purchase existing houses without worry

Consumers who consider the purchase of existing housing may worry about the quality and performance of housing. Therefore, to expand the existing housing distribution market, it is necessary to build an environment where consumers can purchase an existing house without worry.

In order to do this, we are promoting the popularization of appropriate inspections based on the “Existing Housing Inspection Guidelines” (established in June 2013), which are guidelines pertaining to the inspection of current state of housing, so that consumers can get a grasp on the condition of the existing housing.

In terms of the Existing Housing Sale Warranty Insurance System, an insurance package that covers both inspections and warranty to defects, there is a growing variation in insurance products—such as the new insurance product developed in FY 2013 which has a shorter coverage period but is relatively inexpensive—which has resulted in an gradual increase in the number of subscriptions to 9,309 in FY 2015.

Like the Remodeling Defect Liability Insurance Program, the Existing Housing Defect Liability Insurance Program allows consumers to search through a list of registered traders at a website to aid in their trader selection.

b. Forming long-lasting quality stocks

(a) Housing quality assurance

A 10-year defect liability obligation has been mandated for the basic structural part of new housing in accordance with the “Housing Quality Assurance Promotion Act”. At the same time, a housing performance marking program has been put into effect for objective assessment of the basic performance characteristics of new and existing houses, such as earthquake-resistance, energy-saving measures, preventing measures against deterioration, etc. In FY 2015, Housing Design Performance Assessment Reports were issued for 200,050 houses to assess them in their stage of design documentation, Constructed Housing Performance Assessment Reports (New House) were issued for 168,514 houses to evaluate them on-site inspection, and Constructed Housing Performance Assessment Reports (Existing House) were issued for 388 existing houses.

Disputes arising in connection with houses that have been subjected to a constructed housing performance evaluation are to be promptly and legitimately settled by local bar associations that are a designated housing dispute settlement agency, with support from the Center for Housing Renovation and Dispute Settlement Support. The Center also accepts applications for consultation on housing issues. In FY 2015, there were 31 cases of application for dispute processing regarding a house for which a constructed housing performance evaluation report was issued by designated housing dispute processing agency, and 900 cases of consultation regarding a house for which a constructed housing performance evaluation report was issued by the same center.

(b) Approaches to longer-lasting housing

The MLIT pursues the dissemination of housing that is structured and equipped to meet or exceed certain levels of performance requirements, such as durability and ease of maintenance and management (“Long-lasting Quality Housing”) under the Act on the Promotion of Dissemination of Long-Lasting Quality Housing. (Certified houses in FY 2015: 104,633).

We are also supporting progressive approaches to renovation that contributes to the longevity of existing housing.

(c) Promotion of wooden housing

Based on the needs of the public for wooden houses, such as that more than 70% of the public prefer wooden houses ^{Note}, the MLIT supports not only the construction of long-lasting quality wooden housing, certified low-carbon housing and zero-energy housing by a group of contractors working in the entire process of housing, from supplying local timber and other materials, to designing and constructing housing, but also the development of human resources relevant to the construction of wooden housing, with the aim of creating quality wooden housing stock.

In addition, in order to develop general methods of designing buildings using CLT in early FY 2016, technical examinations such as full-size testing are ongoing.

Note Surveys on awareness and preferences concerning the cyclical use of forest resources by the Ministry of Agriculture (FY 2015)

c. Making housing available to fill varied dwelling needs and closing gaps between supply and demand for housing

(a) Home financing

The Japan Housing Finance Agency offers securitization support businesses to support the availability of long-term, relatively low fixed-rate mortgages from private financial institutions. Its operations include Flat 35 (Purchase Program) that consolidates housing loan receivables of private financial institutions and Flat 35 (Guarantee Program) which supports the private financial institutions themselves becoming the originator ^{Note 1} to handle the securitization. The performance result for Flat 35 (Purchase Program) up to the end of March 2016 was 1,067,575 cases of purchase applications and 750,537 cases of successful purchase, with 331 financial institutions participating. The performance result for Flat 35 (Guarantee Program) up to the end of March 2016 was 20,148 applications for insurance coverage and 12,416 cases receiving insurance coverage, with 5 financial institutions participating.

For houses that are entitled to Flat 35, property inspections are carried out against a defined set of technical requirements, such as durability, to assure their quality. In addition, the framework of the securitization support service has been leveraged to launch Flat 35S, which reduces the interest rate of the loan on the acquisition of houses that meet any one of the performance requirements: earthquake-resistance, energy-saving performance, barrier-free readiness, and durability/modifiability, for the first years of its repayment (for the first 10 years for long-lasting quality housing).

The Agency also provides services in those areas that are politically significant but that cannot be easily conducted by private financial institutions, such as financing housing designed for disaster recovery or elderly rental housing with supportive services.

(b) Housing Tax System

In the FY 2016 tax reform, a system was created for the special deduction of 30 million yen applicable to capital gains if an old vacant house inherited (limited to earthquake resistant houses) or land after removing the house was transferred, in light of preventing adverse effects caused by abandoned houses to the living environment around them. In addition, from the perspective of promoting the development of an environment where raising a child is made easier by cross-generational support, a tax reduction system is created for housing renovations for three-generation households financed by a loan or buyer's own funds. Furthermore, in view of reducing the initial burden of those who acquire housing, improving residential standards and forming quality housing stock, the application of property tax reduction for new housing was extended for two years until March 31, 2018.

Furthermore, measures to deal with a possible recoil reduction from the planned consumption tax increase by 10% in April 2017 will be taken, which include the expansion of housing cash benefit (raising the maximum amount from JPY300,000 to JPY500,000) and the tax-free measure for gift tax (raising the maximum amount from JPY15 million to JPY 30 million), in addition to a significant hike in the home buyer's tax break. It is hoped that with these measures in place, the housing acquisition of the younger generation will be promoted and the predictability will get higher for those who are considering housing acquisitions, and that these factors will contribute to the stabilization of the housing market.

(c) Preparing the rental housing market

To improve the stocks of owner-occupied houses, such as stand-alone houses and condominium apartments, by making them available for rent in the rental housing market, the MLIT is working to prepare the rental housing market by disseminating the fixed-term housing rental system, and developing DIY type lease ^{Note 2} guideline.

Note 1 A business enterprise that possesses assets to be liquidated. An originator raises funds by securitizing its assets, by transferring its credit, real estate properties, etc. to a special-purpose company.

Note 2 DIY-type lease means a lease contract or its lease property where remodeling and renovation may be made to reflect the preferences of lessor (tenant) regardless of who bears the DIY expenses. DIY stands for "do it yourself", and usually means doing your own repairs, assembling, and home carpentry without the help of professionals, but in this case includes instances where the tenant hires a professional to make facility improvements or remodeling according to his/her own preferences.

(d) Promotion of measures for vacant houses

The Vacant Houses Special Measures Act was fully enforced in May 2015. Municipal governments are driving forward the Vacant Housing Countermeasure Plan according to their local circumstances, as well as use and removal of vacant houses and buildings.

(4) Assuring housing stability for those who require special consideration for housing

a. Supply of public rental housing

To deliver public housing supplied by local governments to low-income earners in serious need of housing, and to promote the supply of quality rental housing to households consisting of elderly people who need special consideration to stabilize their housing, the MLIT set up the Regional Excellent Rental Housing Program as a scheme that complements the public housing and subsidizes the expenses incurred for the development of public rental housing and also for the reduction of the rents.

In addition, in order to secure a housing safety net for persons who are forced to leave their homes for such reasons as dismissal from work, we have taken measures to ensure stable housing for displaced workers, including the simplification of procedures for allowing such workers who are not originally eligible to use vacant public housing and other such facilities.

Figure II-5-1-1 Purposes and Results of Public Rental Housing

| | Purpose | Number of houses managed |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Public housing | Supplies quality rental housing to low-income earners who are in serious need of housing with low rent. | About 2.16 million houses (FY 2014) |
| Improved housing | Supplies public rental housing to existing residents who are in serious need of housing in a deteriorated residential area. | About 150,000 houses (FY 2014) |
| UR Rental Housing | Supplies quality rental housing that is conveniently located for access to work, focusing on family-oriented rental housing hardly in ample supply from private business entrepreneurs, in major urban areas, as well as develops residential districts (since FY 2002, a privately supplied support rental housing program has been launched to support the supply of family-oriented rental housing from private business entrepreneurs) | About 750,000 houses (FY 2014) |
| Agency rental housing | Supplies quality rental housing to meet the regional demand for rental housing | About 130,000 houses (FY 2014) |
| Regional excellent rental housing | Provides subsidies to private land owners to fund maintenance and other expenses and cover rent cuts to provide quality rental housing for households consisting of elderly people, child-raising families, etc. | - About 122,000 designated excellent rental houses (FY2014) - About 41,000 designated excellent rental houses for elderly people (FY2014) |

(Notes) 1 The number of rental houses managed by the Urban Renaissance Agency includes the subsidized rental housing with high quality for elderly.

2 The number of public rental housings does not include those of the Specified Good Rental Housings and Subsidized Rental Housings with High Quality for Elderly.

3 The Specified Good Rental Housings Institution and Subsidized Rental Housing with High Quality for Elderly Institution were reorganized and the Regional Good Rental Housings Institution established in FY2007.

(Source) MLIT

b. Using private rental housing

In order to facilitate the promotion of smooth move-ins to private rental housing by people such as the elderly, disabled, foreigners and families with small children, we are providing housing assistance such as information services and consultation services through the Housing Assistance Council (60 councils (46 prefectures and 14 cities) established as of the end of FY 2015), which is made up of local government, real estate related organizations and housing assistance organizations.

2 Supply and Utilization of Good Housing Land

(1) Land price trends

The official land prices in Japan for 2016 (as of January 1, 2016) showed that the average residential land price declined but the rate of decline was smaller compared to the previous year, while the average commercial land price increased by 0.9%, compared to 0.0% in the previous year. The average land price of all categories of land use rose for the first time in 8 years since 2008. Land prices in major metropolitan areas increased slightly for residential land, and commercial land price rose for three consecutive years. In regional cities, both residential land and commercial land prices continued to decline, but the rate of decline was smaller, and the average land price of 4 cities—Sapporo-shi, Sendai-shi, Hiroshima-shi and Fukuoka-shi—showed an increase that is higher than that of the three major metropolitan areas for both residential

land and commercial land.

(2) Present status and problems in housing land supply

We are steadily implementing housing land measures based on population and household trends. The Urban Renaissance Agency now works only on the new town projects that have already been initiated. The MLIT also supports the development of public facilities relevant to the development of housing land, and offers preferential tax measures to promote the supply of housing land furnished with a good dwelling environment.

(3) Using fixed-term land leases

A fixed-term land lease—in which the land lease ends for certain at the determined contract term and there is no renewal of the land lease—is an effective system for making residential acquisition at a low cost possible.

In order to spread this system smoothly, we are clarified, among other things, the tax treatment of the system for paying a rent as an up-front lump sum.

(4) Revitalizing aging new towns

The large-scale urban housing areas (New Town) that were systematically developed mainly in the suburbs of the metropolitan areas during the economic boom period are facing issues of decline in community vitality resulting from the quickly aging population and the continued decrease in population. There is a growing need for renewing the dilapidated housing and communal facilities as well as improving the functions that support daily life, in order to renovate these new town areas into cities that are easy to live in for everyone.

Also, with the aim of contributing to the revitalization of aging new towns, we are providing information on the methods and case examples of initiatives by residents, business proprietors and landowners/leaseholders for maintaining and enhancing a good regional environment and regional value.

Section 2 Realizing Comfortable Living Environments

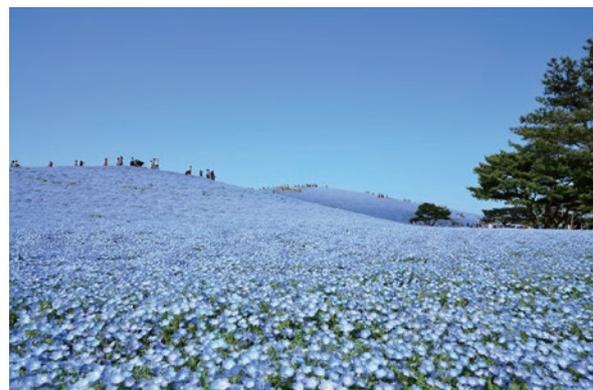
1 Developing City Parks and Forming a Good Urban Environment

(1) Status of development of city parks and approaches to upgrading them

Because city parks are key facilities laid out to fill diversified public needs, national government parks, the development of national government parks, disaster preparedness parks, and the preservation of time-honored cities and green spaces have been implemented efficiently and on a planned basis, with primary emphasis on: a. Building a safe and secure municipality furnished with disaster preparedness parks that could serve as evacuation sites; b. Building safe and secure community sites to address the issues of an aging population with falling birthrates; c. Preserving and shaping a good natural environment that aids in building a recycling-oriented society and addressing global environmental issues; and d. Building sites for advancing tourism that takes advantage of regional characteristics or for inter-regional exchanges or collaboration.

Figure II-5-2-1

Miharashi Hills of Hitachi Seaside Parke, a reviving tourism base (Hitachinaka-shi, Ibaraki)



Source| MLIT

As of the end of FY 2014, city parks were maintained at 105,744 locations nationwide, covering 122,839ha, or about 10.2m² per capita. National parks were visited by about 40.29 million people in the year as of the end of FY 2015, with 17 locations being developed and maintained.

(2) Forming a green urban environment

The MLIT is providing comprehensive support in financial and technical aspects, pursuant to the initiatives based on the “Green Master Plan” formulated by municipalities to properly respond to the global environmental issues, such as global warming and biodiversity preservation, and to aim at realizing green-rich city environment by preserving and forming a good natural environment. Specifically, the MLIT is promoting preservation of greenery by advancing the development of green-rich city parks using the social capital development general grant, etc., and utilizing the Special Green Space Conservation District Program, which aims to protect planting of greenery by restricting the construction of buildings or purchasing land, and the Citizen Green Space Program, which makes green spaces available to citizens under contract. Greening of private land is also being promoted through the Green Space System and the District Plan Greening Ratio Ordinance System. Furthermore, we are facilitating the conservation of multi-function agricultural land within urban areas through the Production Greenland Area System.

Along with holding events like national “Protecting Greenery” gatherings and National City Greening Fairs to gain public awareness regarding greening, MLIT is working on various measures such as awarding certificates of commendation for people promoting greening, as well as evaluating/certifying greening/green area conservation efforts by businesses.

(3) Efforts toward city’s co-existence with greenery and agriculture

In response to growing appreciation of diverse functions of urban agriculture and other factors, the Basic Act on Promotion of Urban Agriculture was established in April 2015, and the Basic Plan on Promotion of Urban Agriculture is being developed in cooperation with the Ministry of Agriculture.

In addition, we are making efforts to realize city development where cities co-exist with greenery and agriculture, such as by surveying on initiatives that contribute to formation of good urban environments that are in harmony with greenery and agriculture and the demonstration of diverse functions of urban city.

2 Advancing Roads that Prioritize Pedestrians and Bicycle Riders

a. Creating people-oriented, safe, and secure walking spaces

To achieve social safety and security, it is important to make people-oriented walking spaces that assure pedestrian safety. In particular, based on the results of an emergency joint inspection that was carried out in FY 2012, we are advancing efforts to improve school routes used by children who walk to school. Schools, the Board of Education, road administrators, police, and other related organizations have worked together to implement traffic safety measures such as maintaining sidewalks, painting colors on curbs, and installing guardrails, as well as implementing joint periodic inspections based on the “School Route Traffic Safety Program” to ensure the safety and security of children through these enhanced measures.

b. Creating a safe and comfortable cycling environment

Bicycles play important roles as accessible means of transportation, but the number of accidents that involve bicycle and pedestrian remains high in the past 10 years while the total number of traffic accidents decreased by 40 percent during the same period. This indicates we need a safer, more comfortable environment for cyclists. In light of this, the MLIT is promoting efforts to create a safe and comfortable environment for cyclists by promulgating the “Guidelines for Creating a Safe and Comfortable Cycling Environment” (November 2012, MLIT, National Police Agency), so that municipalities are encouraged to work on the formulation of bicycle network plans and development by such means as reallocating road space.

c. Developing quality walking spaces

The MLIT supports the development of pedestrian roads and rest facilities that create high quality pedestrian environments and that also tie together rich scenery and abundant nature with historical sites, in order to develop regions that are attractive and that promote health through walking.

d. Developing road signs that are easy to understand

The MLIT is working on the installation of road signs that are easy to understand to help guide pedestrians who are in an unfamiliar place to their destinations.

e. Building a flexible system of road administration

To implement a flexible system of road administration that provides a diversity of road functions tailored to the needs of the local residents -- including safe walking spaces and places of regional buoyancy and human exchange, and making motor-vehicle traffic smoother and safer -- the MLIT is implementing: (a) preferential measures, such as the construction of new sidewalks on national or prefectural highways by municipalities other than the designated cities; (b) a system for suggesting that municipalities refurbish pedestrian safety facilities; (c) preferential measures for road occupancy, such as boulevard trees planted by NPOs or others, street lamps, etc.; and (d) preferential measures for the administration of off-street convenience facilities to keep roads and roadside facilities under integrated management.

Section 3 Realizing Traffic with Enhanced Convenience

(1) Advancing implementation of integrated urban/regional traffic strategies

Intensive city planning that ensures safe, smooth traffic requires a cross-sectional approach to the available transportation modes—such as cycling, railway, and bus—from users’ standpoint, rather than reviewing the transportation modes or their operators individually. To this end, each local government should inaugurate a council composed of public transportation operators and other stakeholders and let the council define a future vision of its cities and regions, and the types of transportation services to be made available, so that it can formulate “Integrated Urban/Regional Transportation Strategies” that cover relevant traffic measures and working programs (as of March 2016, Integrated Urban/Regional Transport Strategies had been formulated or were being formulated in 82 cities), with the stakeholders taking their respective shares of responsibility for implementing measures or projects. The national government is expected to support the implementation of integrated and strategic packages of traffic projects, such as the development of LRT ^{Note} pursued according to the Strategies, and city planning programs.

(2) Approaches to improve public transportation usage environment

For local public transportation, the MLIT supports the deployment of LRT, BRT, IC cards and other less constrained systems through the implementation of regional public transportation assurance, maintenance and improvement projects, to accelerate the improvement of regional public transportation usage environment as part of its barrier-free community planning effort. In FY 2015, Hiroshima Electric Railway Company deployed light rail vehicles.

(3) Upgrading urban railway networks

Urban railway networks have upgraded to a considerable extent to date as they have been refurbished with a primary view to building up their transportation capacities to ease traffic congestion. As a result, traffic congestion in the major metropolitan areas during commuting to and from office or school by train is on the decline, keeping pace with the continuing trends towards an aging population with fewer births. The rate of congestion on some routes, however, remains as high as over 180% and demands continued efforts to mitigate congestion. Efforts in progress include quadruple tracking of Odakyu Electric Railway’s Odawara Line and modifications to Tokyu’s Toyoko Line, both funded by the Designated Urban Railway Development Reserve Program.

The Kanagawa Eastern lines (Sotetsu - JR/Tokyu Through line) and others have been developed by leveraging the “Act

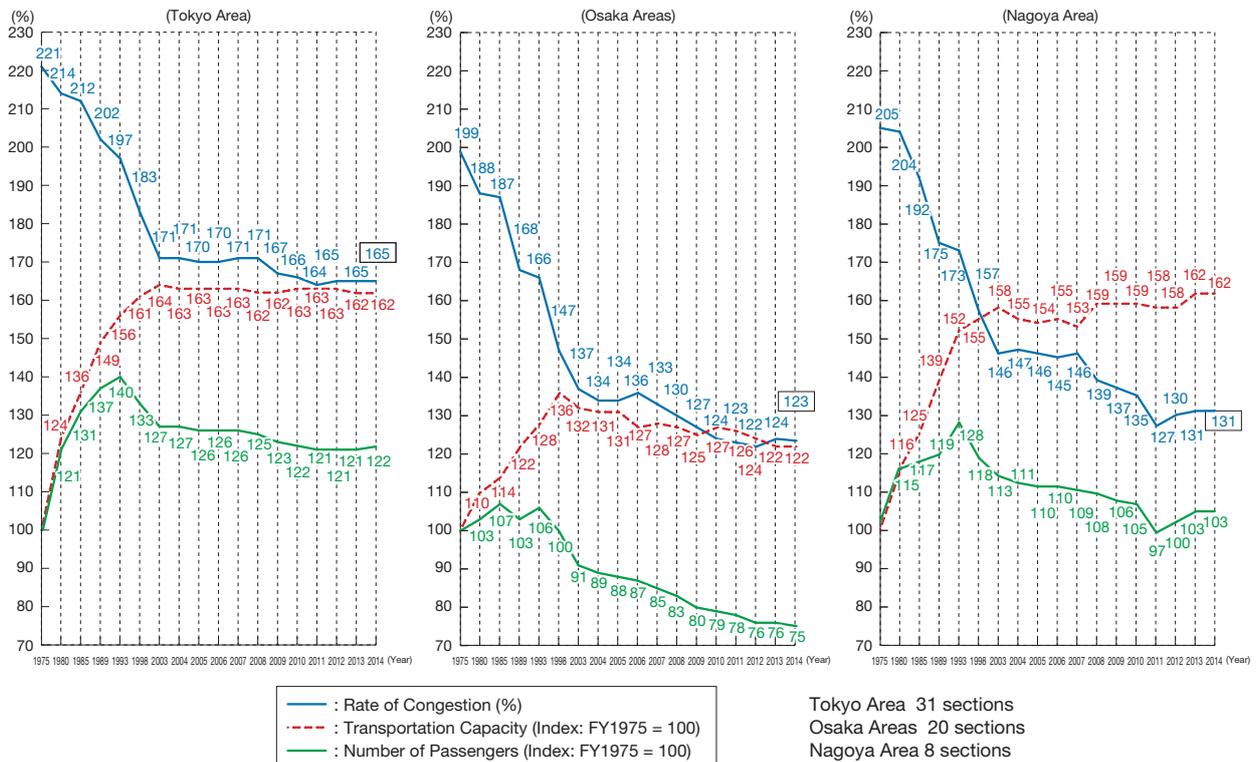
Note Short for Light Rail Transit. A next-generation rail transit system that offers excellent characteristics derived from the use of light rail vehicles (LRV), improvements to rails or stops—such as ease of getting on and out—, punctuality, speediness and passenger comfort.

on Enhancement of Convenience of Urban Railways, etc.”, a legislation aimed at upgrading the speediness and traffic node functions of existing urban railway networks, to further enhance the urban railway networks, including added user convenience.

Furthermore, the Council of Transport Policy is examining the future of the urban railway in the Tokyo Metropolitan Area which was referred to the Council in April 2014.

Figure II-5-3-1

Changes in the Average Rate of Congestion, Transportation Capacity and Passenger Capacity in the Three Major Metropolitan Areas (Index: FY 1975 = 100)

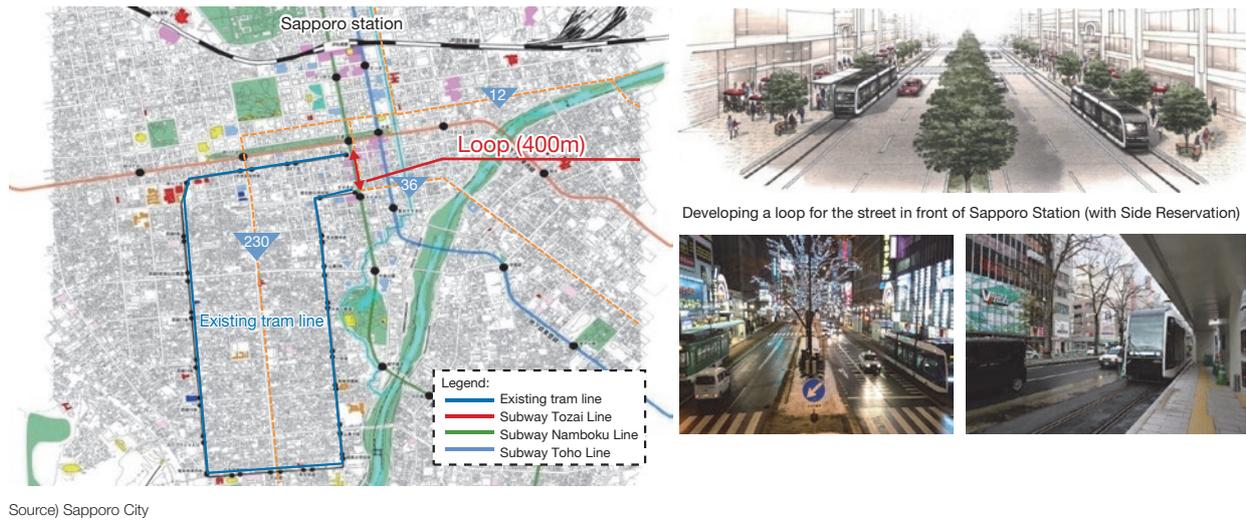


Source) Prepared by the MLIT from "Urban Transport Annual Report" compiled by the Institution for Transport Policy Studies and other relevant literature

(4) Development of urban monorails, new transport systems, and LRTs

The MLIT promotes the development of LRTs to encourage users' migration to public transportation facilities in order to streamline urban traffic flow, lighten environmental loads, and revitalize central urban areas, while keeping vulnerable road users assured of mobility in this era of aging population and falling birthrates. In FY 2015, various cities moved forward with the renovation of public transportation networks. For example, Sapporo-City opened sections where a loop to connect the existing streetcar lines was built; Toyama-City connected the south side and north side of Toyama Station with streetcars; and Fukui-City moved forward with developing mutual accessibility between the streetcar line and the railway.

Figure II-5-3-2 Loop Development (Sapporo-City)



(5) Augmenting the convenience of bus usage

The convenience of bus usage has been augmented by improving the punctuality and speediness features of bus services by using a Public Transportation Priority System (PTPS) and bus lanes, introducing bus location systems that provide information about the location of buses in service, and IC card systems that facilitate smooth boarding and disembarking.