

Introduction --- The Challenge for Reform: Toward a New Administration of Ministry of Land, Infrastructure and Transport for the 21st century

Now that a year has passed since the birth of the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure and Transport (MLIT), the progress of this one-year administration of MLIT has been summarized here as the first issue of White Paper on Land, Infrastructure and Transport. The paper covers several subjects. First of all, the most fundamental issue in the paper, that is, the mission of MLIT and the direction required for administration of MLIT will be stated below.

1. Mission of MLIT

Japan is now facing a time of socio-economic reform as well as the turning point marked by the new century.

Demographic composition, which is the basis of a society, is bringing us an aging society, with fewer children. With decreasing of productive-age population ratio, our wisdom on how to realize a vigorous society will truly be tested. In respect to the economy, Japan is experiencing a transition from a time of constant growth, as in the late 20th century, to a time of a more stable and mature economy. For instance, the price of land is also in transition. Development of business activities that depend on the inherent profitability of the land, that is, keeping one's feet on the ground and avoiding speculation, is sought. Moreover, from a global viewpoint, we must reconstruct our behavioral patterns in order to conserve the global environment, including taking measures against global warming. We are living in a time when consumption of our precious environment and resources will need to be strictly monitored for those of the future.

The Ministry of Land, Infrastructure and Transport was born simultaneously with the start of the new century in this age of transition, integrating four former ministries and agencies, the Hokkaido Development Agency, the National Land Agency, the Ministry of Transport and the Ministry of Construction. The mission imposed on this new organization is to promote comprehensively national land policy, improvement of social capital, transport policy, etc. That is, it is to create a concrete vision of the best design for our irreplaceable national land and to realize that vision by combining and developing the different infrastructure improvement and transport policies, in order to establish the socio-economic system right for the 21st century.

In other words, the role of MLIT to fill is to arrange "site" and "space" for activities, so that citizens and companies will be able to exhibit their potential freely in the new era.

The practical targets to be pursued to accomplish this mission must be made clear. At the time of integration, MLIT established the following five aims as the goal of its administration, with which the newly unified organization will seek to fulfill its mission in an era of innovation, listening to citizens' views attentively and widely.

- (1) To realize vigorous lives for independent individuals
- (2) To sustain and develop a competitive economic society
- (3) To secure safety
- (4) To maintain and create a beautiful and desirable environment
- (5) To create communities with diversity

The process of the birth and the major achievements of integration, including the establishment of the goals for the whole organization, will be presented in Part I, Chapter 1.

Chapter 2 will show how the postwar development of social capital improvement and transport policy has greatly contributed to the economic growth of Japan and improved the quality of life of the Japanese people, looking back the 20th century. On the other hand, this chapter will acknowledge that there still remain a great many issues for MLIT to tackle now at the transition to the new century, such as (1), issues caused by distortion left from the high economic growth of the 20th century and, (2), issues that have emerged more recently, including vitalizing the economy, ever-increasing serious global environmental problems globally, and the emergence of an aging society with fewer children.

Part II will arrange these issues into 12 items and introduce practical measures to conquer them one by one. This is exactly the mission imposed on MLIT in the 21st century: to respond to the expectations of the Japanese people by making every effort to realize these measures and thus accomplish the goal of the above "five aims."

2. Direction to be sought for the administration of MLIT in the 21st century

While the socio-economic environment surrounding the administration of MLIT is rapidly changing, new measures should be taken without sticking to former ways of administration, in order to deal accurately with the various issues from the following standpoints.

(1) Policy development with emphasis on effect and efficiency

In a mature society in an increasingly serious financial condition, it is vital to carry out more effective measures more quickly at lower cost in dealing with various issues.

For that purpose, the following points are important:

- (a) Carrying out measures effectively and efficiently, making the best use of the merits of integration by uniting the former four ministries and agencies and exhibiting comprehensive capabilities.
- (b) Accurately evaluating the effects of measures and determining the priority of measures.
- (c) Promoting rationalization and simplification of the procedures involved in the implementation of measures.
- (d) Actively utilizing the ability of the private sector in areas where it is capable.
- (e) Trying to utilize existing stocks effectively and reduce overall costs, including life cycle costs, especially in the area of social capital improvement, and in the field of transport, steadily implementing administrative review ex post facto with emphasis on safety and environment.

(2) Policy development from the viewpoint of citizens

Japan's economy in the 20th century achieved unprecedentedly high economic growth. But on the other hand, the fact remains as an important political issue that the Japanese people cannot realize wealth fully corresponding to the nation's economic power.

A sluggish economy has persisted in Japan since the 90s, and Japan is now trying to construct an economic society suitable for the 21st century. We must construct a system that makes people fully realize and enjoy the result of development as efforts bear fruit and lead to further development. Therefore, it is essential to develop policies from the viewpoint of citizens.

To be specific, the following efforts are necessary in developing administration open to the public:

- (a) Actively promoting information disclosure, including matters concerning policy evaluation;
- (b) Encouraging the participation of citizens such as PI (Public Involvement) and social experiments from an earlier stage of policy implementation; and
- (c) Promoting to build a system in which local citizens and NPOs can participate willingly.

(3) Development of policy with wider vision

In recent years, reconsideration of role sharing between national and local governments promoting decentralization has become an important issue domestically, while global exchanges have been activated in various fields and globalization has rapidly proceeded worldwide. For the future administration of MLIT, it is inevitable that we must cope with these environmental changes both at home and abroad.

Therefore, the following points are necessary in dealing with issues based on wider vision:

- (a) Promoting policy development that respects local independence and creativity; and
- (b) Endeavoring to display self-reliance, including actively proposing Japan's ideas in a global society, etc.

3. Determination to pursue reform

When proceeding towards above directions, conventional administrative methods should be reformed drastically and a new system of administration of MLIT for the 21st century should be reconstructed with fresh ideas.

Therefore, it is important for each staff member engaged in administration of MLIT actively to launch self-reform, being aware that the ultimate goal of the administration of MLIT is to realize the happiness of the citizens. Moreover, accumulating measures both in hardware and software, including effective use of stocks and construction of a new system respectively, is crucial to make the best use of inventiveness with fresh ideas.

Practical measures that MLIT has begun to challenge for "reform without sanctuary" of the administration of MLIT will be presented in Part I, Chapter 3.

Reform is still in process. Our wisdom should be concentrated in order to fulfill the mission imposed on MLIT, precisely analyzing and understanding new trends and trying harder to arrange and improve the new system for the 21st century, attentively and extensively listening to public opinion.