

ON THE FAST TRACK



A group of Japanese companies has been working to develop and improve state-of-the-art rail systems in Rio de Janeiro and beyond.

KYOKO MOTOYOSHI

LARGE-SCALE urban redevelopment projects are underway in the central area of Rio de Janeiro. The Light Rail Transit (LRT), which just began running on partial sections in late July this year, was built as part of these redevelopment projects, and is expected to serve both local residents and tourists who visit the city for the Olympic and Paralympic Games. The LRT has no overhead catenary system. The vehicle is air-conditioned and barrier-free. The entire route runs a total of 28 kilometers, of which 26 kilometers will be completed within the year. The total number of users per day is expected to reach about 260,000.

A group of Japanese companies

— Mitsui & Co., West Japan Railway Company, and the Japan Overseas Infrastructure Investment Corporation for Transport & Urban Development (JOIN) — are participating in the LRT project in cooperation with Brazilian companies.

“The opening of the LRT will lead to the phased connection of different means of transportation, such as the airports used by domestic airlines, a suburban railway in Rio de Janeiro (SuperVia), and long-distance bus terminals, all of which have operated separately up until now. The LRT will contribute to the alleviation of serious traffic jams in Rio de Janeiro and a reduction of CO₂ emissions,” says Hayato Yanagisawa of Mitsui.

This same group of Japanese companies is also working to improve the management of SuperVia, which stretches 270 kilometers and connects downtown Rio de Janeiro with the suburbs. The company used to transport more than one million passengers a day in the early 1980s, but this figure fell to 150,000 passengers a day in 1996 with the increase in bus services and private cars, the aging of facilities, and the frequent occurrence of accidents and breakdowns due to the lack of maintenance. Following the injec-





tion of private-sector financial resources and business know-how into publicly managed SuperVia in 1998, local companies began efforts to reconstruct the management of the suburban railway. Mitsui became involved in 2014, and West Japan Railway Company and JOIN further became involved in 2016.

One specific initiative for improving management is to strengthen security measures, such as stepping up the inspections and maintenance of railway lines and trains, and taking steps to prevent breakdowns and derailments. To develop the individuals needed to handle these tasks, engineers from West Japan Railway Company are dispatched to Rio de Janeiro to instruct local engineers, while local Brazilian

engineers are invited to Japan to take part in training programs at West Japan Railway Company's facilities. In addition, they also intend to introduce the Automatic Train Stop (ATS) system for preventing train crashes and sudden bursts of acceleration.

"The engineers who took part in the training program in Japan returned to Brazil highly motivated and ready to tackle the hard work needed to introduce the Japanese system. There are about 1.6 million Japanese Brazilians living in Brazil, and they are highly respected for their hard work and dedication to their jobs. They have made it much easier for us to operate in Brazil," says Yanagisawa.

SuperVia is also replacing aging railway lines and trains, providing greater comfort by increasing the number of trains with air conditioners, and shortening service intervals. As a result of these efforts, the number of passengers per day has risen back up to 700,000 and they aim to reach 1.7 million per day in the future.

In addition, this group is going to participate in an LRT project in

- 1 The Light Rail Transit (LRT) in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil
- 2 SuperVia, which connects downtown Rio de Janeiro with the suburbs
- 3 An engineer of West Japan Railway Company (foreground) with Brazilian engineers of SuperVia
- 4 Hayato Yanagisawa of the Passenger Transportation Business Department at Mitsui & Co.
- 5 SuperVia and Rio LRT access map for Rio 2016 Games venues



the city of Goiania, which is near the capital city of Brasilia. They intend to boost the transportation capacity in Goiania because the bus services there have nearly reached their limit. They will also participate in development of line No. 6 of the São Paulo subway. This project is intended to alleviate traffic congestion as well as to respond to demand from commuters living along the subway line.

"It is important to find the right approach to carrying out these projects, one that helps achieve a mutually satisfactory level of improvement without imposing the Japanese approach. We will continue working to improve local social infrastructure by making full use of our experience and expertise in Japanese railway management," says Yanagisawa. 



Photos and figure: Courtesy of Mitsui & Co. (1, 2, 3, 5); The Japan Journal (4)