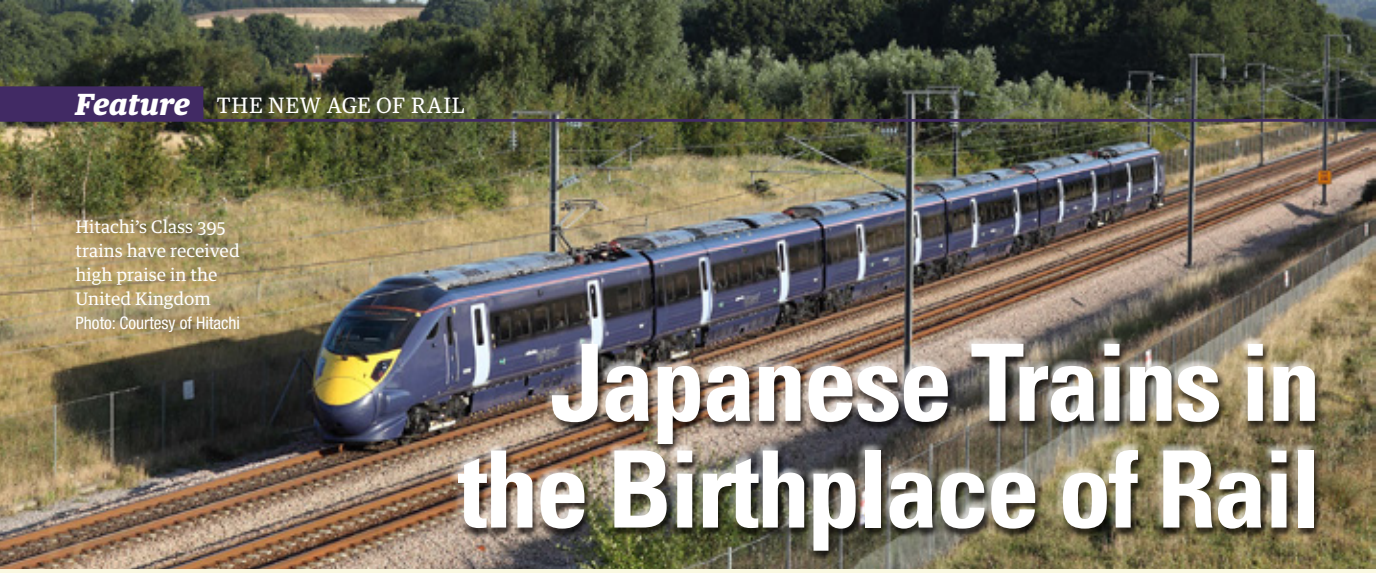


Hitachi's Class 395 trains have received high praise in the United Kingdom
Photo: Courtesy of Hitachi

Japanese Trains in the Birthplace of Rail

Japanese trains are highly rated in the country of rail transport's birth, the United Kingdom.

AKIRA UMEZAWA

After the launch of Japan's first railway in 1872, connecting Shimbashi in Tokyo with Yokohama, railway networks spread throughout the country. Over time, Japanese railway companies would develop a wide range of technologies to improve the speed and reliability, safety and comfort of their service. These Japanese railway technologies are now being introduced to many parts of the world, including India's Delhi Metro, the bullet trains in Taiwan and the subways in New York.

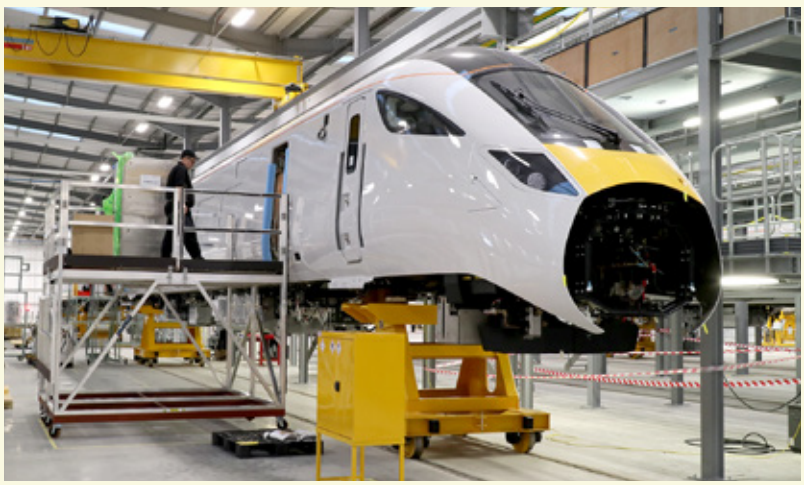
In the United Kingdom, the birthplace of rail transport, high-speed trains developed by Hitachi, Ltd. play a part in railway networks around the country.

Hitachi started to make inroads into the UK market in 1999.

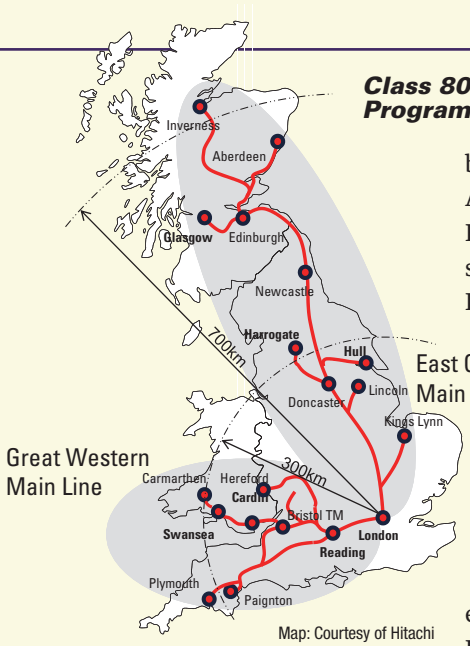
"Initially, we expected that we would have a great deal of difficulty accessing the global railway market, where the Big Three railway companies (Canada's Bombardier, France's Alstom and Germany's Siemens) have large shares," says Shinya Mitsudomi, who is a member of the Railway Systems Business Unit of Hitachi. "We could not bring Japanese railway technologies and expertise directly into the UK. Adapting to British standards on the basis of Japanese technologies was a major challenge."

In 2003, Hitachi recruited in the UK human resources with extensive experience in and knowledge of the British railway industry and contract negotiations. In addition, to demonstrate that the quality of Hitachi's railcars could be achieved in the UK, Hitachi introduced Japanese electric driving gears to the UK, installed them in British railcars and conducted comprehensive test runs of domestic railway networks.

"The test railcars never broke down and we completed our demonstration runs without any problems. We were able to demonstrate that our railcars could be put to satisfactory use, even in the UK where conditions differ from Japan," says Mitsudomi.



A Class 800 train at Hitachi's plant in Newton Aycliffe, County Durham, the United Kingdom
Photo: Courtesy of Hitachi



Class 800 Intercity Express Programme (IEP) Lines in the UK

Map: Courtesy of Hitachi

These efforts bore fruit, and in 2005 Hitachi won an order for the manufacture and maintenance of 174 units of Class 395 railcars that run on the Channel Tunnel Rail Link (currently High Speed 1), the UK's first high-speed railway line connecting London and Ashford. Class 395 commenced commercial operation about half a year sooner than contracted, in June 2009. The railcars were also used for a shuttle service from the central area of London to the main competition venues during the London Olympics in 2012. The railcars ran at intervals of about seven minutes from early in the morning until late at night, but did not experience any service cancellations or delays.

Hitachi, which was rated highly for the quality of its Class 395 and its project performance capability, also won an order for manufacturing and maintenance services for the Class 800, a high-speed railcar for the Intercity Express Programme (IEP) implemented by the UK government, through Agility Train, a joint venture that Hitachi had established in partnership with a British company. The IEP has the largest budget in the history of British railways and is a high-speed railway project for railway lines including the East Coast Main Line connecting London and Scotland, a main line in the UK, and the Great Western Main Line connecting London, western England and western Wales. Hitachi will deliver 866 railcars and will handle railcar maintenance services for around thirty years. The railcars will start operating in the fall of 2017.

A Class 800 train cuts through the English countryside.
Photo: Courtesy of Hitachi

To manufacture high-speed railcars in the UK, including the Class 800, Hitachi built a railcar plant in Newton Aycliffe, County Durham. At the opening ceremony of the plant in September 2015, then Prime Minister David Cameron said, "It is great to be adding to the history of railways in the North East which extends back to George Stephenson – the father of railways."

"Railcars cannot be mass-produced. We invite British plant managers to Japan and conduct technical study programs to convey our expertise in manufacturing railcars to the UK," says Mitsudomi. "We also learn a lot from the British. We will make the IEP an even better railway by utilizing our mutual strengths."

In 2016, Hitachi acquired two companies that manufacture railcars and signals in Italy, and also reached an agreement with railway management companies to supply new double-decker commuting railcars.

"We have the feeling that Hitachi is becoming a European company in Europe," says Mitsudomi. "We are currently part of a project for constructing urban railways in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, but we will make further contributions to developing railway infrastructure in emerging economies as well."