

Rapidly Developing Government Policy for Bicycle Traffic in Japan

Shunichi Uchimura, President Japan Bicycle Promotion Institute
9-3 Aksuka 1-Chome, Minatoku, Tokyo, Japan 107-0052
kouno@jbpi.or.jp

0. Introduction

Our organization, the Japan Bicycle Promotion Institute, was established in 1964 and has been planning and implementing measures for promoting the overall Japanese bicycle industry including production, distribution and trade. Although the number of bicycles has increased considerably recently, the creation of a safe environment for cycling has been delayed. Therefore, we have been gathering materials on bicycle policies and precedents in Western countries, conveying them to Japanese governmental organizations and local governments, and lobbying to speed up the creation of a cycling environment.

The bicycle ownership in Japan, which has a population of 125.5 million, was estimated at 73 million in 1998 with 0.58 bicycles for every one person.
In Tokyo, the number of bicycles in the population of 11.6 million is about 7 million, which is 0.60 bicycles for every one person.

However, our national regulations are extremely ambiguous regarding areas where bicycles should be used. There are very few roads or lanes for bicycles, and parking facilities for bicycles are not yet satisfactory. The cycling environment remains neglected.

The central part of Beijing is packed with bicycles in the morning and evening but they have wide roads, which are used only for bicycles, and most of them are separated from the roads for automobiles. In Tokyo, a tremendous number of bicycles can be found around stations in the suburbs for commuting every working day throughout the year. Although the major roads in the center of Tokyo are crowded with cars on weekdays, there are very few cyclists because there are no safe cycle routes.

Because bicycles are classified as lightweight vehicles under the Road Traffic Law in Japan, they should be treated the same as automobiles. However, historically, roads have been exclusively used by automobiles because motorization flourished before separate paths or lanes for cyclists could be constructed or improved.

The national government has abandoned and neglected policies regarding cycle routes.

At the Velo City Conference Barcelona in 1997, Mr. Sosuke Hanaoka, ex-President of JBPI, proposed to emphasize promoting the bicycle usage at UN's International Convention on Prevention of Global Warming in Kyoto.

In response to his proposal, the Bicycle Federation of America, Velo Quebec and Japan Bicycle Promotion Institute, have delivered the following appeal to ministers in charge of environment in their countries and distributed the appealing leaflets at Kyoto conference.
"Increase the use of bicycles as a mode of transport by providing appropriate facilities and by adopting policies that actively promote bicycle use".

Unfortunately, Our proposal was not discussed in the Conference.

But, in June of 1998, when Japanese Government announced a basic national policy on the prevention of global warming, the policy clearly encouraged the use of bicycles. And the term "promoting the use of bicycles" appeared for the first time in the new policies of respective government offices.

Since the new national policy was announced, the major government offices have quickly started drawing up measures such as the following:

1. The Ministry of Construction

The Ministry of Construction had focused on constructing cycle routes in the suburbs for leisure use and provided some financial support, but was indifferent to bicycle traffic in cities. However, in order to prevent global warming and alleviate traffic jams, the ministry realized it is important to incorporate bicycles into the transportation in the city, not only in the suburbs.



To encourage the use of bicycles, the ministry realized it had to improve road conditions for making cycling safer and more comfortable. As specific measures, the Ministry of Construction selected five model cities, which included Nerima Ward in Tokyo, Shizuoka City, Tokushima City, Hiroshima City and Saga City, in order to "construct a network of cycle routes in these cities to set new precedents as model cities". Of course, the Ministry of Construction will provide the model cities with financial support.

Last spring when this plan was announced for the five model cities, many other cities across the nation also requested that "their cities be designated as model cities because they intended to integrate bicycles into their urban traffic systems". Therefore, the Ministry of Construction announced to add ten more model cities and to hold a competition among cities which wanted to participate. As a result, 32 cities entered the competition throughout the nation and 14 cities were additionally selected in December of last year.

(The additional model cities are Kita-Hiroshima City, Futatsui City, Fukushima City, Maebashi City, Nii Town, Urayasu City, Chiyoda and Chuo Wards, Itabashi and Toshima Wards, Adachi Ward, Kaisei Town, Niitsu City, Nagoya City, Takamatsu City and Taira City.)

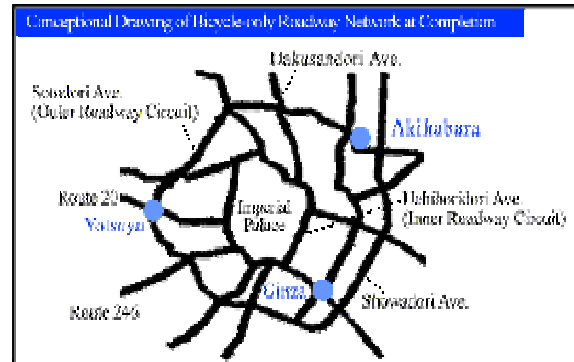
Let me explain some of the main reasons for selecting these cities.

- The City of Maebashi in Gunma Prefecture is planning to build a network of cycle routes by using the existing road network. The city is planning to provide a network of ring and radial routes of 90 kilometers with emphasis on separating cycle paths from sidewalks in the central city area. Their plan will attract attention as one of the regional model cities.

Example for Construction of Bicycle-only Roadway (Separate type)
Joint proposal by Tokyo Metropolitan Government and Chiyoda and Chuo Ward Offices (bicycle-only roadway is provided by reducing the width of motor traffic lanes)



- Chiyoda and Chuo Wards in Tokyo are planning to build a network of 30 kilometers around the Imperial Palace. There will be two kilometers of paths for bicycles in each one square kilometer and this plan was recognized as an excellent model of constructing space for bicycles in a city. The space for cycling is mostly separated from the space for pedestrians and cars, and will be basically created from existing road space.



Now, a total of 19 cities nationwide will start building model cities from this fiscal year "in order to secure space for cycling and to create a network covering the whole city". These plans will be completed in about three years. These attempts to build model cities will be followed by many other cities and so the use of bicycles is likely to be promoted nationwide. The Ministry of Construction is planning to spend tens of billions of yen over about three years for the model city project.

2. The Ministry of Transport

The Ministry of Transport is a powerful ministry which manages and controls land, marine and air transportation in Japan. However, bicycles were not included in the land transportation governed by the ministry. Bicycles were first mentioned in a white paper two years ago when a regional railroad firm offered a service to carry bicycles on trains for the first time in Japan.



Since people need to change their lifestyle to prevent global warming, it has become

necessary for the Ministry of Transport to integrate bicycles into their policies.

The Council for Transport Technology of the Ministry of Transport reported in June 1999 that it is necessary to construct traffic space that is convenient for both pedestrians and bicycles.

The council also asked the Council for Transport Policy, which formulates the basis of the comprehensive policy on land, marine and air transportation in the 21st century, to study "the use of bicycles as a mode of transportation". This is an important issue to be studied in order to build a traffic system that has low environmental impact.

A white paper in 1999 had an article called "Constructing sidewalks and cycle routes." in the chapter on developing a new policy on urban traffic, which stated the national government's views on pedestrians and cyclists as follows:

- There are many roads in Japan where both sidewalks for pedestrians and cycle paths are not separated from vehicular motor roads. Pedestrians and bicyclists do not enjoy a comfortable environment that is safe from road traffic.
- When people use public transportation, most of them either walk or cycle to the nearest

station. Where roads are also used by cars, not only elderly people and those with infants but also normal, healthy people are frequently put at risk.

- The number of traffic deaths while walking or riding a bicycle accounts for 40% () of the total number of deaths in Japan, and is remarkably high compared with in Western countries.
(_ Source : IRTAD 1997, Japan 40.8%, USA 17.6%, France 15.7% and Germany 21.3%.)
- In order to reduce traffic accidents and promote the use of public transportation in the future, great efforts should be made to secure space for constructing sidewalks and cycle routes.

The white paper further mentions parking facilities for bicycles as follows:

- Rather than just controlling abandoned bicycles, parking lots for bicycles should be secured, and a cycle parking system should be provided according to local conditions to ensure good mobility for public transportation users from door to door.

For the Ministry of Transport that rarely mentioned bicycles or pedestrians before, these views are revolutionary. Without mentioning whether their past policy was right or wrong, we welcome their serious intention to take action for bicycles in the future and hope that concrete measures will ensue.

3. 11 related government offices: Measures for using bicycles to revitalize central city areas

The Central City Areas Revitalization Act came into force in the summer of 1998. In recent years even in Japan, urban sprawl has been created by residents and stores as they move from the inner city to the suburbs, leaving the city center sparsely populated. A survey conducted in 1997 showed the following:

- About 85% of shopping districts in the nation have vacant stores, and one third of all shopping districts have store vacancy rates of more than 10%.
- There are more than 110 vacant buildings in central city areas with a total of 880,000 square meters nationwide caused by big stores moving out.

The national government will attempt to solve urban sprawl in cooperation with related government offices by taking various measures and generally trying to "help improve city areas" and "revitalize commerce." To promote this project, the following measures will be integrated to make use of bicycles:

- Construction and improvement of lanes for bicycles
- Zone systems, construction of transit malls and active use of bicycles
- Park and bicycle ride

Because these measures will reshape communities, it will take several years to implement, and related government offices are planning to spend as much as several hundred billion to one trillion yen in total.



4. The National Land Agency

As a part of the emergency economic measures, the "Regional Strategic Plan" was devised in November 1998.

This is designed to carry out a strategic plan for doubling living space over five years from 1999 so that people can live comfortably and affluently, and enjoy diversified individual values. To be specific, cities and respective regions select their own themes, formulate a comprehensive "Regional Strategic Plan" to create such living space, and implement the plan with budgets allocated by the national government. In the plan, one project is estimated at about 100 million Euro per region, with a total of about 400 regions. The total amount is estimated at about 40 billion Euro for five years. A wide variety of living spaces are integrated in the plan, and spaces related to bicycles are as follows:

- Space for shopping
- Space for playing and rural life
- Space for transportation and exchanges
- Safe and environment-friendly space
- Increasing leisure time for utilizing space

The government authorized 460 projects in June 1999 (with a total amount of 40.031 billion Euro), of which 15 plans are related to bicycles with a total value of more than 140 million Euro as follows:

- Construction and improvement of roads for bicycles of various types and sizes
- Creation of comfortable communities by using bicycles
- Plan to utilize MTB and ATB for leisure use in mountainous cities
- Construction of terminals (lodges) for cyclists
- Construction of space for good health by using bicycles
- Bicycle rental plan

Well, I'll conclude my speech with these new important bicycle related measures, taken rapidly in the past two to three years in Japan.