

Introduction

After more than 3 years of planning and preparations by East Japan Railway Culture Foundation (EJRCF) and East Japan Railway Company (JR East), The Railway Museum opened in Saitama City, Japan, on Sunday 14 October 2007, marking the 135th anniversary of the opening of Japan's first railway between Shimbashi and Yokohama.

Before opening to the public, a ceremony was held with representatives from EJRCF, and various other dignitaries, including Senior Vice-Minister of Land, Infrastructure and Transport Midori Matsushima; Governor of Saitama Prefecture Kiyoshi Ueda; Mayor of Saitama City Souichi Aikawa, and the famous film actress Ms Sayuri Yoshinaga who spoke about the

many trains she has ridden during filming and the environmental friendliness of rail, adding a special touch to the ceremony.

About 3400 people—some of whom had been waiting overnight—had queued to get into the museum and their high expectations were clear as they rushed forward when the opening whistle blew at exactly 10:00.



Opening day at The Railway Museum was popular with both the press and members of the public



Exterior of The Railway Museum

Run-up to Opening

The Railway Museum has already been featured several times in *JRTR*, but here is a brief summary of the run-up to its opening. Its predecessor, the Transportation Museum (TM) boasted an 80-year history and became part of JR East following the 1987 privatization and division of Japanese National Railways (JNR). Unfortunately, the old museum had a number of problems, including insufficient earthquake resistance and very poor barrier-free access. The displays had also become very dated, with no new train exhibits added after 1976. As a

result, annual visitors had dropped to less than half the peak of 838,016 in 1976. Nevertheless, the museum still had strategic value for JR East in terms of both the company's social contribution and handing-on the legacy of railways to future generations. Consequently, JR East decided to close the TM and build The Railway Museum as a special project to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the company's establishment. In addition, the new museum is dedicated solely to rail transport—the core of JR East's business.



Museum restaurant offering typical dishes from train buffets



Miniature train that visitors can drive



Interior of Remufu 10000 freight wagon



Mini-train staff

The final decision to build The Railway Museum was reached in February 2004 and the groundbreaking ceremony was held on 10 November 2005. In parallel with building works, trains to be exhibited were restored and moved to the museum. Work also started on creating new exhibits by asking experts and key figures about their opinions, which were used to enhance the museum's overall quality.



Kids' Space for interactive fun-based learning



Japan's largest HO-gauge railway diorama



Visitor driving D51 steam locomotive simulator with staff assistance

Museum curating techniques have progressed rapidly in recent years, especially in the USA, but also in Europe and Japan. Unlike the past, when objects were simply put in glass display cases for visitors to admire, today's trend is towards interactive exhibits that encourage visitors to learn by active participation, and such hands-on exhibits enhance the whole museum experience. This approach is likely to become the main future trend.

The Railway Museum features many hands-on exhibits. In the History Zone, rather than just displaying various trains side-by-side, they are exhibited by operations period alongside recreated platforms and factories from that time. Real, period, day-to-day items and other objects give visitors a better feel for each time. Many of the exhibits are designed to allow visitors to actually board and walk through the carriages, enhancing the overall value of the museum experience.

The History Zone's centrepiece is the turntable with trains displayed on the radial lines around which visitors are free to walk. Especially valuable carriages from several imperial trains are housed in a climate-controlled glass case in one corner of the History Zone to ensure conservation in best condition.



History Zone featuring 35 train displays



Revolving turntable



Hibari Kuha 481 train



Recreation of yesterday's Ueno Station



75-m chronology of railway history



Observing inspection and repair of ED40 train



Cutaway of 9850 Class steam locomotive showing internal structure

The Learning Zone offers an educational programme for children developed with Saitama City Board of Education. As part of their studies, students perform experiments using exhibits at the museum to discover how scientific principles learned at school are used in real life.

For example, every effort has been made to create hands-on exhibits allowing visitors to discover various aspects of railways for themselves; visitors can see functioning signalling safety systems, including ATS-P and ATC, drive a model train, and learn more about train driving using realistic simulators. One of the most popular exhibits is the very realistic D51 steam locomotive simulator, recreating the experience and physical strength required to drive an SL in nearly every detail. Other electric locomotive simulators show how the transition from steam to electric made drivers' lives easier.



Learning Zone (above and below) where visitors understand railway principles and systems through hands-on exhibits and experiments



Future Developments and Challenges

Although The Railway Museum has made a promising start by drawing many visitors, new facilities like museums often suffer declining visitor numbers as the novelty wears off. One way to welcome as many people as possible and ensure that they will want to visit again and again is by renewing exhibits, holding special displays and events, and making full use of membership schemes.

Of course, railway history did not suddenly end with the opening of The Railway Museum, so new exhibits must be added to keep the museum up to date. Admissions revenues will provide a source of autonomous funding for broadening the range of exhibits by adding noteworthy trains retiring from service in the future to the collection, and for undertaking research. The museum will also continue developing special exhibitions focusing on the latest railway information.

As of 7 December, 396,900 people have visited The Railway Museum in the first 3 months but we are not resting on our laurels; we shall continue working tirelessly to enhance the pleasure of visiting what we hope will be one of Japan's best museums.

The Railway Museum Details:

Location:

Omiya Ward, Saitama City, Saitama Prefecture (about 30 km north of Tokyo)

Size:

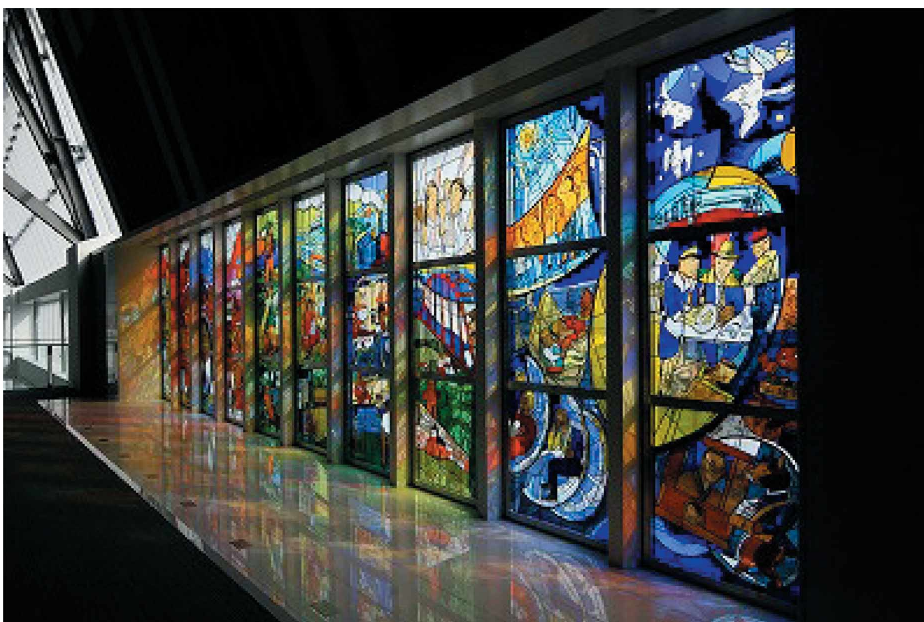
Site area approx. 41,600 m²; total museum floor area 28,200 m²; area of exhibits 9,600 m²

Total project cost:

approx. ¥12.4 billion

URL:

<http://www.railway-museum.jp>



Stained glass window—"Passing Through"