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Special Feature: Assisting Transportation in Disaster-Affected Areas

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Assisting Transportation in Disaster-Affected Areas

Adoption of Hino Motors' Hybrid Buses for Bus Rapid Transit along the JR Kesenuma and Ofunato Railway Lines



The Great East Japan Earthquake caused serious damage to towns along the coast of Iwate and Miyagi prefectures. The earthquake and tsunamis also heavily damaged the East Japan Railway Company's Kesenuma and Ofunato railway lines that had been serving the area, washing away tracks and railway stations. Considerable time will be required to rebuild these towns and the infrastructure along the coastline, and, likewise, time will be needed to reconstruct the railways lines.

With the hope of improving conditions as quickly as possible in the aftermath of the disaster, local bus companies carried out transportation operations, responding to local demands to transport people to and from work, school, hospitals and shops as repairs and reconstruction of stores, factories and other buildings began to get underway.

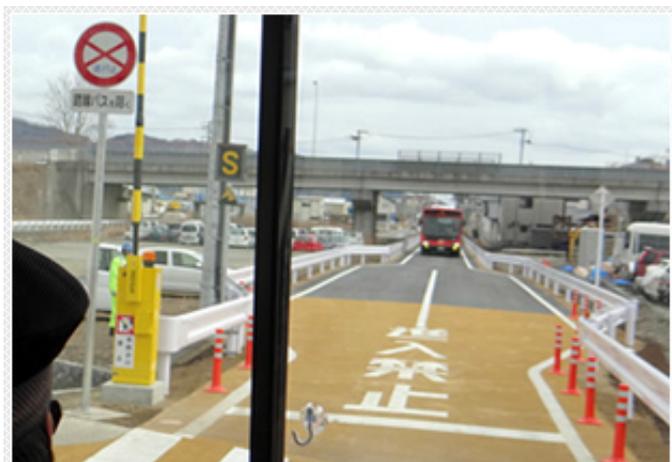
In May 2012, the East Japan Railway Company gained approval from local municipalities located on the Kesenuma Line to pave over the railway tracks and operate a buses-only service on such newly paved roads as a way to temporarily resume transportation services on the line. As a result, it was able to commence operations of a Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) system.

Hino Motors supplied this BRT system with 26 hybrid buses that are both easy for people to use and friendly to the environment.



JR Kesenuma and Ofunato railway lines BRT Operation road

The BRT system uses roads designated exclusively for buses, thus avoiding traffic congestion and waits at traffic lights and enabling the buses to travel at a constant speed, arriving at scheduled times with no delays. The bus routes can be flexibly modified to suit each stage of urban reconstruction and the extension of the rail lines to rebuilt stations. Furthermore, since the buses run on ordinary roads also, provisional transportation services were possible at an early stage. Even in the event of an earthquake or tidal wave, buses can be driven out of seismic danger areas.



The designated BRT driving lane can be seen from the driver's seat. Gates were built to prevent other vehicles from mistakenly entering the designated road



There is a single, one-way bus road, because it uses a single railroad line

When East Japan Railway Company began the BRT system, it set up a BRT office in Kesenuma as a base for gaining approval for operating the bus service, as well as administering the business and providing customer service. It also outsourced a local bus company to help with operations, and both companies worked closely together to prepare the BRT system.

The Kesenuma Line BRT system began temporary service using old buses along an exclusive 2.1-kilometer route on August 20, 2012 in order to provide service to a school located on the railway line in time for its second semester. On December 22 of the same year, the hybrid buses supplied by Hino Motors were introduced and full-scale service commenced. People returning to their hometowns in the area for the end-of-year holidays were treated to comfort and convenience of the brand-new buses.

Meanwhile, the adoption of Hino Motors' hybrid buses for service along the Ofunato Line started from March 2, 2013, two years after the earthquake struck the region.



The hybrid buses are low-floor models with no steps, allowing children and elderly passengers to board and disembark easily

The buses supplied by Hino Motors are passenger-friendly, low-floor models that have no steps, making it easy to board and deboard. They are also environment-friendly vehicles that employ LED lighting to enable long periods of use without emitting toxic substances, and they feature a hybrid system that reduces CO₂ emissions, thereby helping to combat climate change. As such, these buses met the expectations of local people hoping to rebuild the damaged region. The buses were chosen after it was confirmed that low-floor models could enter and run in areas still covered in debris, as well as carry heavy loads during rush hour.



The interior of one of the buses having children's drawings above the windows commemorating the start of the bus operations.

At the time of delivery, the buses were painted in a two-color combination of scarlet and white, but in an effort to bring some joy and raise the spirits of people in the disaster-affected region, Hino Motors decorated the vehicles with images of rainbows, stars, and popular local images. As people began using the buses for commuting to work and school, going shopping, visiting the hospital, and other purposes, they praised the vehicles for their environmental friendliness, quiet ride, and ease of boarding and deboarding. In a local newspaper, for example, a student noted that when commuting to school via the BRT system, many more buses were in operation compared to regular passenger bus service.

In order to help people restart their lives and make gradual progress towards restoring conditions to the state before the earthquake struck, Hino Motors is dedicated to playing a role in the recovery of the damaged areas by providing buses that are beneficial for both people and the environment.



The Ofunato Line BRT started operations on March 2, 2013



Six kinds of characters popular in Kesennuma and Miyagi Prefecture were painted on the buses

Comments

**Mr. Takashi Nojima,
Disaster Reconstruction Department,
General Planning Division,
East Japan Railway Company**



We wanted to help revitalize the disaster-affected areas as quickly as possible, so we studied the situation and grew confident that a Bus Rapid Transit system could respond to the needs of people in the region as a temporary transportation service to be put in place as soon as possible.

The buses are low-floor types that are comfortable for people to use and equipped with advanced technologies that reduce the effects on the environment. There were no buses like this in the area before, and we expect Hino's buses to contribute to the revitalization of the region.



**Daisuke Ono,
Bus Sales & Marketing Division, Japan,
Hino Motors, Ltd.**

Our work schedule was constantly tight as we conducted onsite surveys, prepared specification documents, and manufactured the buses in response to requests to quickly rebuild the disaster-affected areas. But without a doubt, I was confident that the BRT system would become extremely useful for people in these areas.

So when I saw that Hino low-floor-type hybrid buses were being used for the system to transport people in the area, I felt genuine pride, along with a sense of relief. From hereon, I intend to do my best to live up to the expectations of the local people so that we can contribute to the reconstruction of the areas damaged by the disaster.



Hino Motors received a letter of appreciation from representatives of East Japan Railway Company for its company-wide efforts to introduce hybrid route buses in disaster-affected areas