

Introduction

Fumihiko Nakamura

Professor, Dean, Institute of Urban Innovation, Yokohama National University

Prof. Nakamura is an IATSS member. He graduated from the Department of Urban Engineering of the University of Tokyo, going on to gain his Master's degree from the School of Engineering at the same university. He holds a PhD in engineering. His areas of specialty are urban transport planning, transport facility planning, urban planning and regional planning. He serves on a variety of deliberative councils and committees, including at the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism and also in local government. His publications include *Basu de Machi-zukuri* (Town Planning with Buses) (Gakugei Publishing).



Over two years from fiscal 2011 to 2012, the International Association of Traffic and Safety Sciences (IATSS) engaged in research on “Challenges for urban transport systems in ensuring mobility for persons with intellectual disabilities.”

In the first year research concentrated on identifying the problems in Japan relating to commuting for school students with intellectual disabilities, out of the general issues that face persons with intellectual disabilities. In the second year the research advanced to study trends overseas and clarify what lessons could be learned from cutting-edge case studies.

In the early stages there were doubts expressed as to why the research was limited to school students from among the wide range of people with intellectual disabilities. However, based on the desire to find something that could be done for children with disabilities in the educational and learning environment, and also on the reasoning that it would be preferable to provide training on the use of public transport while children were commuting to school, so that they could utilize this training to lead independent lives in the community after graduation, it was decided to focus the research on school students.

Let us consider briefly the current status and challenges relating to commuting for school students with intellectual disabilities in Japan.

The commute to school for students with intellectual disabilities is generally provided by parents, guardians or social services. However, this places a considerable burden on parents and guardians. Other than these commuting

methods there are two further patterns of commuting: 1) the school bus, and 2) independent commuting by public transport. If either of these patterns could be adopted it would lessen the burden on parents and guardians, but both patterns present various issues.

Firstly, with regard to 1) the school bus, it has been pointed out that as school catchment areas are very wide, this leads to extended bus routes that entail very long rides for students. On the other hand, with regard to 2) independent commuting by public transport, there are concerns about such issues as the different commuting environment for each student, difficulties in teaching children how to commute by bus, issues about responding to emergency situations, and parents' worries about letting their children commute independently. With regard to pattern 1) although the issue of long journey times has been raised, no further action has been witnessed, perhaps due to the fact that it is not considered urgent. With regard to pattern 2), although we have seen a slight improvement in the situation by compiling handbooks, this has regrettably not led to any positive efforts to promote independent commuting.

It was decided to engage in research into cutting-edge case studies from overseas about these commuting methods. First we surveyed countries that are generally considered to be advanced in terms of welfare assistance and provision, however, contrary to expectations we could not find any examples of specific activities. By further expanding the breadth of our research we found two case studies that are expected to be a significant source of reference, one in Brazil and the other in Germany.

Firstly, with regard to the first pattern of using a school bus for commuting, we found a system known as SITES that is being run in the city of Curitiba in Brazil and subsequently visited the city to observe the system in operation. With regard to the second pattern of independent commuting by public transport, we found that the MogLi Project, which was first implemented on a trial basis in the Germany city of Nordhorn and then put into full operation, could provide a good source of reference.

Using the MogLi Project as a source of reference, with the cooperation of a

special needs school and a transport operator in Japan, we carried out trial commuter training for city buses and new public transport systems. The trial was very well received by the school and transport operators who took part, and they provided a number of useful suggestions which could be applied to full implementation of the scheme. It also should be noted here that however good the bus operating system may be, commuting school students still need to walk to the bus stop. If the route to the bus stop is not safe the children will not be able to feel secure enough to get there and ride the bus. Our research in this project also addressed the issues presented by the route that children take to a bus stop.

In September 2013 we compiled a pamphlet of our research results, with the aim of seeking broader support and understanding from society about this issue. In December 2013 we invited Ms. Hildegard Roosen, the originator of the MogLi Project in Germany, to come to Tokyo to participate in a seminar. The seminar provided a forum for vigorous and lively discussions and this booklet has been compiled as a summary of the discussions that took place.

It can be expected that the publication of this booklet will increase opportunities for people to give greater thought to commuting assistance for children with intellectual disabilities, and that practical and active consideration will be given to such issues as reviewing school bus systems and providing commuter training on city bus routes. It is our hope that such developments will ultimately ensure the mobility of students with intellectual disabilities, so that they can participate fully in society in the future.