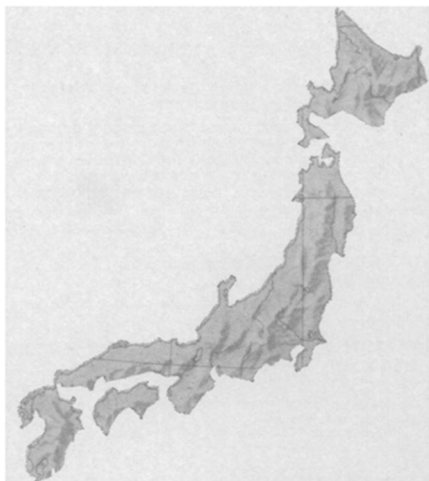


LETTER FROM TOKYO



Linking the East

**Pan-Asian bus and train
routes are being pushed
by Japanese engineers**

by Stuart Griffin

Japan, suddenly red-hot for opening up Asia and the Far East in both transportation and communication for intra-regional economic development, is pushing two plans. Both of them would have the effect of creating broad new markets for Japanese heavy transportation equipment.

The Japanese Ministries of Construction and Transportation have forwarded to the U.N.'s Economic Commission for Asia and the Far East an Asian Highway Bus Service Plan. It envisions establishment of regular bus transportation service, interlacing Southeast Asia and penetrating the Middle East, for both passengers and cargo.

The Government has also launched a full-scale study of possible extension of aid to the Japan-proposed 6,250 mile Saigon-to-Istanbul Asian Railway, also with ECAFE backing.

The railroad especially would be of value in bringing Europe and Asia to one another's doorsteps, say the Japanese officials. The project's aim is construction of an international double-track trunk railway line between Turkey and South Vietnam.

An entire railway or highway would not have to be built from scratch because each system already has segments in operation. The job would be one of improving and tying up existing links.

The Ministry of Transportation here has asked for \$540 million to finance route surveys between now and March 31, 1971. The railroad would cost about \$10 billion to complete and take some 20 years to build.

Survey work, if sanctioned, would be the responsibility of the Japan Railway Technical Service, a non-profit corporation already set up in Tokyo.

The idea is not a new one; it is considered possible that Japan's enthusiasm now is partly motivated by the market for buses and trains.

The trunk line would link a large number of Asian countries. It would run from Saigon via Pnom Penh, Bangkok, Calcutta, New Delhi, Rawalpindi, Karachi, Teheran, Baghdad, Aleppo and Ankara, before reaching its Istanbul terminus.

Japanese railroad men say the job is technically feasible if Japan is allowed to do the planning and building tasks in the light of the nation's internationally recognized railway technology. The state-owned corporation has an enviable reputation for speed, comfort and safety of operations, and already operates the world's fastest train.

The plan hinges largely, however, on

ECAFE approval of the Japanese draft now under way.

The economics of building such a railway are questioned by some transportation officials. Unless there is enough traffic density to justify the costs of the railway, merely completing the line on the map would make little sense.

In addition, the railway could be economically hurt by competition from other surface transportation modes, something that might occur if both an Asian railway and highway were built.

The rail scheme is judged more realistic for regional economic development than an earlier suggested Asian Highway Plan, first proposed in 1965. This is because the products of the emerging Middle East, subcontinental and Southeast Asian states are chiefly bulky, primary agricultural, forestry, mining and other such goods, needing a massive means of transportation.

A railway, too, costly as it would be both to build and maintain, is judged less expensive than a multi-country highway. But many bridges and tunnels would be required because of the mountainous terrain.

The plan has aroused the interest of Japanese industrial circles in potential sales of rolling stock, locomotives, rail and technical equipment for years to come. The government sees the project as beneficial also in terms of good will.

Critics, though, tick off military and political problems, and the huge expense. They also say Japan could not hope to have its way entirely, for competition would surely arise from Britain, France, West Germany or even the United States.

Three bus routes also are programmed by the Japanese, in their submission of plans to the ECAFE regarding the Asian Highway Bus Service Plan.

The first would run from Keng Tung in Burma to Chiengai in Thailand, and on to Bangkok, to Pnom Penh in Cambodia and Saigon, a distance of 1,150 miles. The second would go from Bangkok to Kuala Lumpur and on to Singapore for 1,750 miles total, and the third from Teheran to Kabul in Afghanistan, to Rawalpindi and New Delhi and Calcutta, and on to Dacca in East Pakistan—a distance of almost 3,000 miles.

Japanese say that these bus routes would serve to promote international motorization and contribute moreover to the original Asian Highway Plan. Japanese who initiated the highway plan have been loathe to jettison it entirely, again for reasons of prestige.