

CPIJ

News Letter

No.28 Dec. 2007

Published by: The City Planning Institute of Japan

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**Edited by: The City Planning Institute of Japan,
International Affairs Committee**

New Directions of Regional Planning in Japan

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The Reform of Spatial Planning System and Development of National Spatial Strategy

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1. Introduction

The Diet, in its 2005 ordinary session, passed “Act to amend the Comprehensive National Land Development Act and other laws in order to promote comprehensive national spatial development.” This was the first major revision in 55 years to the Comprehensive National Land Development Act -- the legal foundation of Japan’s national land development and spatial planning since its enactment in 1950. The amended law has been renamed National Spatial Planning Act. This article will describe what led up to the revision and how the first National Spatial Strategies were formulated.

2. Background of the Spatial Planning System Reform

Japan’s post-war spatial planning has largely been based on the Comprehensive National Development Plans (National Plans) formulated pursuant to the Comprehensive National Land Development Act. The first Comprehensive National Development Plan was put together in 1962. There have been a total of five Comprehensive National Development Plans that provided basic policies in response to the needs of the respective era when each of the plan was drawn up. These plans have achieved some positive results in addressing issues such as decentralization of industrial plants and educa-

tional institutions and regional income disparities.

Meanwhile, since the enactment of Comprehensive National Development Law in 1950 and subsequent enactments of various laws and regulations, the national spatial planning system has repeatedly come under pressure for major changes due to calls for a shift away from development-oriented planning and for decentralization of power from the central government to local governments. Such calls led to the adoption of the fifth Comprehensive National Development Plan, or Grand Design for the 21st Century, decided by the cabinet in 1998, which set out missions to establish a new spatial planning system that will define principles for spatial planning, address calls for various reforms including decentralization of power and cope with requests for an enhanced guiding roles.

In response, the National Land Council began to study and deliberate in earnest issues related to the reform of spatial planning system. Its subcommittees finalized their reports in 2000 and 2002, respectively. In 2004, its Subcommittee on Investigation and Reform presented a report titled A Comprehensive Review of National Land, which concluded that the national and regional planning should undergo a bold reform in light of the current trend in pressing for changes in spatial planning.

Ministry of Land, Infrastructure and Transport, pursuant to the Grand Design for the 21st Century and subsequent deliberations by the National Land Council, submitted to the Diet a bill to amend the Comprehensive National Land Development Act and other laws in an attempt to make drastic changes to the Comprehensive National Land Development Act and to rename it National Spatial Planning Act. The bill, following a heated deliberation in the Diet, was approved on July 22, 2005, promulgated on July 29 and went into effect on December 22 of the same year.

3. Outline of National Spatial Planning Act

Key features of the revised law are as follows. The article numbers provided correspond to those in the enacted National Spatial Planning Act.

(1) A switch away from development-oriented planning

First, instead of a development-oriented national land planning that has been adopted to achieve quantitative expansions, programs in the national spatial planning will be reviewed and the national spatial planning has been revised to promote comprehensive policies in the use, improvement and conservation of the national land in order to achieve qualitative improvements to the national land.

Specifically, new provisions on the basic principles for national spatial strategies were added. These provisions are aimed to achieve four goals for the national land: local communities that independently develop in accordance with their own characteristics; a vital economy and society through the enhancement of international competitiveness, promotion of science and technology, etc.; citizens' lives for which safety is secured; and a rich environment which also contributes to the preservation of the global environment. They also stipulate that national spatial development shall pay attention to secure domestic and international coordination, respect independent approaches by local governments and fulfill the roles expected of the national government (Article 3).

To draw up plans that meet the needs of a matured society, the term “kaihatsu (development)” has been dropped from the list of glossaries used. The National Spatial Strategies have been defined as “the comprehensive and basic plans to promote the use, improvement and conservation of national land.” The new subject matters governed by the revised law include the utilization and preservation of sea areas, the preservation of environments and formation of good landscapes. Another subject matter is the use, improvement and conservation of public facilities, which was included to promote the

use of the existing stocks (Article 2).

Because the revised law now governs subject matters well balanced among utilization, improvement and conservation -- rather than development-oriented, the plan and law have been renamed National Spatial Strategies and National Spatial Planning Act, respectively.

(2) Shared vision between the national and local governments

Second, the National Spatial Strategies consist of two tiers: the National Plan and the Regional Plans (Article 2). The Comprehensive Prefectural Development Plans, Comprehensive Local Development Plans and Comprehensive Special Region Development Plans from the past have been abolished.

The National Plan sets policy guidelines for the comprehensive spatial development by providing (I) basic policies, (II) objectives and (III) basic measures found necessary from a nationwide perspective. The Minister of Land, Infrastructure and Transport is to prepare a draft of the National Plan and seek cabinet approval. The National Plan must be harmonious with the national government's basic plan for the preservation of the environment and subject to policy review after a certain period of time has passed since the date of its completion pursuant to the Government Policy Evaluations Act (Articles 6 and 7).

The Regional Plans, on the other hand, set major policy guidelines for the comprehensive spatial development by providing (I) basic policies, (II) objectives and (III) basic measures found necessary from a regional perspective. The Regional Plans cover the Tokyo Metropolitan Area, the Kinki Area, the Chubu Area and other areas each consist of two or more prefectures designated by a Cabinet Order as regions that require the promotion of comprehensive national spatial strategies. The Regional Plans are to be deliberated by the Regional Plan Councils and finalized by the Minister of Land, Infrastructure and Transport (Article 9).

In order to deliberate on matters necessary for a Regional Plan and its implementation, each Regional Plan area is to organize a Regional Plan Council consisting of the national government's local branches and relevant prefectures or designated municipalities. Designated municipalities and other non-designated municipalities, local governments adjacent to the said Regional Plan area and other entities that have a close relationship with the implementation of the Regional Plan may also participate in a Regional Plan Council (Article 10).

(3) Participation in planning by a diverse array of entities

Third, to facilitate the participation of entities across a broad spectrum in the process of formulating national spatial strategies, ways for citizens to have their voices heard and a system for local public groups to submit their proposals have also been established in addition to the Regional Plan Councils.

The planning proposal system is a novel system that provides a forum for the national and local governments to engage in dialogues on equal terms. Through this system, prefectures and designated municipalities may make proposals concerning the National Plan, and municipalities within an area may submit proposals concerning Regional Plans. Each entity may submit a draft plan to the Minister of Land, Infrastructure and Transport regarding plan formulations or changes. If the Minister of Land, Infrastructure and Transport decided not to follow a submitted proposal when drafting a plan, he or she must consult with the National Land Council or the Regional Plan Council and notify the entity that made the proposal of the reasons and the grounds for not following such a proposal (Articles 8 and 11).

(4) Streamlining and integration of national spatial planning systems

Fourth, in conjunction with a drastic revision of the Comprehensive National Land Development Act, the national land planning system underwent reforms, including consolidation with the National Land Use Planning, streamlining of the plan concerning improvements to the major metropolitan areas and abolishing the regional development promotion plan, among others, to streamline and integrate the processes into one that make more sense to the citizens.

With respect to national land use, the National Land Use Plan (National Plan) pursuant to the National Land Use Planning Act has been said to be the foundation of the national government's other plans. The pressure on switching to a different form of land use has decreased and is expected to decline continuously in the future. Under this circumstance, it is fitting to formulate the National Spatial Strategies and the National Land Plan in a mutually-supportive manner. Thus, the National Spatial Strategies (National Plan) shall be delivered in an integrated manner with the National Land Utilization Plan (National Plan) (Article 6).

The three laws on improvements of the major metropolitan areas, the Capital Area Improvement Act, the Kinki Area Improvement Act and the Chubu Area Development and Improvement Act, also underwent revisions. Some of the plans were abandoned or consolidated. Regional development promotion plans pursuant to the specific regional development promotion acts for the Tohoku, Kyushu, Shikoku, Hokuriku and Chugoku areas were also abolished in conjunction with the creation of the Regional Plans system.

4. Formulation of National Spatial Strategies

(1) Schedule for formulating the strategies

The Planning Subcommittee of the National Land Council, chaired by Professor Shigeru Morichi of National Graduate Institute for Policy Studies, is currently studying the National Plan, the interim result of which was submitted in November 2006 to the national Land Council in a report titled Planning Subcommittee Interim Report. After relevant agency and ministry hearings and solicitation for plan proposals from prefectures and designated municipalities, at the 23rd Planning Subcommittee meeting in April 2007, the subcommittee's first draft of the report on formulating the National Spatial Strategies (National Plan) and its responses to plan proposals by prefectures and designated municipalities were presented. Subsequently, at the 25th meeting of the Subcommittee, in November 2007, the report was finalized and submitted to the 11th National Land Council in December 2007.

With respect to the National Plan, following the submission of the report by the Planning Subcommittee to National Land Council, the Minister of Land, Infrastructure and Transport will draw up a draft plan, which is scheduled to be adopted by the cabinet in the fiscal year 2007 (April 2007 to March 2008) after public comments, hearings at prefectures and designated municipalities and final consultation with the National Land Council, among other procedures.

Meanwhile, due to the need to mark the boundaries of the regional plan areas before Regional Plans could be formulated, an Area Subcommittee was set up under the National Land Council, headed by Hideo Nakamura, President of Musashi Institute of Technology, to study ways of dividing regional blocks. In June 2006, a National Land Council report titled Proposed Regional Plan Areas was prepared based on the Subcommittee's report. Subsequently in July of the same year, the Ordinance on National Spatial Planning Act Enforcement, which divides Japan into eight areas, excluding Hokkaido and Okinawa, was enacted and enforced (Figure 1).

Formulations of the Regional Plans are scheduled to take place in the fiscal year 2008 after the completion of the national Plan.

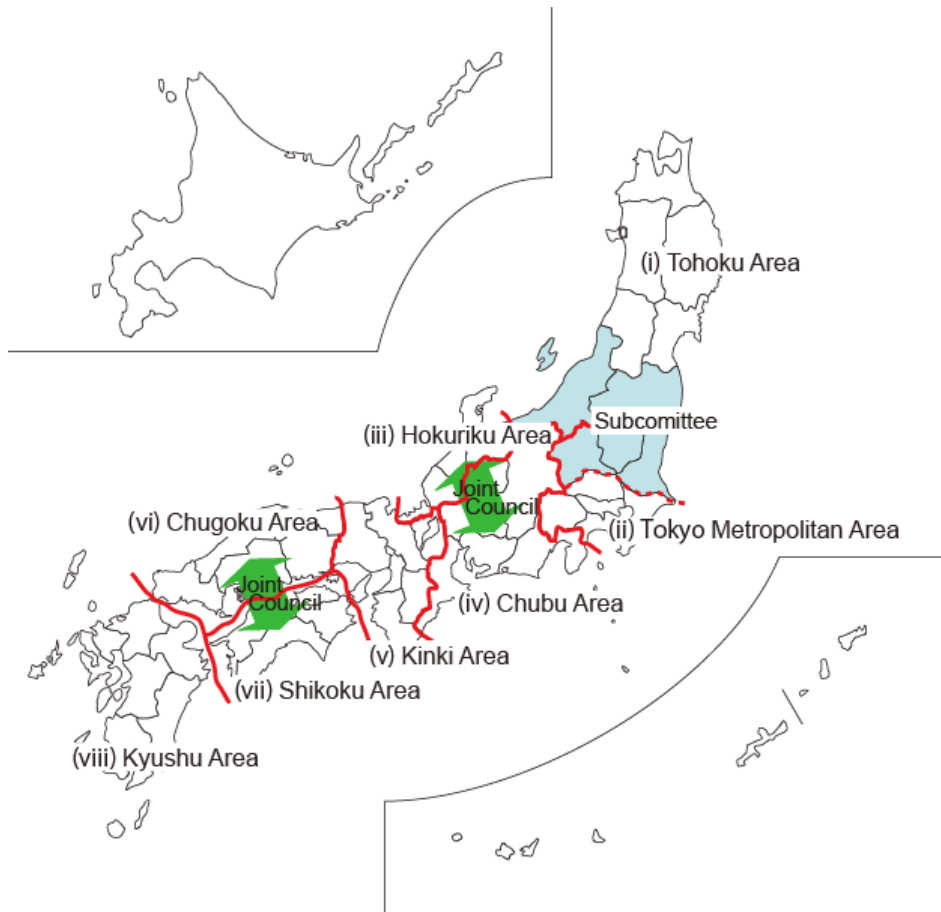


Figure 1 Regional Plan Areas

(2) National Plan

As stated above, the National Plan is still pending finalization. The Planning Subcommittee has raised the following four issues as the key issues to be considered when preparing the subcommittee report, which is to become the draft version of the National Plan.

- (I) Develop national strategies to avoid the decline of Japan due to population decrease: As the first spatial plan under population decrease, it shall provide policies designed to provide and maintain quality public services and living environment as the population decreases and ages
- (II) Explore the uniqueness of each region as one of the regions in East Asia: As the first plan that expands its spatial vision to East Asia, it shall reexamine and make the best use of the characteristics of each region in Japan, allurements and international roles as one of the regions in East Asia
- (III) Unite community powers for the purpose of community development: Facilitate the involvements of a broad spectrum of civilian entities in addition to government agencies to create an interface between the government and private sectors (a new public sector) in addition to the traditional government sector
- (IV) Japan consists of diversified and self-sustained regional blocks: To achieve the above objectives, the National Plan shall provide guidance on building a national land structure consists of self-sustained regions in the unit of regional block with the goal of expanding people's awareness on the territory and the regions.

The Planning Subcommittee's report prepared, with considerations given to the above issues, consists of three parts. Part 1 Basic Philosophies for the Plan specifies the circumstances recognized and provides the general principles and goals of the plan. Part 2 Basic Directions of Area-wise Policies offers area-wise policies designed to achieve the goals

specified in Part 1. Part 3 Formulation and Promotion of Regional Plans gives new guidelines on formulating the Regional Plans.

Part 1 Basic Philosophies for the Plan touched on the great social-economic transformation brought by the progress made in globalization and the economic developments in East Asia, and the changes and diversification in the citizens' views. It also specified the following three issues related to the views on the national land conditions. First, while the population and the nation's operations continue to converge along the Pacific coastal zone with Tokyo as the center, there are demands to develop new growth strategies aimed at overcoming population decline. Second, it has become increasingly critical to create an environment for independent regional developments through decentralization of power; to strengthen each region's decision-making power through more direct exchanges under the growing economy of East Asia; and to work with regional blocks in response to increasing number of challenges that require regional responses beyond prefectural jurisdictions. Third, the relationship between human and the national land should be reviewed to relieve the pressure and to make qualitative improvement on the national land as the population decreases.

The new strategies for the national land envision regional blocks, in the unit of the Regional Plan area, shall compete and work with other East Asia regions, come up with regional strategies that take advantage of the regional resources and form independent areas that do not rely excessively on Tokyo. The new plan's basic policy is to build a national land where diversified regional blocks develop in a self-sustained manner and to develop a beautiful national land that is good for the citizens to live.

Under the above basic policy, five strategic goals were set to promote the plan through collaboration among a diverse array of entities. First, in order to develop a national land while coping with present challenges such as globalization and population reduction, it is necessary to develop a seamless Asia with a global outlook and to develop a sustainable region. In order to build a safe and beautiful national land, it is necessary to develop a national land that is resilient to disasters and to manage and inherit a beautiful national land. In addition, it is a cross-sectional goal in regional development to create a "new public sector" that strategically facilitates the collaboration of a diverse array of entities.

5. Conclusion

After the cabinet approval of the National Plan in the fiscal year 2007, Regional Plans for the eight regional blocks will be formulated in the fiscal year 2008. Regional Plans will be formulated through deliberations by Regional Plan Councils that consist of national government's regional branches, local governments and economic groups, among other entities. Regional Plans are master plans for regional blocks that provide specifics based on the National Plan. This article mainly described the system reform and the key features of the National Plan. Regional Plans merit a paper of their own in the future.

Amendment of the City Planning Law for Controlling Large Scale Retail Institutions

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1. Introduction

The City Planning Law of Japan and other relevant Laws were amended in May 2006 and enforced in November 2007. The most significant point of the amendment is to control locations of large scale retail institutions with more than 10,000 square meters in floor area by the planning procedure.

At the beginning, the primary issue in politics was town center revitalization, but during the policy making process of the ruling parties, it was enlarged to the issue of how to create a sustainable pattern of urban form and structure, which are adaptable to the approaching era of population decrease. This can be considered a success for the planning administration, because while in the midst of a historical trend of the easing of regulations and government involvement, at least as far as huge retail buildings are concerned, the strengthening of land use and the controlling force of the site location due to the urban planning was made possible.

Although the general regulatory situation on land use control in Japan is still far loose and generous compared to main western countries, this paper intends to clarify the meaning of the Law amendment for the Japanese urban planning administration, as well as its history and backgrounds.

2. Prehistory

Before the 1990's, governmental intervention for the establishment of large scale retail stores used to be enforced as a part of the industrial policy in Japan. The purpose was to protect small shops in town centers. It was similar to the French policy and system.

The former intervention was introduced in 1974 by "the Law for Adjustment on Business Activities concerning Large Scale Retail Stores", and it was strictly enforced until the 1980's. However, the policy of the government changed to deregulation as of 1990, and the law itself was finally abolished in 1998. As for the deregulations, the main motivation was political pressure by the US, but conforming to Article 16 in the General Agreement on Trade and Services (GATS) of the WTO was also considered inevitable.

Since 1990, when the deregulation policy of the distribution industry began, the number of large scale retail stores was dramatically increased. Most of them were built outside the town center, and some of them were super large in size and was almost equal to total floor area of the whole town center. However, the land use control by the City Planning system has not worked, because suburban type large scale retail institutions are of the sort that have a low density style building with an extremely large lot. And as such, the floor area ratio regulation by the ordinary zoning designation does not work. In addition, usage land use regulations of the arterial road side areas are not strict because it is considered a preferable use of land in the area since it is for retail use rather than residential uses.

In 1998, three laws were legislated, instead of the abolishment of the former large scale retail store law. The following are the laws: "the Town Centre Revitalization Law" that mainly relates to the financial support framework; "the

Large Scale Retail Store Location Law” that relates to the implementation of environmental impact assessments such as the necessary number of parking lots, noise prevention, and garbage storage; and “the City Planning Law” (an amendment of the existing law) that relates to the land use regulation system to give power to the municipality to restrict specific uses of buildings by making the Special Use District system more flexible. The national government thought at the time that municipal governments would control large scale retail stores at their own discretion as long as the tools to regulate land use was improved. This approach was easy to accept because of its conformity to the decentralization policy of the nation as well as the WTO agreement. Therefore, measures using the law for promoting planned land use while controlling the opening of large scale retail stores in the suburbs was considered to be sufficient for the times.

3. Background of the Law

However, the booming of large scale retail store establishments had continued even after the implementation of the new laws, and most of them were still built in the suburbs. In fact, the reason was obvious because after all, there were few municipalities that introduced land use regulation to control large scale retail stores in the suburbs. For example, Toyota City, which was a rare example, designated the arterial road sides in suburban areas as a Special Use District in 1999, and this banned retail stores with more than 3,000 square meters in floor area. However, within only three years after the designation, eight huge stores with more than 10,000 square meters were established one by one in other surrounding municipalities where they did not introduce the regulation on controlling retail stores (Figure 1). As a result, the sales share of Toyota City decreased. As it turns out, most cities in Japan were never really interested in introducing land use regulation to control large scale stores.

In the beginning, the national government did not recognize it as a serious problem because it simply seemed to be a result of the choice of consumers and the decisions of each local government. The promotion of decentralization, which facilitates delegating power to local government and minimizing intervention by the national government, was another prioritized political issue as well as the deregulation. However, people and groups who were interested in the town center revitalization, such as the Japan Chamber of Commerce, began to criticize the situation as a failure of national policy, and gradually such opinions grew to be significant political pressure. Finally, the ruling parties and the national government started reviewing the policy. However, there were the other groups that were against strengthening regulation, and they asserted that this may be against deregulation as well as the decentralization policy. Then, after a lot of discussion, the ruling parties made a decision to strengthen land use regulation, and the City Planning Law was amended again in 2006.

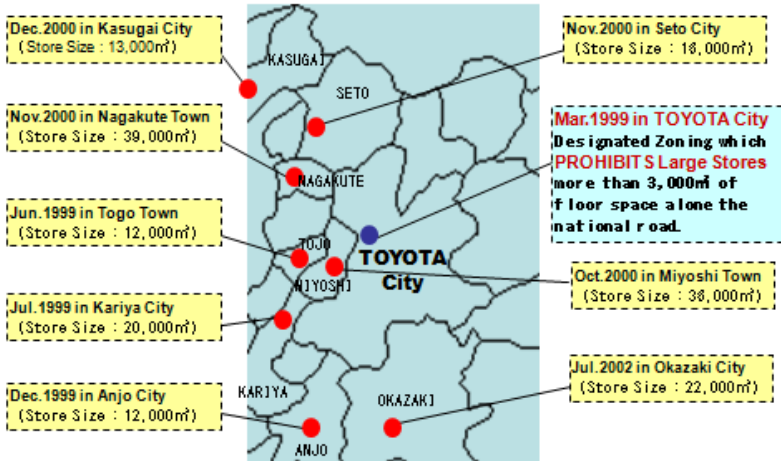
4. Recognition

The following can be recognized as problems concerning Japan’s current urban planning:

- The “Urban Growth Policy”, which is based on the growing trend of demands, should be changed because the national population in Japan has already started to decrease since 2005. Therefore, urbanized areas should be reformed to be more compact.
- Meanwhile, large scale retail institutions tend to be spreading out into the suburbs. The trend in fact is seemingly continuing due to the mature motorized society, despite the decrease in population. This phenomenon leads not only to the emptying of the town centers, but also to inefficient public investments and increasing costs in infrastructure management in the long run. Therefore, at least the locations of such large scale institutions that attract a large number of people from a huge catchment area should be controlled by the planning initiative. This is what is currently necessary.

Establishments of Superstores outside the With-Regulation City

Toyota City and Surrounding Municipalities



Open After March 1999 and Store Size More Than 10,000m²

Written by Naohito ISE and Hideyo HOSOGAYA in 2004

Regulation for Retail Uses by the Land Use Zones

Examples	1 Low. Res. Z.	2 Low. Res. Z.	1 Med. Res. Z.	2 Med. Res. Z.	1 Res. Z.	2 Res. Z.	Quasi Res. Z.	Neigh. Com. Z.	Com. Z.	Quasi Ind. Z.	Ind. Z.	Ex. Ind. Z.	Non
Shop in house (50m ² Max)												×	
Daily Store (150m ² Max.)	×											×	
Retail Store (500m ² Max.)	×	×										×	
Store (1,500m ² Max)	×	×	×									×	
Store (3,000m ² Max)	×	×	×	×								×	
Store (10,000m ² Max)	×	×	×	×	×							×	
Store (NO SIZE LIMIT)	×	×	×	×	×	×	×				×	×	×
Theater	×	×	×	×	×	×	△	△			×	×	△
Adult Shop	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×		×	×	×	
Karaoke Box	×	×	×	×	×								
Auto Repair Shop	×	×	×	×	×	×	△	△					

 Can be built
 × Usually cannot be built
 △ Can be built under some conditions

- However, the current situation of the national basic zoning code, which ought to be the basic measure to attain the policy above, is not restricted to large scale retail stores except for the floor area ratio. The reason why the regulation standard was the way it was is because it was always believed that like department stores near train stations, if retail buildings become huge, the density will also become high. However, this kind of thinking was out of date. The municipalities have the right to modify the basic zoning code by their own discretion, but it was shown by recent experiences that they are not willing to restrict large scale retail stores because the commercial domains of these stores are so large that economic interests of municipalities are in conflict with each other. This fact is significant.
- As a result, development control should be introduced by the national law itself as a primary condition of spatial planning by local governments, at least for specific land uses such as large scale institutions that attract a large number of people from a huge catchment area, including beyond the border of the municipality in which it is located. In principle, the regulation should be enforced all over the national land, although it seems to conflict with Japanese traditional policy that says “No regulation where the necessity hasn’t been proven”.

5. Contents of the Law Amendment

- Retail institutions that have more than a 10,000 square meter floor area will be restricted in the whole City Planning Area except in the three categories of the Land Use Zones, which are the Commercial Zone, the Neighborhood

Commercial Zone, and the Quasi Industrial Zone (Figure 2).

- In addition to the above, in order for the “the Basic Plan for Town Centre Revitalization” created by municipalities to be approved by the government, (i.e. be eligible for financial support by the national budget), the municipalities are expected to regulate huge retail stores by designating Quasi Industrial Zones also as Special Use Districts themselves. The article for exceptional permission in the Urbanization Control Areas that applied to developments with more than five hectares in site area will be repealed. Hospitals, social welfare facilities, schools, and government offices that have been exempted from the development permission procedure will also be required to file the permission.
- On the other hand, a private developer with consent from more than two thirds of the land owners is recognized as a qualified body who has a legal right to institute the Planning Proposal for amending the zoning designation. The District Plan system has also been improved to be available for the release of the floor area restriction of retail institutions. This entails an improvement to the planning process. The large scale retail institution is not recognized as altogether bad, but its location should be judged by the planning process.
- The Land Use Zone amendment or the District Plan designation, which is implemented by the municipal government, requires consent from the prefectural government. Through the series of the decision making process, including the planning proposal by a private developer and the consent from the prefecture, the private development of large scale retail institutions is considered a planning issue related to the creation of a more sustainable pattern of urban form and structure of the whole city and the region.

6. Conclusion

Although mainstream Japanese national policy has been to deregulate and decentralize, aiming to minimize governmental intervention on business sectors and local communities, the 2006 amendment of the City Planning Law took a different position from the trend, although it only concerns retail institutions with more than 10,000 square meters in floor area.

The purpose of the amendment is to strengthen the power of planning to make the urban form and structure more sustainable for the approaching era of population decrease.

In fact, there are only a few people who are against the town center revitalization policy. However, a policy that restricts the development rights of land owners of land outside the city center area for the reason of protecting already existing stores in the city center couldn't be justified. To make such a restriction acceptable, it had to be considered necessary for the sustainable development of the whole city. More specifically, as far as the goal of how indeed to create a sustainable urban structure (i.e. a structure in which land and buildings are not disposable, there is no financial waste, people aren't dependent on cars, one that is environmentally friendly, one that is easy on pedestrians, and one that has various means of transportation to access the city's attractions) such land use regulation was necessary. For local governments, it is not an easy task to introduce regulation by their own initiative. In order for the city planning system to work where land use control is concerned, the development has to be primordially regulated. Furthermore, only in a primordially regulated situation can the steps to public involvement, societal involvement free of discrimination (social inclusion), and careful decision making be secured.

On that point, the 2006 amendment of the City Planning Law is significant not only in regards to restricting large scale retail institutions in the suburbs, but also in recovering the initiative of local governments from private developers on deciding where to construct attractive places in the city.

Compact City Policy and Its Challenges – Case Studies of Toyama and Aomori

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1. Introduction

As the effects of population decline begin to be felt, many provincial cities are showing problems such as a run-down central district, dwindling population living in a spread out residential area and over-reliance on driving. As the population continues to shrink amid an aging society with a low birthrate, it has become increasingly difficult for urban policy-makers in provincial cities to find ways to continue providing services to their residents and maintaining their urban structure. Some have suggested solutions such as revitalization of the central district, systematic reduction in size of the urban district and sustainable town-development to deal with such challenges. In recent years, these concepts have come to be referred to as compact city, a spatial configuration concept. The recent movement to amend the three community management laws also provided important indications on the direction the provincial cities should take in terms of compact community development, especially concerning the issue of large-scale retail stores.

This essay will attempt to discuss the compact city policy and its challenges using the policies of Toyama City and Aomori City as case studies of local governments incorporating the concept of compact city in their urban policies. It was not that long ago that both cities swiftly drew up their own first basic community revitalization plan.

2. Toyama's Approach to a Compact City Design

2.1 An overview of Toyama

The City of Toyama has a population of about 418,000¹⁾ spreading over a large jurisdiction the size of approximately 1,240 km², a result of its annexation of six surrounding municipalities in April 2005.

A strong preference among Toyama's residents for single-house dwellings and Toyama's extensive highway system has fueled a population shift to the suburbs. Toyama now has the lowest population density in the urban area (DID 40.3 persons/ha) among prefecture capital cities. As a result, there is a heavy reliance on driving, which accounted for 72.2% of the share in transportation, the highest among provincial core cities.

Issues confronting urban policy-makers in Toyama are: (1) declining quality of life for the city's residents, an increasing percentage of whom are elderly and non-drivers, as the urban structure becomes even more reliant on driving; (2) deteriorating budget outlook amid rising administrative costs due to a lower population density in its urban district and falling tax revenues due to a declining population; and (3) population decline and economic decay at the central district due to increasing outflow of urban population and functions to suburbs.

2.2 Toyama's compact city policy

To deal with these challenges, the City of Toyama has adopted the concept of compact city in its urban policy. In its

master plan, the city sets out a mission to attract people back to the city by bring urban functions and various services to the urban center and key communities as well as by improving public transportation, including rail and bus systems, in order to develop a compact community where residents do not have to rely on driving.

To achieve such goals, Toyama plans to develop an urban structure that gives its residents access to urban functions within walking distance (within a community) without having to use their own cars and to link such communities by public transportations that meet a certain service standard (Figure 2-1).

The official plan to improve public transportations that serve to link these communities include improving the rail and major bus routes services and providing community bus services to the neighboring areas. Part of that plan is the Toyama Light Rail, a light rail transport system (LRT) built in 2006 that has earned a nationwide media exposure and received a high mark from the residents. Toyama plans to build LRT throughout the city as its leading project to develop a compact city

Key communities, defined as non-industrial areas within a radius of 500 m or 300 m, respectively, along the major rail or bus routes, have been designated as Residential Promotion Areas Along Public Transportation Route. Public subsidies will be made available for building or buying homes in such areas.

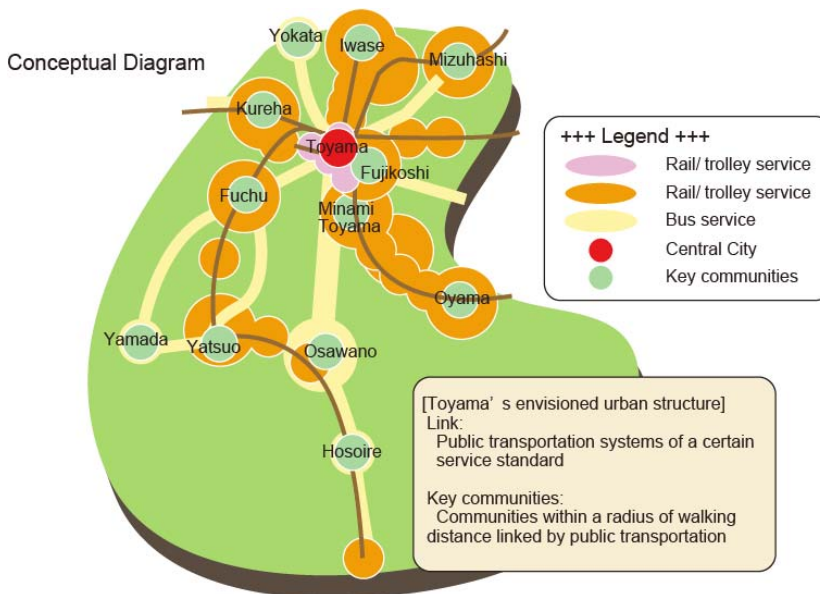


Figure 2-1 Conceptual diagram of Toyama's compact city design



Figure 2-2 Toyama Light Rail PORTRAM²⁾

2.3 Challenges to Toyama's compact city policy

The City of Toyama, in connection with the amendment of three community management laws, has decided to set up special use areas in quasi-industrial areas. It has yet to begin studying what ordinances and changes in land utilization it will adopt in its compact city design. The city intends to provide incentives as a way of giving choices to its residents on whether to live in the city or the suburb. Toyama Prefecture has the highest percentage of people who own homes (79%) among all prefectures in Japan, and people in the City of Toyama are no exception, with many of them preferring single-house dwellings. With its residents' life style heavily reliant on driving, the City of Toyama's ability to entice citizens to choose a compact community has been called into doubt.

Policy makers must also take notice in the rapid growth of population, due mainly to the increasing number of young households, in some of the towns adjacent to the urban planning area. For instance, Funahashi-mura, a community about a half hour drive from downtown Toyama, has seen its population nearly doubled between 1990 and 2005, the top pop-

ulation growth rate within the prefecture. The City of Toyama has increased in size after annexing some surrounding municipalities. One of the keys to achieving its policy goals undoubtedly is to find ways to accomplish regional coordination with its neighboring municipalities.

3. Aomori's Approach to a Compact City Design

3.1 Overview of Aomori

Aomori is a city of approximately 824 km² with a population of about 310,000³⁾. It is surrounded by a rich natural environment, with Mutsu Bay in the north and Mount Hakkoda to the south. It receives heavy snowfall in the winter and is the only prefectural capital with its entire jurisdiction designated a special heavy snowfall area. Coping with snow is therefore a key word in its community design. Aomori received approval as a core city after its annexation of Namioka-cho in 2006.

The City of Aomori too is showing a significant outflow of population to suburbs, with a declining population at the center of the city and a nearly tripling of population in the suburban residential areas. (Table 3-1) The city estimated that its initial cost in public investment associated with the population outflow from its central district to suburbs was about 35 billion yen. On top of that, it also has to bear huge running costs such as snow removal cost. Such government inefficiencies are the result of its expansion in size.

The outflow of the city's population to the suburbs also saw construction of suburban large-scale retail stores accessible by car, which, combined with relocation to the suburbs of hospitals, libraries, wholesale markets and other facilities, resulted in a hollowed out central district.

Table 3-1 Changes in district population in the City of Aomori

Year	1970	1975	1980	1985	1990	1995	2000
Central district (inner)	159,818	166,410	165,710	162,890	152,420	150,400	146,768
Suburban residential areas (mid)	36,278	50,576	71,489	76,993	81,906	87,039	93,246
Non-urban areas (outer)	43,867	47,230	50,388	54,153	53,481	56,725	57,845
Total population	239,963	264,216	287,587	294,036	287,807	294,164	297,859

3.2 Aomori's compact city policy

The City of Aomori, in light of the anticipated decaying of its central district, weakening of its urban functions due to a declining urban density and the budgetary pressure resulting from its population outflow to the suburbs, has decided to adopt a compact city design to deal with these challenges.

Aomori has come up with a master plan that recognizes the need for a compact city design in order to develop a pleasant and efficient city capable of withstanding snowfall and other disasters, in harmony with the environment and also sustainable amid an ageing and declining population. In its urban planning master plan, the city is divided into three areas: the inner-city, the mid-city and the outer-city. Individual goals designed to meet the needs of each areas are provided below (Figure 3-1).

Inner-city: This area roughly covers the urban area developed up to around the 1960s. This area, with many decrepit buildings, is in need of revitalization.

Mid-city: A relatively new urban area that potentially can serve as a stock area to absorb urbanization needs.

Outer-city: Most of this area are covered by urbanization control zones and will continue to see restricted development.

The City of Aomori has also stepped up its public investment in projects located in its central district. In 2001, the

city provided about 16 billion yen in fund for AUGA, a public-commercial building in front of the station. (Figure 3-2) The property now houses retail stores geared toward young people and the municipal library that has relocated from the suburb and now boasting an annual visitor count of 6 million. Other projects located in the central district include the Mid-Life Tower, a condominium for seniors, and Passage, a part of the central district revitalization project.

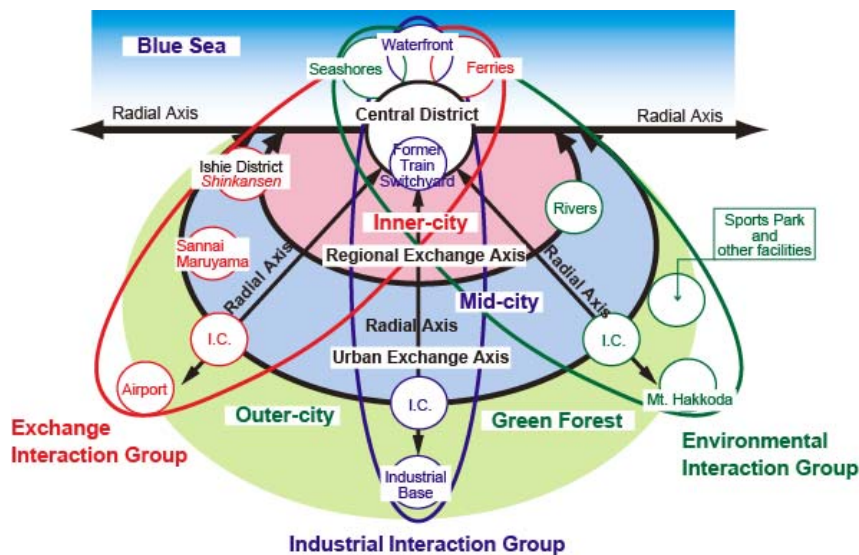


Figure 3-1 Conceptual diagram of Aomori's compact city design



Figure 3-2 AUGA (Multiple-use facility in front of a station)

3.3 Challenges to Aomori's compact city policy

The City of Aomori, in connection with the revision of the City Planning Law, has begun the process of drawing up its special use areas and quasi-town planning areas, but it has yet to come up with its own land use regulations. Under these circumstances, it may be necessary to systematically concentrate its investment to the central district in order to achieve its vision of a compact city design. A review of its physical 2005 urban policy-related budget revealed investments in the amount of 1.3 billion yen for the inner-city, 2.7 billion yen for the mid-city and 0.2 billion yen for the out-city; that about half of these budgets are earmarked for road maintenance and improvement and land readjustment projects; and that its investment policy weighted heavily toward the suburban areas remains unchanged.

Whereas the budget designated for suburban developments comes primarily from earmarked revenue sources, the critically needed investment in inner-city developments comes mainly from the general account budget. If new development projects continue in the suburbs the way they are now, there will be an increasing pressure to dip into the general account budget to finance the maintenance of the suburbs, which may very well lead to cuts in investments to the central district. In order to continue the push to achieve a compact city design, it may be necessary to reexamine how budgets are allocated and to allow local governments more flexible control on their investments.

4. Conclusion

The case studies of the two forward-thinking cities that adopted the compact city policy showed that Toyama and Aomori are completely different in what each has envisioned for its own city. Toyama, a city encompassing a vast territory, is taking a multi-pronged approach to develop its transportation network. In contrast, Aomori, a relatively small city surrounded by geographic boundaries, is relying on a concentric approach that focuses on its central district. The targets of their investments are also different. Whereas Toyama is largely dependent on its transportation policy, Aomori is heavily invested in its central district revitalization. As illustrated by these two case studies, it would be meaningless for cities to

consider the concept of compact city as merely a spatial configuration theory. Rather, city planners need to realize that this concept can only be incorporated into their planning after each of their own circumstances, requirements and characteristics are taken into consideration.

The case studies involving the two cities also showed one thing in common: the lack of regulatory approach. It is obvious that central district revitalization cannot be achieved simply by placing a regulatory restriction on suburban developments. It is also a fact that the existing zoning regulations covering a vast area may impede the forces that work to shape the city landscape. The problem with a regulatory approach stems largely from the difficulty in reaching consensus among various entities. Nevertheless, active dialogues, including discussions on regional coordination, will likely help in finding potential ways of dealing with the many challenges facing the provincial cities.

Notes

1) As of August 2007.

2) Reprinted from <http://www.g-mark.org/>

3) As of July 2007.

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Prefectures' Role in Regional Coordination and Expectations of Regional Councils' Performances

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1. Prefectures' Role in Regional Coordination

1-1 Decentralization of power in urban planning

Japan at present is divided into 47 prefectures, with 1,827 municipalities (as of April 1, 2007).

Prefectural governments and municipal governments are each responsible for part of the urban planning. In principle, they share the responsibilities in urban planning, with the municipalities playing the central role in urban planning, while prefectures handle regional and fundamental aspects of urban planning that involve multiple municipalities.

In recent years, Japan has been promoting a greater decentralization of power; 475 laws were collectively revised in 2000 in order to achieve the central government's goal of transferring some of the power to local governments. The Urban Planning Act was one of the laws that were revised. The decision-makings in urban planning used to be an agency-delegated function (a duty of the central government delegated to the local governments) but are now a local government function (a duty of the local governments). In the meantime, the involvement of the central government was also reexamined, and urban planning was deemed the local governments' own responsibility. Authorities have subsequently been transferred from the central government to prefectural governments and from prefectural governments to local governments.

Prefectures' decisions concerning urban planning used to require approvals from the central government, and municipalities' decisions on urban planning used to require approvals from the prefectural government. To limit interventions by the central and prefectural governments, such decisions now require only the central or prefectural government's consent. This was an effort both to strengthen the independence of local governments and to streamline the process for urban planning.

1-2 Prefectures' Role in Regional Coordination

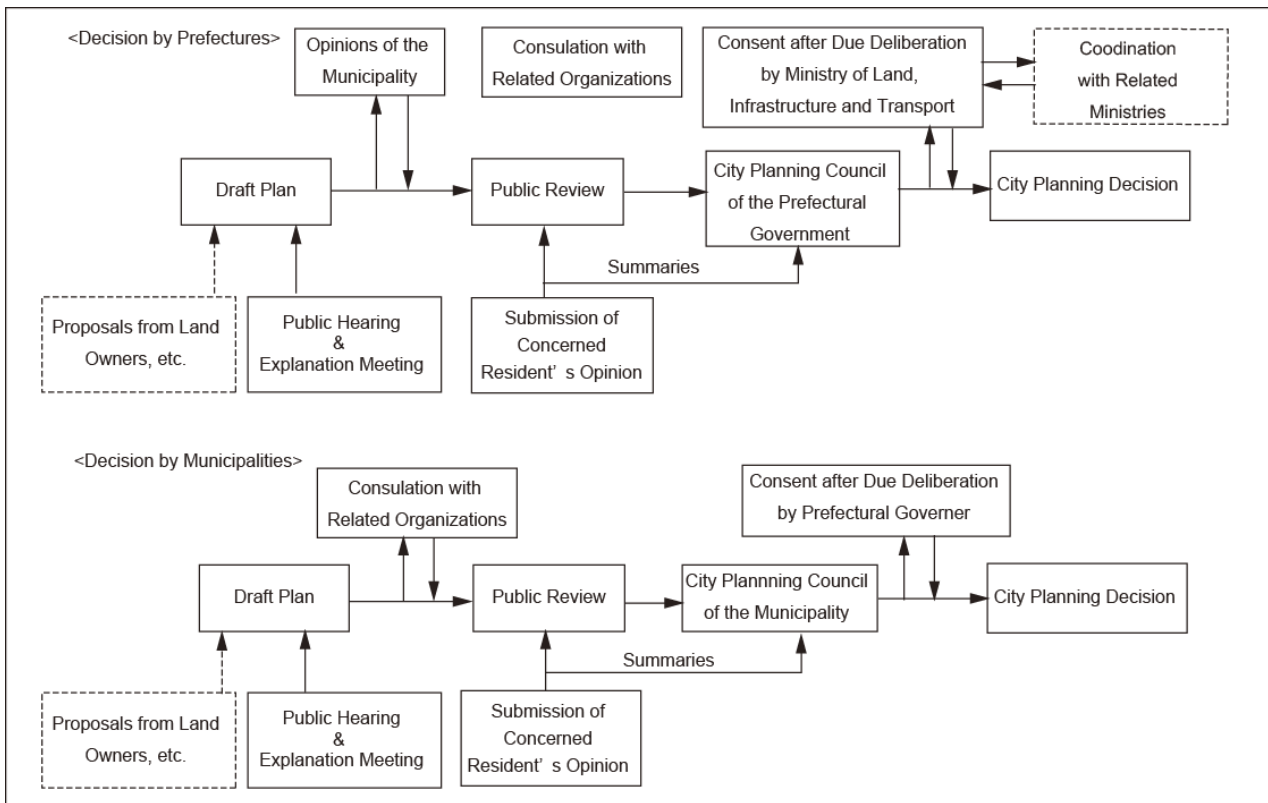
Presently, a prefectural government's consent to an urban planning proposed by a municipality is based on the following criteria.

- I) - Conformance with laws and regulations
- II) - Compliance with the prefecture's established or pending urban planning
- III) - Compliance with the prefecture's long-term planning and other basic planning
- IV) - Necessary regional coordination has been made if the effect of the proposed urban planning will be felt beyond the jurisdiction of the municipality

A prefectural government is supposed to confer with a municipality to ensure the proposed urban planning is in compliance with the prefecture's established or pending urban planning and be in coordination with the planning in other municipalities of the region. For instance, compliances with the prefecture's long-term planning and urban master plan

Aspects of Urban Planning and Responsible Decision Makers

Aspects of Urban Planning			Planning Authority		
			Prefectur	Municipalit	
Urban planning areas			●		
Urban planning districts improvement, development and conservation			●		
Municipalities' basic policies on urban planning				●	
Urban redevelopment policies			●		
Drawing boundaries for urbanization areas and urbanization control areas			●		
Districts or areas	Zoning	3 Major metropolitan	●		
		Other		●	
	Special use districts			●	
	High degree districts/ high use districts			●	
	Urban revitalization special districts		●		
	Fire prevention areas/ quasi fire prevention areas			●	
	Scenic areas			●	
	Parking improvement areas			●	
	Port districts	Important ports	●		
		Other		●	
	Historic preservation areas		●		
	Landscape conservation areas		●		
	Distribution business areas		●		
	Productive green areas			●	
	Traditional monument groups preservation areas			●	
Urban facilities	Roads	National highways/ prefectural highways	●		
		Other roads	4 Lanes or more	●	
			Less than 4 lanes		●
		Expressways	●		
	Urban high-speed railways		●		
	Parking lots			●	
	Airports	Categories 1, 2 and 3	●		
	Parks, green belts	Area of 10 ha or more	●		
	Plazas/ cemeteries	Area of 10 ha or more	●		
	Water lines	Water utility services	●		
	Electricity/ gas utility facilities			●	
	Sewage system	Public sewage system	2 or more	●	
			Municipal areas		
	River-basin sewerage system		●		
	Sanitation treatment plants/ refuse incineration facilities			●	
	Industrial waste treatment facilities		●		
	Community heating and cooling facilities			●	
	Rivers	Classes A and B rivers	●		
		Secondary rivers		●	
	Cannels/ other water ways		●		
Schools	Colleges/ higher professional	●			
	Other		●		
Libraries/ research facilities, etc.			●		
Hospitals/ child-care facilities			●		
Markets/ slaughterhouses/ crematoriums			●		
Government offices at housing complexes		●			
Urban district development projects	Land readjustment projects	Area exceeding 50 ha	●		
	New residential urban district development projects		●		
	Industrial park development projects		●		
	Urban district redevelopment projects	Area exceeding 3 ha	●		
Area of 3 ha or less			●		
District planning				●	



Flow chart for decision-making processes in urban planning

and effects on the urban area's urban structure or regional infrastructure are to be taken into consideration.

Nevertheless, from a regional point of view, coordination with neighboring municipalities is, of course, necessary. The amended 2006 Urban Planning Act states, "Prefectural governors, in making such a discussion, may request the relevant municipalities to submit data, express views, give explanations and provide other assistances when deemed necessary."

The amended law has also taken a stance against allowing the development of large-scale shopping malls, which have contributed to the decaying of the central urban district. Large-scale shopping mall developments now must go through the process of urban planning to ensure any such project is deemed appropriate by the affected region.

With respect to responsibility-sharing between municipalities and prefectures, municipalities are in charge of making coordination for existing commercial districts located within a municipality, and prefectures are responsible for making regional coordination and developments affecting multiple municipalities.

Japan has begun to feel the effects of a dwindling population and an aging society, with the economy in provincial areas in decline and regional disparities widening. The competitions between provincial and urban cities are expected to intensify, leading to fierce struggles to bring population, businesses and industries to each of their own jurisdiction.

As the inter-city rivalries build up, prefectural government will increasingly be asked to provide regional coordination involving multiple municipalities. The ability of a prefecture government to provide regional coordination will be critical to the success of achieving a balanced regional development.

1-3 Challenges Facing Prefectures in Making Regional Coordination

Prefectures need to take following actions in order to be successful in making regional coordination.

- I) - Formulating a regional master plan
- II) - Establishing a regional coordination system

III) - Specifying criteria for making regional decisions

I) - Formulating a regional master plan

In order to execute a speedy and fair regional coordination, it is necessary to formulate a regional master plan that lay down a clear vision for the region to serve as the basis for making coordination and decisions. In formulating such a plan, it is critical to have the participation of the relevant municipalities and adopt their recommendations.

The master plan should take advantage of the characteristics of each municipality and allocate urban function such as population, industries and public facilities among other resources accordingly. It is important that the master plan rebuild the existing regional structure to build an efficient network of urban function.

II) - Establishing a regional coordination system

It is also important to set up a system for carrying out coordination so that it is clear as to what types of projects are subject to regional coordination, the boundary within which municipalities are subject to coordination and the procedures for carrying out coordination.

III) - Specifying criteria for making regional decisions

To arrive at decisions fairly and speedily, it is important to specify the criteria to be used. Such criteria should be based on the regional master plan. For this reason, it is imperative that a regional master plan be formulated as soon as possible.

Many prefectures are faced with the challenge of developing sustainable communities. As inter-regional and inter-city competitions heat up, it is critical to think of regional coordination from the viewpoint of coexistence.

2. Expectations of the Regional Councils' Performances

2-1 National Spatial Strategies and Regional Plans

Next, let us examine the national plans. Presently, Japan has two national plans: the National Spatial Strategies based on the National Spatial Planning Act and the National Land Use Plan based on the National Land Use Planning Act.

The National Spatial Strategies is a new statutory plan stipulated by the 2005 National Spatial Planning Act, formerly the Comprehensive National Land Development Act before its revision. This plan is divided into two tiers: the National Plan, a comprehensive and basic plan to promote the use, improvement and conservation of national land throughout Japan, and the Regional Plans, plans that provide the policy guidance for the spatial development in regional areas.

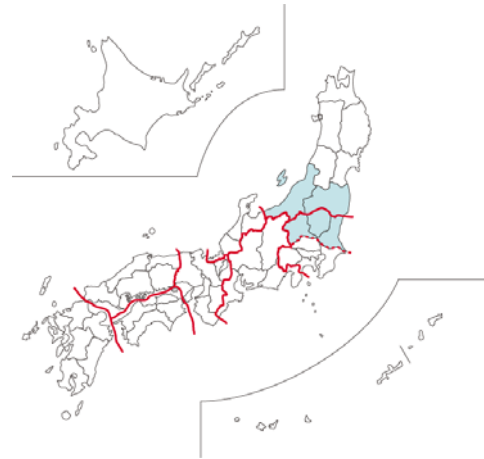
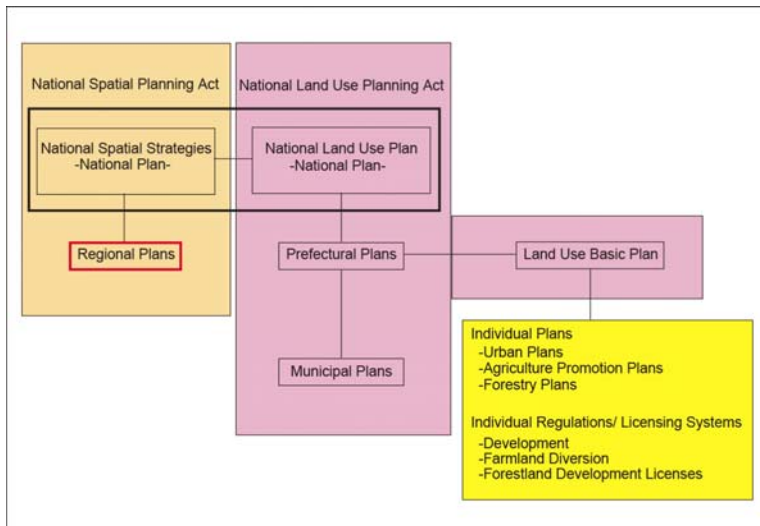
Each regional plan covers a group of prefectures and is to be formulated in collaboration with the central government's regional branches and the local governments in the region, a new framework for formulating regional plans.

The central government is in the process of drawing up the National Plan. Meanwhile, preparatory councils for regional plans have been set up in the eight regions to begin preparation of formulating the regional plans.

2-2 Expectations of Regional Plan Councils Performances

The purposes of formulating regional plans are:

- To handle regional problems and challenges involving multiple prefectures in an efficient and effective manner
- To share the problems and challenges facing each region and to work toward finding solutions



National Spatial Strategies system

- To respect the individuality and independence of each region while forming a block that could develop on its own

Challenges for regional planning are:

- To find challenges that are common to the regions and issues that require regional responses
- To come up with a vision for each region
- To ensure that policies for implementing the plans would work effectively

The Regional Plan Councils, rather than searching for issues that are the greatest common denominator to all local governments, should recognize what the problems and challenges are facing each region and carry out constructive discussions to examine what direction the region ought to be heading.

It is also important that a regional plan should be more than just a plan that restates the existing policies of each prefecture according to project theme. It should serve both as a strategic plan that provides a picture of what the council envisions for the region's development and as a policy guidance on what steps each prefecture governments should take.

To avoid the plan being turned into just a pie in the sky, it is also necessary to specify the entities in charge of carrying out the plan, to set up a system to assess the progress and to create a mechanism to guarantee its effectiveness. Finally, regional plan councils are not the forum for local governments to reconcile conflicting interests, they should be the venue where new ideas are born that would take the region to a great future.