

Promoting Utsunomiya as a Cyclist-Friendly Community

Utsunomiya City



Background

The city of Utsunomiya has held Japan Cup Cycle Road Race, the top-rated bicycle road race in Asia, every year since 1992. Utsunomiya Blitzen, a professional cycle road racing team based in Utsunomiya, was established in 2009 and has since made good showings in domestic races. These developments have raised citizens' interest in bicycles and cycling.

In 2003, Utsunomiya drew up the basic plan for the more extensive and better use of bicycles, under which the city sees bicycles as a mode of intra-city transportation alongside automobiles, trains and buses. It also promotes the fact that bicycles' are environmentally friendly and can contribute to a healthy lifestyle. The basic plan was mapped out amid changes in the social environment, including worsening traffic congestion, higher public awareness of the need to protect the global environment and the aging of society. Based on the plan, the city has stepped up efforts such as securing a dedicated space for bicycle travel and increasing the number of bicycle parking lots.

Increased environmental and health consciousness in recent years boosted public interest in bicycles and cycling, creating the need for further policy measures. In response, the city decided to put its efforts into realising a city that thrives on bicycles and cycling.

Purpose of Project

Conditions for bicycles and cycling have changed and related needs of citizens have diversified including higher environmental and health consciousness and an increase in leisure activities that use bicycles in recent years. Against this backdrop, the municipal government drew up in 2010 a plan to promote community development with a focus on bicycles and cycling, aiming to establish Utsunomiya as a cyclist-friendly community where everyone can use bicycles safely, comfortably and enjoyably.

Outline of Project

Under the plan to promote community development with a focus on bicycles and cycling, the city of Utsunomiya clarified a basic policy of enhancing the convenience of bicycles as a mode of transportation and boosting the city's attractiveness through active use of bicycles.

The city set following four main policy themes under which specific projects are implemented to promote bicycle-focused, cyclist-friendly community development:

◆Anyone can use bicycles safely

--Increasing safety

- Constructing roads that provide safety and peace of mind for cyclists.
- Educating cyclists so they comply with rules and have good sense of etiquette for bicycle use. Creating an environment that supports the safety of bicycle travel.

Major Projects

- a) Securing dedicated space for bicycle travel (for example, creating bikeways and road signs).
- b) Holding traffic safety classes.



Bikeways indicated by blue surface paint on the sides of the road

◆Anyone can use bicycles comfortably

--Improving comfort

- Efforts to create an environment that encourages bicycle use, including the establishment of places for cyclists to take breaks and the promotion of tie-ups with public transportation companies such as railway, bus and taxi operators.
- Developing convenient bicycle parking lots that make good use of the features of bicycles.

Major Projects

- a) Establishing "bicycle stations," or small-scale rest spots that allow cyclists to make simple repairs to their bikes, on the premises of public facilities and convenience stores (41 bicycle stations in fiscal 2015).
- b) Creating bicycle parking lots near railway stations and bus stops.

◆Anyone can use bicycles in pleasant surroundings

Promoting tourism and sports

- Creating an environment that makes people want to use bicycles.
- Discovering the new attraction of bicycles, through collaboration with tourism and the promotion of cycle sports.

Major Projects

- a) Expanding bicycle rental services (increasing the number of bikes available for renting).
- b) Operating the Miya Cycle Station, a facility where cyclists can use bathrooms and rest areas for free. It was set up by the municipal government near the west exit of East Japan Railway Co.'s Utsunomiya Station, located in the city centre.
- c) Creating maps for cyclists.

◆Anyone can use bicycles with a focus on health and the environment

Promoting health and environmental conservation

- Enhancing citizens' health and promoting lifestyles that are friendly to our planet.

Major Project

Implementing a cyclist monitor project to measure effects on health, such as changes in body weight, and on the environment i.e. carbon dioxide emissions, that result from a shift in commuting from cars to bicycles.

In addition, the city of Utsunomiya promotes the following measures that make use of local resources

Japan Cup Cycle Road Race

The city has hosted Japan Cup Cycle Road Race, a bicycle road race that brings together top racers from around the world, every year since 1992. Of the one-day races authorised by the Union Cycliste Internationale (UCI), it is the only road race in Asia categorized in the first-tier "Hors Class."

Utsunomiya Blitzen

Utsunomiya Blitzen is a community-based professional cycle road race team in Utsunomiya. The team has turned in strong performances, winning championships in 2012 and 2014 at the J Pro Tour, the top-level bicycle road race in Japan. It is also involved in Wielerschool, a cycling and road safety education programme, for elementary

school children in the city, as well as a cycling class for the elderly aimed at promoting health and preventing the need for nursing care.



2015 Japan Cup Cycle Road Race

Features and Advanced Aspects

Japan Cup Cycle Road Race has posted audience growth of 50% over the past decade. Since the start in 2020 of a criterium race in which professional cyclists make a number of laps of a closed circuit in a traffic-restricted central part of the city, the overall event has attracted more than 100,000 spectators every year. The city of Utsunomiya provides active support for the race, regarding the event as a major opportunity to publicise itself as a cyclist-friendly community both at home and abroad. It also supports the event to invigorate tourism.

Utsunomiya Blitzen is a community-based professional cycle road race team, a rarity in Japan, rather than a company-backed team. The city works with Utsunomiya Blitzen to conduct traffic safety classes as part of an active involvement in regional contribution efforts, in hopes of fostering a regional culture centered on bicycles and cycling.

The city is pushing ahead with the programme to create a community for cyclists on a long-term basis and in a comprehensive way, covering infrastructure development and upgrades, such as the operation of the Miya Cycle Station and bikeway development, and the drawing up of cycling maps and other efforts.

Effects of Project

1. Development of bicycle travel space

Securing bikeways and establishing road signs to show they are part of measures aimed at improving the safety of cyclists and reducing accidents. In fiscal 2013, the number of accidents involving bicycles fell 40% from fiscal 2008 for the whole of Utsunomiya and 46% for specially prepared lanes such as bikeways.

2. Operation of bicycle rental services

Rental bicycles placed at municipal parking lots are designed to make it easier for citizens to move around the downtown area by bicycle.

3. Establishment of more parking lots

By setting up bicycle parking lots near railway stations and bus stops, the city hopes to strengthen links with the public transportation network and boost the convenience of bicycles.

4. Operation of Miya Cycle Station

At the Miya Cycle Station, a rental service for sports bicycles is offered. They also provide seminars as part of an effort to invigorate cycle sports, publicise their attraction, and hopefully lead to a more extensive use of bicycles.

Problems and Responses

◆Before Project Implementation

It is necessary to create a road environment that promotes safe and comfortable bicycle travel, and to educate cyclists on rule compliance and etiquette.

Of all means of transportation (including bicycles, trains, automobiles, buses and walking), automobiles account for a relatively high share of journeys in Utsunomiya, at 59% against the national average of 41% (2000 National Census). In order to facilitate a shift from automobiles to bicycles and reduce environmental damage, including CO₂

emissions, the city needs to strengthen links between bicycles and the public transportation network by, for example, creating parking lots near railway stations and other transport nodes, and encourage the use of bicycles and public transportation.

Japan Cup Cycle Road Race and the success of Utsunomiya Blitzen have not only stimulated local citizens' interest in bicycles and cycling but also caused an increase in the number of cyclists who visit Utsunomiya. To build on the momentum and boost the number of cyclists further, the city has found it necessary to redouble its efforts to construct base facilities for cyclists and publicise the attractions of sports bicycles.

◆After Start of Project

While trying to meet calls for additional bikeway links in Utsunomiya, in particular at accident-prone intersections, the city is also making efforts to ensure safety at intersections and on narrow roads. These are mainly road construction efforts designed to make cyclists more clearly visible to automobile drivers.

The city is discussing an expansion of the Miya Cycle Station, a facility to promote the use of bicycles, following an increase in the number of users and calls for a further improvement of user services

Outlook

To promote Utsunomiya as a community that supports cyclists, the city is engaging in many initiatives. It plans to continue its efforts to create an environment for the safe and comfortable use of bicycles, strengthen collaborations with public transportation operators, and improve and expand Japan Cup Cycle Road Race, a key local resource.

Reference URL

<http://www.city.utsunomiya.tochigi.jp/kotsu/jitensy>

[a/015606.html](#) *Japanese

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