



Handbook on Michi-no-Eki for International cooperation



# 道の駅



## Michi-no-Eki

Michi-no-Eki was born in 1993 in Japan.

Local vitalization effects of Michi-no-Eki are huge, and now, they are being adopted in ten or more nations around the world. (2018)



■■■ Information ■■■



■■■ Community ■■■



■■■ Relaxation ■■■



## It is not a usual roadside stop!

A Michi-no-Eki is not a usual rest facility along a route.

Michi-no-Eki are facilities (infrastructures) for rest and social (community) exchange located by a roadside, aiming at comfortable rest for road users and vitalization of the local area.

It is a system where local governments establish Michi-no-Eki, which are certified by the MLIT (central government).

Local communities participate in the operation of Michi-no-Eki, providing original and various services.

Road users drop into Michi-no-Eki and have interaction with local community members to invigorate the area.

## Objectives of Michi-no-Eki

There are two main objectives as follows:

1. Provision of safe and comfortable road traffic service to road users.
  - Under the circumstances of improved roads and increased automobile traffic, the provision of safe and comfortable rest attracts road users who had previously passed by.
2. Local development is promoted by the visits of road users to Michi-no-Eki, in which local communities participate
  - Interaction among road users and local communities is promoted at Michi-no-Eki, and various effects for local development can be expected.



## Japanese original system

Michi-no-Eki is a system originated in Japan, which began in 1993

Other nations evaluate them highly as a unique model, in which the effect of road improvement and road traffic lead to the development of roadside areas.

Now, they are spread over ten or more nations around the world, and the word "Michi-no-Eki" is becoming internationally recognized. (2018)



Conventional expressway service areas tend to provide rest areas and information as their main services. In contrast, Michi-no-Ekis provide services for local development.



Road users resting at a comfortable place outside facility.



"Michi-no-Eki" is used as a place for exchange and Marche



Road users stop at Michi-no-Ekis to enjoy local foods and specialties made by various distinctive producers, which leads to local development. (Fresh seafood caught in the morning is sold on the same day.)

## Changes in road users and expectation for regional improvement

Since the 1980s, changes in social environments have influenced the sense of values and lifestyle in Japan. The following changes led to the birth of Michi-no-Eki.

### Changes in social circumstances:

- Road maintenance and improvement have progressed to enhance the needs of not only smooth traffic but also comfortable rest service for road users."

### Changes of drivers:

The drastic increase in female and senior drivers intensified the need for safe and comfortable rest facilities along usual roads (not expressways and other roads exclusively for automobiles )."

### Changes in sightseeing ways:

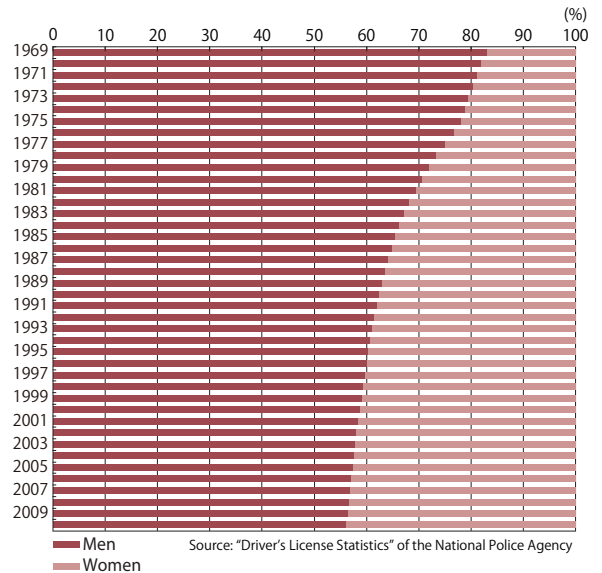
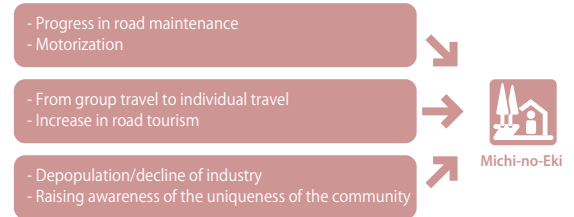
The mainstream sightseeing ways changed from organized bus tours to individual road tourism.- Some train lines have been decommissioned in local areas, and sightseeing using roads has increased."

### Changes of values:

People's interests have come to value local supply and consumption, slow food, and local likeness."

### Changes in local social environments:

Local decline and a decrease in population have progressed to strengthen the consciousness of regional vitalization.



Female drivers' share of all drivers has increased since 1970 in Japan.

## The birth

### - A "station" wanted for roads -

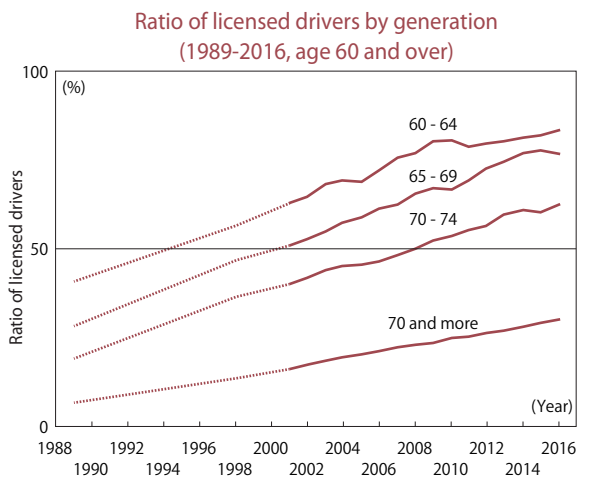
Started from one recommendation at a symposium of MLIT and citizens (1990)

A citizen participant said, "It would be good to have stations on roads, like railways have."

In the following year (1991), MLIT performed a social experiment together with the citizen who proposed the Michi-no-Eki.

Upon the success of the experiment, the official government system was born in 1993.

In the same year, 103 roadside complexes became Michi-no-Eki.



The number of elderly drivers is also increasing in Japan.

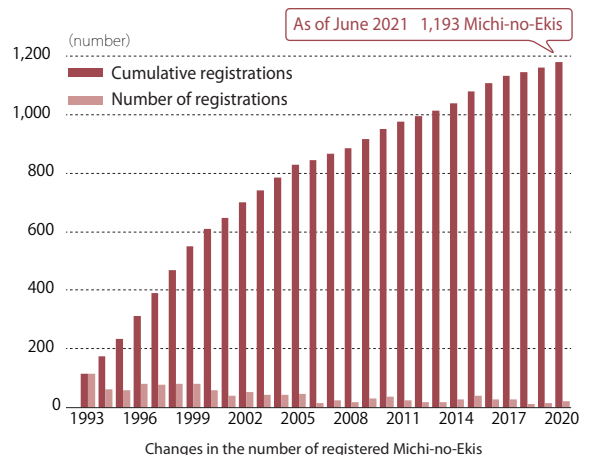
## 1,193 Michi-no-Eki in 28 years since the birth

The initial goal was 1,000 Michi-no-Eki.

1,193 Michi-no-Eki as of 2021, and still increasing.

Many Michi-no-Eki in areas that are neither big cities nor popular tourist resorts

The reason is that local governments establish Michi-no-Eki in areas where private sectors do not invest.\*





## Provision of comfortable and safe roadside rest services

Free parking lots and clean restrooms operating 24 hours.

Provision of rest and refreshment services required for driving, including inside and outside free rest spaces, such as benches, parks, and viewing facilities.

- Free services by home municipalities make road users drop in and rest freely in comfort.
- Therefore, many road users drop into Michi-no-Eki even when they don't need to for their traveling.

## Provision of specialties and foods using resources of the area

Local specialties and goods available only at the Michi-no-Eki of the area.

Provision of foods using unique local ingredients and cookery.: (restaurants, takeout foods, processed foods)

Affordable and fresh vegetables, fruits, fishery products, etc.

- (～)(Safety and peace of mind, slow food, connected directly with producers, prices decided by producers)
- Thereby, not only economic effects but also social effects are born, which contributes to the local improvement significantly!



Various road users, such as those in passenger cars and heavy trucks, can stop by easily.



Outdoor gardens and benches for a comfortable rest  
Increased stop times translate into increased sales at Michi-no-Ekis.



A comfortable rest area inside the facility



Toilets are in operation 24 hours a day. Clean, convenient toilets translate into increases in visitors to Michi-no-Ekis.



Michi-no-Eki with spectacular views



Agricultural products harvested in the early morning are sold the same day.



Road users purchase local products, thereby invigorating the local economy.



Attractive restaurants at Michi-no-Ekis bring more visitors.



Development and sales of commercial goods made from local products



## Dispatch of traffic and sightseeing information

Provision of maps, vehicle information, and weather and disaster information.

Bulletin boards and pamphlets, in addition to guiding at information desks about the sightseeing and local information,

Depending on the Michi-no-Eki, guidance in foreign languages is available.

→ These information services support road users for safe and attractive driving and sightseeing!

## Various area functions (differ depending upon the local Michi-no-Eki)

Community base: support of living, education, and welfare, and community activities

Area sightseeing base: tourist agency office, tour guidance, staying, etc.

**Cultural base:** dispatch of local history, culture and industries, and activities of cultural circles

**Traffic base:** bus terminal, cycle terminal, etc.

**Public-relations base:**

public relations for specialties (antenna shop), introduction of stores in the town, provision of relocation information, etc.

**Cultural base:** dispatch of local history, culture and industries, and activities of cultural circles

**Traffic base:** bus terminal, cycle terminal, etc.



Restaurants serving local specialties



Exhibition space introducing local history and culture



An example of a tourist information center operated by a tourist association at a Michi-no-Eki  
(<https://www.hakobura.jp/db-shopping/2016/02/post-86.html>)



Information provision by means of local information magazines



A space for meetings to pursue local activities



Roadmaps featuring nearby facilities are provided, as are real-time images of road conditions. Traffic and weather information provision can help visitors set their driving itineraries.



A space for relaxation that doubles as a shelter during disasters



Parking areas used as evacuation sites during severe snowstorms

## Features of Michi-no-Eki

### – Differences from usual road side stops –

Michi-no-Eki are established with different concepts from those of SAs and PAs of expressways and roadside service stations and stores.

Complexes to make exchanges with road users for local improvement • Local governments and communities with Michi-no-Eki.

Almost no one visits conventional service areas or parking area as destinations, but many people visit Michi-no-Ekis as destinations.

Functioning as a network of many Michi-no-Eki in close coordination, not only one Michi-no-Eki.

The central government and local governments also provide support by positive publicizing and other activities.

→ Thereby, the charm and convenience of traveling or visiting using a route with Michi-no-Eki increase, which leads to the promotion of sightseeing and local community activities.



Some Michi-no-Ekis have sightseeing facilities that take advantage of the local environment and scenery. (Photo: Sanjo Printing Corporation)



Local produce harvested by farmers early in the morning is sold directly to consumers on the same day. Agricultural products sold at Michi-no-Ekis, which are publicly accessible facilities, are trusted for their freshness and reliability.

## Reasons why Michi-no-Eki are popular

Michi-no-Eki are not uniform—various services are provided. Each Michi-no-Eki uses ingenuity and pursues uniqueness.

Not only the complex but the products and services are substantial. Users' needs, such as safety and peace of mind regarding foods, as well as low price and freshness are matched with the concept of Michi-no-Eki.

Both outside visitors and residents are customers. They have peace of mind because of the public nature of the facilities (services, goods, and prices).

Michi-no-Ekis will improve through competition with each other.



Interaction between producers and buyers (face-to-face sales)

## Types and functions of Michi-no-Eki

Types of Michi-no-Eki, are roughly divided into two: gateway and area-based. However, many Michi-no-Eki have both elements.

The expected effects differ depending on the purpose for which the Michi-no-Eki was established and on conditions such as location and environment. It is necessary to examine Michi-no-Ekis to determine what type will produce the intended effects.

### 1. Gateway

**Location** Tourists and passing traffic drivers are the main targets: located along tourist resorts, passes, and highways

**Purpose** Sale of local foods and specialties to road users from outside of the area, which is an expected economic effect

### 2. Area-based

**Location** Complex mainly for residents: located in or around a small village

**Purpose** Assisted living, cultural promotion, and the welfare of local communities are considered.

## Michi-no-Ekis to be supported

**Gateway Michi-no-Eki, intended to vitalize the area from without**  
**Functions required**  
 Inbound tourism support, one-stop tourism counter, promotion of relocation to local areas and the like.

Such Michi-no-Ekis bring vitality, create employment and start a virtuous cycle for the community.



**Area-based Michi-no-Eki, intended to harness local energy**  
**Functions required**  
 Industrial promotion, community welfare, disaster prevention



## Michi-no-Eki – Effects –

Direct effects are mainly effects on Michi-no-Eki, and effects on road users.

→ Those direct effects develop indirect and propagating effects, such as effects on local communities and effects on roadsides as a whole.

### 1. Direct effects

#### Effects on the Michi-no-Eki

- Effects to attract customers (Increase in customers dropping in)
- Increase in sales of local specialties and foods
- Establishment of regional improvement base
- Utilization of Michi-no-Eki brands

#### Effects on road users

- Safe and comfortable rest
- Access to information on traffic and local areas
- Purchase of good specialties at a reasonable price.
- Enjoying food peculiar to the area, etc.

**High quality and fair services,  
and creation of friendships among visitors and residents**



Dissemination of real-time information on weather, accommodation facilities and the like (<https://www.michi-no-eki.jp/specials/view/40>)



Development of original Michi-no-Eki products that make use of local specialties (<https://www.michi-no-eki.jp/specials/view/44>)

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## Benefits of rest areas

By having Michi-no-Ekis provide even more excellent rest area services, we expect more drivers to stop by and stay for longer. This will lead to increased sales from more visitors spending more money.

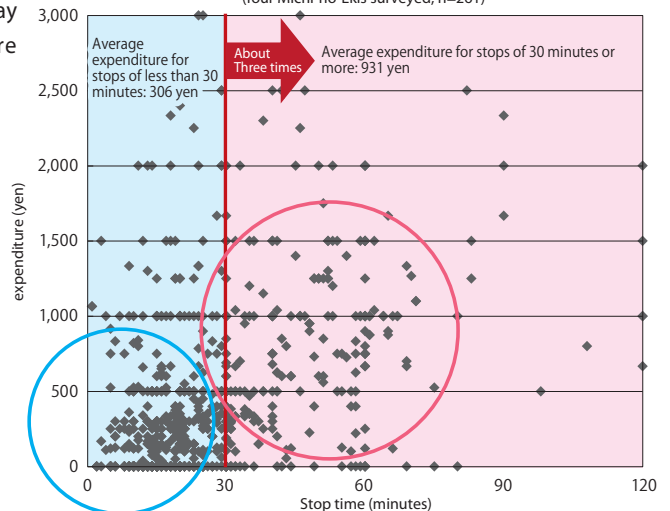


An example of the extent to which visitors and sales increased after tables, parasols, benches and planters were set up in the corner of the parking lot

For stops of 30 minutes or more, **The expenditure triples.** (Actually, it more than triples.)

#### Stop time and expenditure

(four Michi-no-Ekis surveyed; n=261)



Spending was found to increase with increases in the amount of time that visitors stayed.

## 2. Indirect and propagating effects (effects on entire roadside areas)

### Economic effects

Increase of local specialty production/ branding of local specialties (improvement in brand name)/ increase of prices of local specialties/ increase in sales and earnings of local businesses/ increase in capital investment/ improvement in income of local farmers and increase in employment of residents/ acceleration of development of new specialties and new processed goods/ new business starts and investment

Increase in visitors to tourist resorts and urban areas/ increase in experience tours and event participants

Increase in the traffic volume along routes/ promotion of the roadside sightseeing area/ promotion of road tourism

### Social effects

Improvement of safety and charm of sightseeing along routes/ local brands/ notability of the area

Friendship of residents and visitors/ public relations of local culture and history/ activation of hobbies and cultures of residents

Promotion of community development: fair trade, improvement of female positions, a decrease in child labor, a decrease in illegal street stalls, environmental enhancement

Activation and enhancement of local communities/ collaboration promotion among neighboring local governments

Fostering of affection for and pride of residents in their local areas/ increase in immigrants, population, and persons moving back to their hometowns

(In the case of area-based Michi-no-Eki) More convenient life for residents

(In the case of disaster-prevention Michi-no-Eki) Improvement of disaster prevention functions of areas



Provision of local tourism information to shoppers  
( <https://www.michi-no-eki.jp/specials/view/35> )



Active employment of local youths and women

**These Michi-no-Eki effects lead to invigoration (promotion) of roadside areas!**

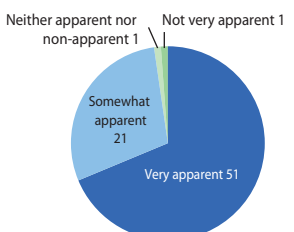
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## Questionnaire on the effects of setting up a Michi-no-Eki

- The results of a questionnaire survey of municipalities with Michi-no-Ekis in Hokkaido
- A number of municipalities considered it beneficial to have a Michi-no-Eki.
- The benefits were found to increase with increases in the sales of local specialties (processed products).
- For this reason, it's important to develop, sell and brand processed local products with high added value.

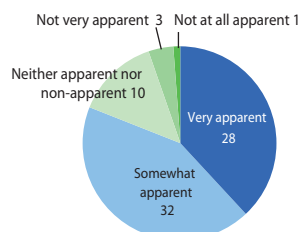
Q: How apparent are the effects of the Michi-no-Eki?

Increases in numbers of people visiting sightseeing spots and regions



"Perceived" (69%)+ "A little" (28%) = 97%

Increased recognition of towns and areas



"Perceived" (38%)+ "A little" (43%) = 81%

Q: How much do you feel the Michi-no-Eki contributes to regional revitalization? (General)

Annual sales of local specialties other than agricultural products directly from farms

50 million yen or more



Less than 50 million yen



Legend: Perceived (dark blue), Can not be judged (light green), Not perceived at all (medium green), Perceived a little (light blue), Not perceived (medium blue)



## Establishment

- Established and maintained mainly by local governments -

Local governments make plans for Michi-no-Eki based on the requirements set up by MLIT and receive MLIT approval.

- Local governments consult with road administrators (~) during the planning.
- They discuss with the candidate management organization and cooperating organizations (asking for cooperation), including tourist agencies, agricultural cooperative associations, commerce-and-industry associations, companies, and farmers.

Local governments make agreements with the management organization and other cooperating organizations for arrangement toward commencement of business.

Local governments or public institutions construct Michi-no-Eki. (Existing complexes used for Michi-no-Eki are modified to satisfy requirements)

There are joint and independent constructions.

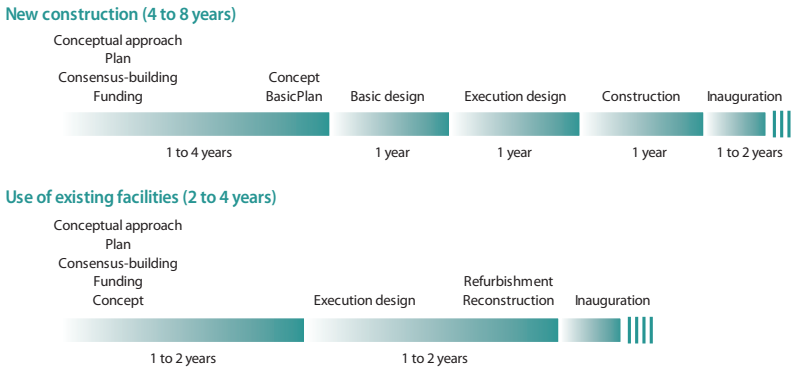
### Joint construction:

the local governments and road administrator of the area cooperate in the construction (cooperation with the government for a national road)

### Independent construction:

the local government of the area carries out the construction independently.

Figure: Time required to establish a Michi-no-Eki



For new construction, the process from planning to inauguration takes 4 to 9 years. For renovations, the process takes 2 to 4 years. And for only design and architecture, it takes 1 to 2 years.

## Budget

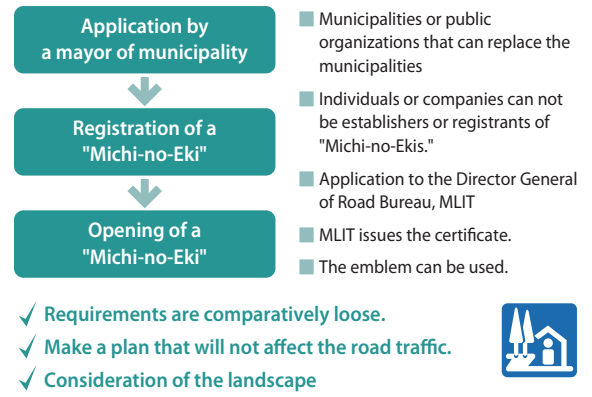
joint construction, MLIT supports the parking lot, toilet, and information-service section.

According to the objective and content of each Michi-no-Eki, ministry agencies financial support using their scheme.

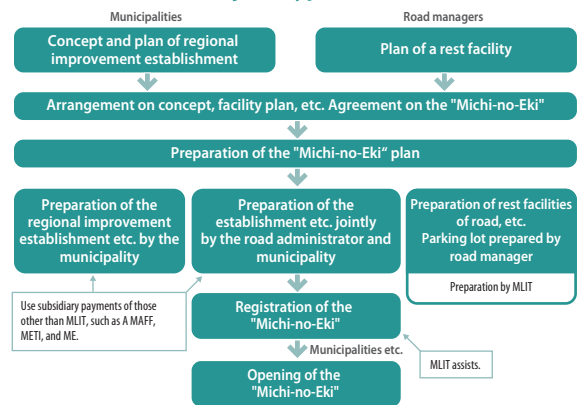
Utilization of subsidies from the government to local governments and "hometown tax."

(Hometown tax is a Japanese program that enables people to support the local government of their native provinces.)

### Registration of "Michi-no-Eki" (Approach)



### Preparation procedure of the "Michi-no-Eki": (1) joint type, 56%



### Preparation procedure of "Michi-no-Eki": (2) Independent type, 44%

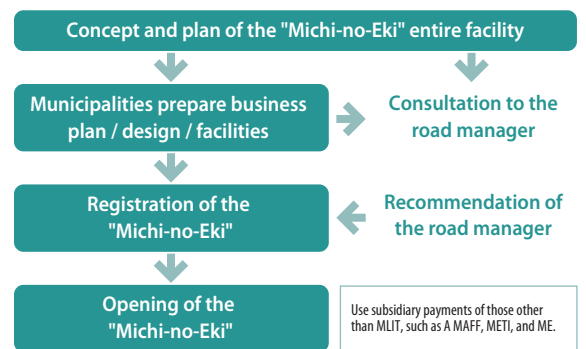


Table: Example of subsidies from the central government for a Michi-no-Eki. (None of the following names are official.)

Ministries and agencies	Purpose of support
MLIT	Disaster prevention and road safety
	Urban renovation
	Village revitalization
	Local public transport
Japan Tourism Agency	Branding of tourist regions
Cabinet Office	Regional revitalization
Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry	Installation of charging facilities for electric vehicle
Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries	Revitalization of agricultural and fishing villages
	6th Industrialization
	Distribution of domestic marine products
	Forestry regeneration
Ministry of Environment	Reduction of carbon dioxide emissions
Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications	Regional economic cycle
	Regeneration of facilities in depopulated areas

\* The subsidy is often around 30-50%. (The balance is covered by the budget of the local government.)

## Operation of businesses

### Public service businesses:

Provision of comfortable rest, information service, cooperation in local activities and events, emergency actions, etc.

### Profit-earning businesses:

Sales of goods, eating and drinking, and development of specialties, etc.

### Tourist businesses:

Tourist information, accommodation guide, implementation of tours, development of sightseeing events, etc.

### Facility management:

management and operation of complexes.

## Operation systems

There are mainly three operation systems, each with merits and demerits. The designated-management system is dominant, whereas there are only a few local-government management systems at present.

### Local-government management system: 11% (direct management system)

Local governments manage and operate directly. Local governments make contracts with persons for each restroom, restaurant, shop, etc.

### Outsourcing system: 13%

Local governments do not operate directly, and entrusted persons manage and operate. Local governments are responsible for the management of complexes.

### Others: 6%

### Designated management system: 70%

On behalf of local governments, designated persons manage and operate complexes comprehensively. This is a system for private corporations to perform management/operation of public institutions. Private corporations are responsible for the management of complexes, which means more flexible management compared with that of the outsourcing system.

(Note) Entrusted persons are public corporations to which local governments and other public corporations and private enterprises contribute.

## Participation and cooperation of local organizations and persons

Participation and cooperation of local organizations and persons from the planning phase for the design, management, and operation of complexes are indispensable!

Establishment and training of new organizations for the operation of Michi-no-Eki.

### 1. Organizations suitable for operation

Utilization of existing organizations: tourist agencies, commerce-and-industry organizations, local top-rated companies, NPO, other regional organizations, industrial organizations, local governments, etc.

### 2. Organizations and individuals who can participate, cooperate and collaborate

Associations of agriculture and fishery, farmers, fishery operators

Universities, senior high schools, special (occupational) schools, specialists

Local companies, major companies, and world brand companies

Regional organizations, NPOs, residents, immigrants, foreigners, students

Michi-no-Eki of other local governments and sister cities

Organize and foster those persons who cooperate in the operation of Michi-no-Eki.



Local high school (home economics section) operates a store on weekends.



Collaborations in which local farmers bring in fresh farm products for sale



Cooperation with local community development groups



The opening of an international outdoor retailer right next to a Michi-no-Eki



## Points for success

### Planning

Clarify the objectives and concept to establish a Michi-no-Eki, and make a plan with due consideration of the strategy and tactics to realize it.

Identify and match local resources and needs of users, and perform flexible planning, design, and operation.

Raise the value of local specialties, and build a mechanism to bring money into the area on an ongoing basis.

Discuss with the main operation body and organizations, producers, and local communities that may cooperate from the planning phase.

The plan and scale should be suitable considering the operation.

### Design and construction

Starting with the utilization of a simple or existing complex, with which later repair and extension does not cause a failure.

A complex that is safe, identifiable, easy to use, clean, and comfortable, and which people will continue to be willing to come to and stay at, should be built.

Planning and design to sufficiently utilize the important surrounding environment.

Construction in an area with no competing complex.

### Operation and management

Ensure an able stationmaster and management organization (provide education, if they are not available).

Improve active and continuous management and management capability of the organization.

Aim at self-support accounting as much as possible.

Treat local producers and cooperators who provide goods and services favorably.

Devise to raise incentives of Michi-no-Eki employees.

**It is not important to build a beautiful complex, but building a mechanism with good planning and operation is necessary!**



Products are sold alongside photos of the producing farmers.



There are also small Michi-no-Ekis to meet the demand for such facilities. An example of a Michi-no-Eki next to a tourist ranch



Facility design taking advantage of ocean views

## Challenges of Michi-no-Eki

### Common main challenges to many Michi-no-Eki

A decrease in sales in the off-peak period, the burden of maintenance, management, and updating of complexes

A shortage of executive capability and product development ability of the management organization, ensuring of able chief and staff members, talented people's training

Improvement of Michi-no-Eki personal treatment, aging of management and cooperation organizations and aging of farmers, and a shortage of successors in response to increasing numbers of foreign tourists, etc.

Providing services demanded by inbound tourists (foreign tourists)

### Individual main challenges to many Michi-no-Eki

The deficit, pressure on private sectors, overnight staying in cars and illegal parking, management depending on direct delivery from farms, dangerous parking lots, Michi-no-Eki structure that cannot enter easily, supervisory oversight, contract method not connected with local improvement, etc.

## The success of Michi-no-Eki

Does the success of Michi-no-Eki lie in the many visitors and the increase in sales and profit?

Increase in sales of goods made in foreign countries and areas, which does not contribute to local improvement is limited.

The success of Michi-no-Eki is not only direct, but is also indirect and is propagating effects for areas and users alike.

True success is for users and local communities to be affluent (happily)!

## Michi-no-Eki spreading around the world

Although road maintenance and improvement are progressing in developing countries and fairly-developed countries in recent years, the effect of local roadside improvement is small.

Other countries are interested in Michi-no-Eki as a solution.

→ Complexes called "Michi-no-Eki" are spreading around ten or more nations at this moment. (2018)

The effects that can be expected are females' advancement in society and their economic independence, as well as local improvement by self-reliance, traffic safety, etc.

## Technical assistance from Japan

The utilization of Michi-no-Eki as sales bases of local specialties is recommended by JICA at the level of technical co-operation relevant to the "one-village, one-specialty" economic movement.

Dispatch of specialists from local governments who have operational know-how regarding Michi-no-Eki.

JICA Hokkaido Center has performed training for eight countries in Central Asia and the Caucasus area from 2013 to 2015.

From 2017, Michi-no-Eki training for seven countries of Central America and the Caribbean Sea area.



Column

## Primary products market

Many Michi-no-Ekis have produce stands that sell fresh, reliable local farm and fishery products at low prices.

These stands are very popular. It's been confirmed that they increase the numbers of visitors and the sales revenues.

However, primary products have little added value, so the sales of these products have little ripple effect on related industries. Given that Michi-no-Ekis aim to promote regional development, it's important to create processed products with more added value.



Provision of product knowledge and cooking methods



Produce stand for fruits, vegetables, and marine products Affordable, fresh, safe, reliable