

September 14, 2009 (Monday) 15:15-17:00

Speech: Future Visions of Asian New Infrastructures

(3) New urban transportation systems in the global community

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On August 24th, I established and became president of a company called SIM-Drive. This company has Soichiro Fukutake of Benesse Corporation as chairman and Nobuyuki Idei as our advisor. Today I would like to talk about how land traffic systems will change over the next ten years. I believe that the problems mankind is facing today, such as global warming and the depletion of oil resources, are all resolvable. With solar energy technology, which was developed in the 20th century and has become of practical use only now in the 21st century, I think that in the future, the world's 7 billion people can lead richer lives.

The "Eliica" car that our company developed in 2004 will become symbol car of the future. I would like to show you some footage of the Eliica overtaking a Porsche (video). With technology, things move from inefficient to efficient, from complex to simple. The development of the transistor proves this. In this next footage you will see automatically controlled cars. Two to four cars can be controlled and moved in a vertical formation. There is just one driver in the first car, and the other three cars are following the first. With GPS data, map information and collision prevention sensors, automatic driving is now easy and possible. This helps solve four problems – the environment, energy efficiency, accidents and traffic congestion.

Logistics will change dramatically as a result. You can load containers with goods and transport them without people. Shinkansen will be able to transport cars with people still seated inside. I believe that trains will become specialized and cover only distances greater than 500km.

SIM-Drive strives to support the existing automobile industry by open sourcing the fruits of its labors. By adopting our very low-energy-consumption technology, we believe conventional cars can operate on half the current energy used now.

At SIM-Drive, we plan to bring together a number of companies to develop a state-of-the-art prototype car. Participants can be car manufacturers, parts suppliers, investors and even new entrants. “Let’s develop a car together, and then you take home the technology we developed.” That is the basic thinking behind open sourcing.

Cars of the future will be radically different and in particular, they will be electric. Taking a look at mobile phones and digital cameras, from the time of initial popularization, technologies shift in about 7 years. At our company, we have a prototype car that is both comfortable to ride and very low energy consuming. Now all we have to tackle is the problem of mass production. That is why we want to work with other companies to popularize it. To do this, it is important to nurture the ability to identify quickly what technologies for what purposes are good to invest in.

At our company, we are also thinking about making the mass production scheme open source. To companies that want to make automobiles, we will provide all sorts of information and development support, and our business model at SIM-Drive is to charge a small percentage of the results as payment. Along with solving our unprecedented environmental problem, we feel a sense of mission to create a car that does not cause accidents or traffic jams and we want to spread these technologies as quickly as possible. In the future, cars will become electric, driving will become automated and traffic infrastructural systems will radically change. If we combine this with IT, we can facilitate communication with others while driving as well as a number of other things. Ultimately, this will add value

to moving from one place to another.

<Q&A Session>

Q1: I would like to see electric cars become more prevalent, but aren't some of the reasons this is not happening so quickly is because of vested interests, the oil industry economy and other barriers?

Shimizu: Thirty years ago when electric cars were first developed, we thought that something would take hold in 5 years, but in fact, it was not until the 21st century that the technology became really good enough to use. Currently, we are at a stage where we are thinking about how to make our prototype more widespread. Along with advances in technology, people now share a sense of crisis that oil will become depleted and this has also helped promote our cause.

Q2: When Ellica was first developed, there was criticism that a car without an engine is not a car, but I think it is superb. On other hand, history shows that wonderful things do not always become de facto standards. Currently, China is also developing an electric car. What does Japan need to do to create the electric car that will become the world's de facto standard?

Shimizu: Perhaps I am being irreverent, but I think technology will move in the direction I foresee it. Since our press conference announcing the establishment of SIM-Drive on August 24th, I have met with 30 domestic companies and 10 foreign companies. We have no intentions to operate only domestically. In a world where 90 percent cannot drive a car even if they want to, I see an opportunity for growth. I would very much like to work with Chinese companies.

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