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Cover:
 At RTRI, a new test facility to analyze the mechanism of micro-pressure waves is under construction. A model train runs through the model tunnel at 400 km/h and generates micro-pressure waves.

Over the last decade, the world’s circumstances concerning transport industries have greatly changed with emerging, low-cost air carriers, spreading ride-share services and collapsing fares in long-distance bus services. Furthermore, we will have to expect that growing use of autonomous driving options will change the world’s transport scene more drastically. In order to improve competitiveness of railways over other transport modes and increase their share in the transportation market, we have to provide customers with transport services producing higher customer satisfaction while reducing environment impacts and energy costs.

This issue of *Ascent* features an overview of some of the new fronts RTRI has been pursuing with the goal of contributing to further speed increases and improving customer experience. The particular focus of this issue is on research efforts carried out to realize improved ride comfort, lower energy consumption, and reduced impact on wayside environment, all of which are essential factors for further speed increases.

This issue also presents an article on the current status of high-speed railways in the UK by Professor Roderick Smith at the Imperial College, London.

If the articles contained in this issue of the *Ascent* provide assistance to our readers who are involved with railways and contribute to the development of railways around the world, I could not be happier.

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