

Looking Back on WCRR 2019

At WCRR 2019, which was held in Tokyo from October 28 to November 1, 2019, I feel that very productive discussions took place and many participants were able to share their expertise. At this congress, three Plenary Sessions featured panel discussions by executives of railway-related organizations around the world, addressing the congress theme of “Railway Research to Enhance the Customer Experience.” The panelists representing the positions of railway operators, railway suppliers, and railway research institutes provided important perspectives concerning the direction in which the railway industry should proceed and what we should do to create the railways of the future, and we were able to share these views with many railway-related participants from around the world.

This congress was the first time WCRR held Organized Sessions that were organized and chaired by invited experts of various fields with the aim of encouraging active and in-depth discussions on research themes that are attracting worldwide attention. Since it was the very first attempt to include sessions of this format in the WCRR program, we were not completely confident at first about whether these sessions would be successfully run. However, thanks to the chairpersons who organized them, the Organized Sessions were able to provide opportunities for truly lively exchange of ideas. In particular, the sessions on autonomous trains and on-board monitoring had so many participants that I was able to confirm that these fields are focal points of current railway research. In addition, the congress set up sessions on cross-cutting topics such as horizon scanning, innovation process, and global certification; I believe we were able to have a closer look at the issues that the railway sector should address and from a different perspective than in the conventional vertically divided sessions on respective technical fields. I am very grateful to the chairpersons for their contribution to running



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these sessions and to the members of WCRR Organizing and Executive Committees for recommending such outstanding session-organizing chairpersons.

My overall impression of the congress is that the railway sector already shares the perception that digitalization is an inevitable issue for railways; now, we are in the phase where we should concretely examine how to implement and develop digitalization in the actual daily operation of the railways. The main theme of this congress was determined through intense discussions at the WCRR Organizing and Executive Committee meetings. Many ideas have come and gone and the word “digitalization” was among the keywords discussed. As the word “digital” has broad implications and some doubts were raised regarding the validity of highlighting only “digitalization” in the wide-ranging scope of railway research, a decision was made not to include this word in the congress theme. Nevertheless, this congress resulted in a good opportunity to demonstrate the significance and tremendous impact of digitalization to the railways.

Finally, I would like to express my gratitude for the great support of our congress by our generous sponsors, exhibitors, and everyone who came to attend this congress from all over the world.