

Shimanami coastal highway a balanced maritime cluster



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Helping to support the Maritime City of Onomichi Promotion Council in conjunction with the City of Onomichi itself is the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport & Tourism's (MLIT) Chugoku District Transport Bureau. Deputy Director General Yasuhisa Mitani believes that 'the Shimanami Coastal Highway is a balanced maritime cluster,' referring to Onomichi, along with neighbors Fukuyama and Mihara and Imabari on the opposite shore, and expressed hopefulness with regard to Onomichi being able to do its part.

Kaiji Press: International competition is fierce in the shipbuilding industry. How do you plan on overcoming this?

Yasuhisa Mitani: The MLIT put together a plan entitled, 'A Comprehensive Newbuilding Policy – How to Remain a Top Shipbuilding Nation' in July 2011.

In that plan, the section entitled 'Boosting Order Volumes' states that it is necessary for the entire maritime industry to put our heads together and come up with various methods, while taking into consideration international environmental regulations. Japan's shipbuilding industry excels in the area of energy-saving technology, so by focusing on and improving in that area, we should be able to boost order volumes and differentiate ourselves.

The section entitled 'Developing New Markets and Businesses' talks about the technological development of offshore renewable energy, particularly the offshore wind farm category. These are floating structures, meaning the shipbuilding industry has a large role to play. The MLIT also formulated technical standards for floating offshore

wind power generation in April 2012. Moving forward, it will come up with safety guidelines, which will put Japan in the lead in terms of international standardization of floating offshore wind power generation facilities.

'Promoting Reorganization of the Industry' discusses the anticipated improvement in competitiveness sparked by the spinoff of Japan Marine United, created by a merger between IHI Marine United and Universal Shipbuilding.

KP: What are your thoughts on the Maritime City of Onomichi?

Mitani: The shipbuilding industry is an important core industry that makes up approximately 30% of the production value of the entire manufacturing industry located in Onomichi. It is an industry with many, many supporting industries that will spur production activity for all industries, including those located in areas surrounding Onomichi. The competitiveness of its shipbuilding and marine equipment industries will need to be boosted in the future in order to maintain and develop them into industries that can support continued economic development of the city. The City of Onomichi is also making active efforts to this end, including drawing up a Shipbuilding Industry Promotion Vision of Onomichi City. There are very few examples of this sort of thing in other regions. The Chugoku District Transport Bureau will provide as much support as it can by cooperating with the City of Onomichi, as well as other relevant groups and business operators.

KP: What is the importance of the Maritime City of Onomichi?

Mitani: Onomichi has historically blazed the path of development for the shipbuilding industry in the Seto Inland Sea region, and has put together a balanced maritime cluster of virtually all maritime industries, including not only the shipbuilding and marine equipment industries, but also the shipping industry, education and human resources training institutions, ship classification societies, and government organizations. In terms of the cluster's accomplishments, there are numerous achievements and unique frameworks produced by Onomichi.

For example, the Innoshima Technical Center has been recognized as the 'Innoshima Model of Human Resources Training'. The Onomichi Marine Institute's Japan Marine Technical School has also begun Japan's first completely privatized Class 6 Licensed Officer training program. Another of the Onomichi area's innovations is the Setouchi Cycle-Cruise PASS, a program aimed at promoting cruise ships and is seeing a significant increase in users.

KP: What are your hopes for the Maritime City of Onomichi?

Mitani: As a maritime city representative of Japan, I hope that the public and private

sectors continue to work together and make active efforts in all areas to create a hub city for shipbuilding culture, as well as a sustainable and competitive shipbuilding cluster core hub.

I want Onomichi to go forth with a spirit that should be a model for the whole nation as it searches for solutions to the challenges it will face, all while keeping a wide perspective that includes not only Onomichi, but also its two neighbors, Fukuyama and Mihara, Imabari on the opposite shore, and even the entire Seto Inland Sea and all of Japan. There is still a lot of growing room for this partnership. It would be great if academic, industrial, and government officials could meet regularly and create a space where they can freely exchange opinions and information on areas such as new technologies and new markets. The keyword here is 'partnership'.

The Promotion Vision points out the necessity of giving small and midsize corporations the opportunity to acquire information pertaining to various systems of research and development. The Chugoku District Transport Bureau will make efforts to have such information available.