

COMMENTS ON PAPERS PRESENTED IN SESSION 1 - GRAND DESIGN FOR FUTURE DEVELOPMENT IN NORTHEAST ASIA, by Kenji Sumida

The transportation system in the United States or in Hawaii are not directly relevant to this discussion of a Grand Design for collaborative development in Northeast Asia. However, I would like to offer a couple of comments about our experience in infrastructure planning that might apply to Northeast Asia.

1. Dr. Noda described how Japan's development policy has changed. He explained that one pillar of Japan's policy reform is decentralization, whereby local and prefectural levels are encouraged to play a more active role in planning and decisions on development and utilization of resources. We have found this participatory process to be crucial in any planning process. Participation by those most affected at the local level would lead to wider public acceptance of plans and decisions, and would facilitate the implementation of those decisions.

The question is: how can this grassroots participatory approach be applied in a formulating a grand design that seeks to integrate development planning in the vast and diverse Northeast Asia region that encompasses six countries in varying stages of development? This is a major challenge for us all.

2. All three of our distinguished speakers have discussed the importance of an integrated regional transportation and distribution system, and described existing and planned transportation projects in China, Korea and Japan. A well designed transportation system can stimulate economic activity including trade, manufacturing and tourism, particularly for this developing region.

Because of the long lead time required to design, finance and construct transportation infrastructure, and because of continued development of transportation technology, flexibility must be incorporated in the grand design for a regional transportation and distribution system. Projections of traffic volume and flow in the United States have usually been underestimated, particularly in still developing areas, and as a result, costly infrastructure are often outmoded even before construction is completed. I am certain this will be true in Northeast Asia because of the dynamic growth anticipated in this region. It will therefore be important to include provisions for expansion or even re-routing in any future planning for an integrated transportation system in Northeast Asia.

In summary, all three presenters have shown how their respective countries' projects and systems can be part of a larger regional system that encompasses the six countries of Northeast Asia. However, it is clear that today, full economic integration in Northeast Asia is still a dream or vision that probably lies beyond the normal planning horizon. But as with any dream, one must take a small but bold step forward to reach toward that dream. The Northeast Asia Economic Forum's Grand Design, spearheaded by Japan's National Institute for Research Advancement (NIRA), may well represent that first, bold step.