



A group of kindergarten children watch a “Slocal” self-driving service demonstration

New Transport System for Aging Communities

A mobility service demonstration experiment is under way in Kozoji New Town in Kasugai City, Aichi Prefecture, to address the issue of daily transport for the elderly population.

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“NEW Towns,” which were built across Japan in the post-war period of rapid urbanization, are connected to neighboring cities by rail and bus services, and support the lives of people working in the cities as commuter towns. However, after more than half a century, sustaining the transportation networks in commuter towns has become a challenge as their population declines due to aging and as more people choose to live in the cities.

First developed in 1968, Kozoji New Town is in Kasugai on the outskirts of the city of Nagoya, one

of the largest cities in Japan (population: approximately 2.3 million as of 2020). Kasugai is an adjacent northeastern suburb of Nagoya, and Kozoji New Town, covering approximately 700 hectares, is in the eastern hills of Kasugai. Kozoji New Town has developed as a commuter community with easy access to Nagoya Station, which can be reached from Kozoji Station in less than 30 minutes by the fastest train.

Today, the town’s population is 20% lower than its peak of approximately 52,000 and is continuing to age. As its population shrinks,

the number of bus services, a primary public transport system used within the area, has been dwindling.

As the town is situated on a wide stretch of hills, local residents find it difficult to use the bus service, as they have to walk up and down those hills to get to and from a bus stop. It is therefore common for people to use their cars whenever they go shopping or see a doctor.

Tsuda Tetsuhiro, Supervisor of the Kasugai City Government’s Planning Administration Section, says, “As the population



Kozoji New Town, Kasugai City, Aichi Prefecture
All photos: Courtesy of Kasugai City

ages further, more people will return their driving licenses meaning fewer people will have access to cars. How to ensure a daily means of transport for residents is becoming an increasingly important issue.”

To address this issue, Kasugai City is undertaking a range of projects for Kozoji New Town in collaboration with Nagoya University and its private sector stakeholders.



Smartphone screenshots of the Kozoji Outing Support App

In May 2019, the city’s initiatives were selected as a pioneering model project of the Smart City Model Project by the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism (MLIT). In June of the same year, the city was selected as a pilot area for the Smart Mobility Challenge Project, which is jointly promoted by MLIT and the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry.

The city’s initiatives were selected as Society 5.0-type projects to receive a Regional Revitalization Promotion Grant by the Cabinet Office in March 2020. One

of these initiatives is a demonstration experiment for mobility services using self-driving vehicles.

In collaboration with Nagoya University, Kasugai City is undertaking demonstration experiments introducing the “Slocal” self-driving service, a slow-moving electric vehicle designed for the elderly in the district of Ishiodai, which has a larger elderly population living in detached houses than other areas of Kasugai.

Users of the service can hop on and off at some 130 spots within a one square kilometer area, taking a trip from somewhere near their homes to their destinations by making a reservation on the phone. The vehicle is a refurbished golf cart and two helpers are on board just in case the user has trouble with driving.

To date, demonstration experiments have been performed on some limited occasions and the city has received positive comments from the citizens, such as, “The vehicle was comfortable and the service was both easy to use and affordable because it was free.”

For the demonstration experiment implemented from February to March this year, the city used a new eight-seat bus offering improved safety and comfort. Efforts are under way to allocate the roles and responsibilities of city administrators and local citizens using the service in the event of an accident ahead of full launch of the service in April 2022.

In some areas of Kozoji New



Demonstration of the AI on-demand shared taxi

Town, the city is undertaking demonstration experiments including an AI on-demand shared taxi service and the Mobility-as-a-Service (MaaS) Kozoji Outing Support App.

People have commented that the shared taxi service was affordable and easy to use without hesitation.

The Kozoji Outing Support App has been developed jointly by leading cellphone operator KDDI, Nagoya University and Kasugai City with the goal of helping users to navigate all of the transport services within an area.

Users of the loop-line bus or shared taxi within Kozoji New Town that use this app may be eligible for discounts on fares or even on shopping or dining at local stores and restaurants sponsoring the transport service. As of this January, there have been more than 400 downloads of the app.

The goal of Kasugai City is to maintain the vibrancy of the whole town, while trying to improve the mobility convenience specific to regional requirements. Expectations are high for the new transport systems under the range of initiatives currently under way. 