City of Utrecht

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Staying on the move in Japan:

Delivering high-quality mobility for seniors in low-density areas when driving is no longer an option and public transport isn't enough

📌 **Wednesday, 26 November 2025**

⏱️ **9:00 - 10:30**

SESSION 1G

Thinking ahead: Innovative steps forward in Small and Medium-Sized Cities

SPEAKER

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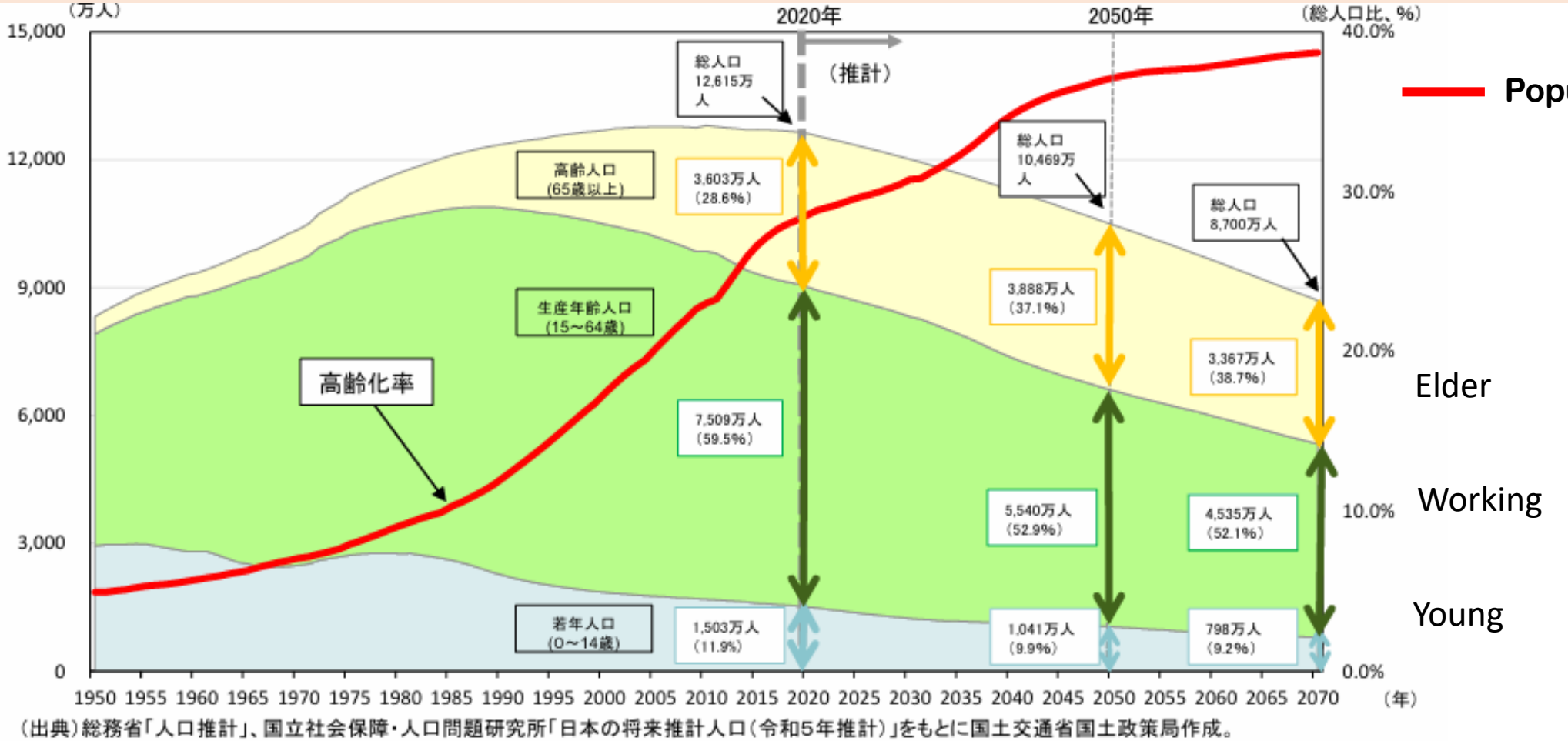
Aging trend in Japan

- Japan's population is ageing faster than that of any other developed country.
- While this may be less evident in large metropolises such as Tokyo, small and medium-sized cities and rural areas face a much harder reality.
- A significant portion of residents are over 65, and ensuring everyday mobility to support seniors' daily lives and needs has become a serious challenge.

Population decrease and aging trend in Japan



（出典）総務省「人口推計」、国立社会保障・人口問題研究所「日本の将来推計人口（令和5年推計）」をもとに国土交通省国土政策局作成。

- The total population is decreasing rapidly (10 times faster than in EU countries).
- Aging is also rapidly progressing.

Population decrease in Japan

- **The population decrease is faster in remote areas and in smaller communities.**

地域別人口の将来の姿（2050年推計）

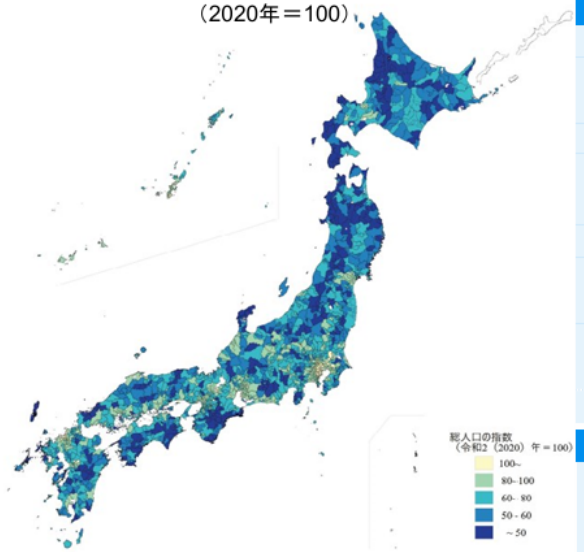
国土交通省

資料④

○ 2020年比で東京都を除く46道府県で人口減少。11県では30%以上減少。
約2割の市区町村では人口が半数未満に。
○ 高齢化率(※)は全国で37.1%（2020年：28.6%）となり、25道県では40%を超える。

（※）高齢化率とは総人口に占める65歳以上人口割合を示す。

2050年の総人口の姿
（2020年＝100）



各圏域別総人口の姿

	2020年	2050年	増減率
北海道	522万人	382万人	▲26.8%
東北圏	861万人	589万人	▲31.6%
首都圏	4,446万人	4,113万人	▲7.5%
（うち東京都）	（1,405万人）	（1,440万人）	(+2.5%)
北陸圏	514万人	376万人	▲26.8%
中部圏	1,697万人	1,390万人	▲18.1%
近畿圏	2,054万人	1,650万人	▲19.7%
中国圏	725万人	557万人	▲23.2%
四国圏	370万人	260万人	▲29.7%
九州圏	1,278万人	1,013万人	▲20.7%
沖縄県	147万人	139万人	▲5.4%
国内総人口	12,615万人	10,469万人	▲17.0%

2050年に人口が30%以上減少する県 ※()は減少率

秋田県（▲42%）、青森県（▲39%）、岩手県（▲35%）、
高知県（▲35%）、長崎県（▲34%）、山形県（▲33%）、
徳島県（▲33%）、福島県（▲32%）、和歌山県（▲32%）、
山口県（▲31%）、新潟県（▲31%）

（出典）国立社会保障・人口問題研究所「日本の地域別将来人口推計（令和5（2023）年推計）」より作成。

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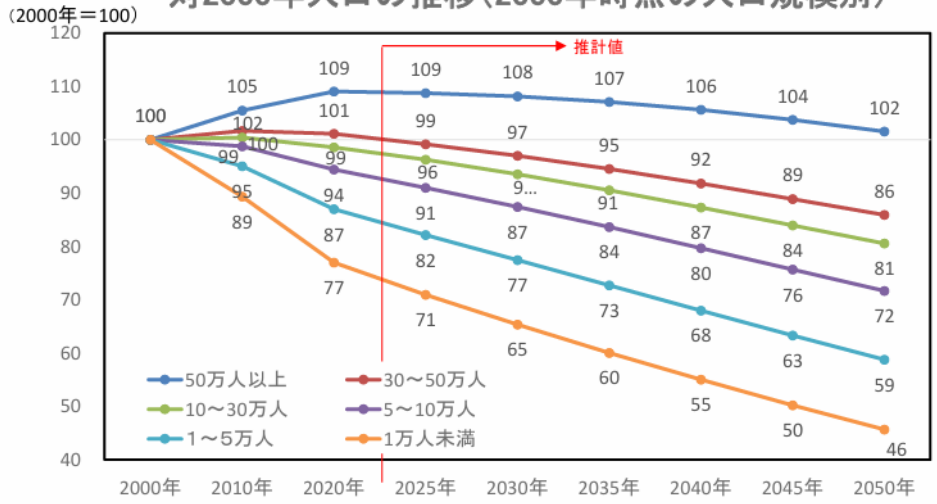
市区町村人口規模別（2000年時点）の人口の推移

国土交通省

資料⑤

○2000年時点の市区町村人口規模別の将来人口推計をみると、人口規模の小さい自治体ほど人口減少に直面。
○5万人未満の小規模自治体では、直近20年ですでに人口減少が進み、2050年には2000年に比して半減すると見込まれる。
○5万人以上30万人未満の中規模自治体においても、今後は人口減少リスクがより顕在化する。

対2000年人口の推移（2000年時点の人口規模別）



（出典）1. 国立社会保障・人口問題研究所（社人研）「日本の地域別将来推計人口（令和5（2023）年推計）」、総務省「国勢調査」より作成。2020年までは国勢調査、2025年以降が推計値。
2. 自治体数は、東京特別区は1つとして、福島県の一部の市町村（いわき市、相馬市、南相馬市、広野町、楢葉町、富岡町、川内村、大熊町、双葉町、浪江町、葛尾村、新地町、飯舘村）は、社人研の人口推計の区分に準じて1つの地域（浜通り地域）として集計している、合計は1707。

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- **Income differentials are believed to be a main reason for population migration to Tokyo.**

Mobility lock-in

- As people age, their physical abilities decline, making driving difficult and eventually impossible.
- At the same time, these areas are heavily car-dependent, and low population density makes traditional public transport hard to sustain and provide.
- With most Japanese public transport services operated by private companies that have been forced to cease operations, some seniors experience reduced mobility.
- In the most extreme cases, they may even face ‘mobility lock-in’, meaning that they can no longer leave their homes.
- This can seriously affect to social isolation and affect seniors’ quality of life.

Challenges tackled by SIP (aided by Japanese government)

- To tackle these challenges, Japan is turning to a mix of traditional methods with innovative approaches.
- One such response is the ‘Smart Mobility Platform Development’ program, part of a Cabinet-level initiative called the Strategic Innovation Program (SIP).
- SIP aims to eliminate mobility divides, and by redesigning mobility services and integrating digital technology, the program is giving seniors the freedom to stay active and connected.
- Here are two inspiring examples.

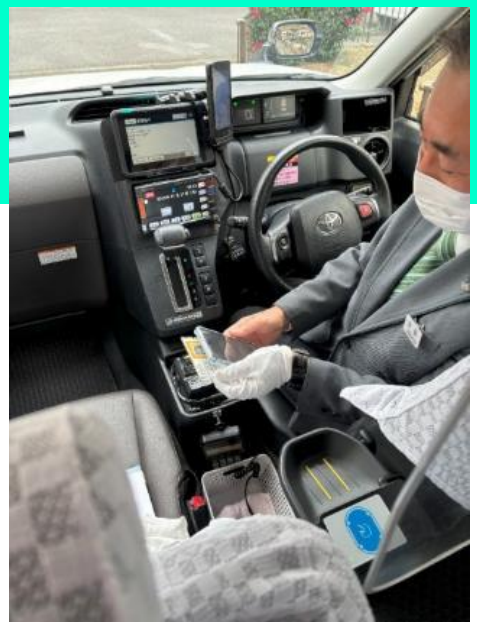
Case 1:

Nishio City, Aichi Prefecture

Affordable taxi service with convenient smart payment in Nishio City, Aichi Prefecture

Nishio: a typical small city with poor public transport

- Nishio, Aichi Prefecture, is a typical small, low-density city with a population of around 160,000.
- After private bus operators withdrew services, the local government began running community buses at public expense.
- To improve access to bus stops and railway stations along these routes, the city also launched a low-cost taxi service.



Complex procedure tackled by SIP

- However, the service faced challenges: complex registration and fare payment procedures, along with an inefficient dispatch system, hampered its growth and usability.

- To address these issues, members of the Nagoya University project team, which is involved in our SIP activities, worked closely with the community, introducing a more efficient dispatch system and QR code payment options.

Improvement and expansion

- These improvements simplified fare payment for users, streamlined operations for drivers, and increased dispatch efficiency.
- As a result, the number of users skyrocketed, and local residents began taking trips more frequently, alleviating mobility challenges.
- Encouraged by these outcomes, the local government is now exploring the expansion of this approach to other areas and different types of services.
- The operator has also become more cooperative, demonstrating how technology can strengthen collaboration between service providers and municipal authorities.

Case 2:

Niyodogawa Town, Kochi Prefecture

‘Sakura’ car,
a community-shared
electric vehicle service in use
in Niyodogawa town,
Kochi Prefecture

Remote small community with integration of frailty prevention activities and mobility service

- Niyodogawa is a small, remote and aging community of 4,000 residents and with high population aging ratio(almost 60%), nestled in the mountains of Kochi Prefecture.

- For several years, a team from the Japan Automobile Research Institute has collaborated with the elderly community to promote frailty prevention.

- A local non-profit organization that had been running frailty prevention activities joined the effort, helping ensure that many elderly residents could access the electric vehicle service and, by default, their activities.

EV shared car to meet seniors' needs

- As part of this initiative, the team introduced a community-shared electric vehicle service, the 'Sakura' car, and held discussions with local public transport planners to better meet seniors' needs.

- This combination of health and mobility created new and enjoyable opportunities for seniors to go out, promoting both physical activity and social engagement.

- Surprisingly, many participants have come back from frailty and shoulder important roles in their activities.

SIP’s solution to mobility lock-in cases

- These examples demonstrate how small and medium-sized towns, as well as rural communities, can maintain sustainable mobility despite ageing populations and the disappearance of private transport services.

- Central to this effort is SIP’s 'mobility service redesign', which leverages all available mobility resources—including conventional buses, taxis, car-sharing, and shuttle vehicles—enhanced by digital technology.

- Collaboration between government agencies, residents, and businesses ensures that these solutions are practical, sustainable, and adaptable to local needs.

Integrated and strengthened policy

- Since 2020, Japan's transport policies have supported various reforms in response to population decline, an ageing society, and dwindling private-sector passenger transport services in small and medium-sized, low-density cities.
- SIP has contributed by providing guidance, expertise, and innovative strategies, helping communities implement effective mobility solutions.
- The results have been encouraging:
  - Seniors regain independence, communities remain connected, and mobility services are now integrated with healthy promotion efforts.
  - Combining these previously separate goals not only improves the physical and mental well-being of elderly residents, but also strengthens regional care policies, particularly in areas with limited medical resources.
  - Niyodogawa is now subsidized by MLIT(Ministry of Land ,Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism) as a leading community to review legal / administratative framework and budget allocation for remote and rural community revitalization program).

Promising future

- Japan's small towns are proving that, with creativity, technology, and cross-sector collaboration,

  mobility challenges do not have to lead to isolation.

- Instead, they can become an opportunity for innovation, community building, and a better quality of life for all.

Thank you for your attention!

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