

The History of Seibu in Photos (Part 1)

I The Early Days of Seibu Railway (1892–1969)

Part 1

Dawn of a New Age of Railways Four Railway Companies Operate in the Musashino Region

The Meiji Era was a time when Japanese looked up toward the mountains and “clouds at the top of the hill” beyond as they strove to build a new country. They pinned their hopes for the future on a product of a civilization originating in Europe railways. As infrastructure that dramatically improved the efficiency of transportation of people and goods, railways were essential for modernization.

It is well known that the history of Japan’s railways began in 1872, when the first state-run railway line opened between Shinbashi and Yokohama. Tracks were being laid in Osaka at the same time as the Tokyo–Yokohama line and the Osaka–Kobe line opened in 1874. Amid growing calls for railway construction using private-sector capital, private companies began applying for licenses around the country, resulting in a private-sector railway boom.

The Musashino region in western Tokyo that includes southern Saitama Prefecture was especially enthusiastic about railway construction and many tracks were built in this area in the late 19th century and early 20th century. Starting with the Kōbu Railway, which opened in 1889, four railway companies were founded, including the Kawagoe Railway in 1892, the Tama Railway in 1910, and the Musashino Railway in 1912. These four companies were the main players of the early days of Japan’s railways in the Musashino region.

History of Musashino Railway and Kawagoe Railway —two tracks forming the origins of Seibu Railway

Seibu Railway has set May 7 as the date to mark anniversaries of its founding. Musashino Railway was also founded on May 7, in 1912, which can be considered the starting point of the history of Seibu Railway.

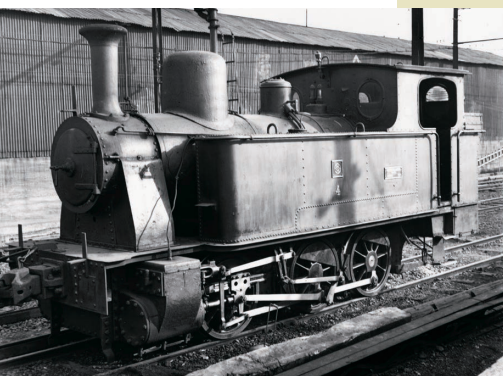
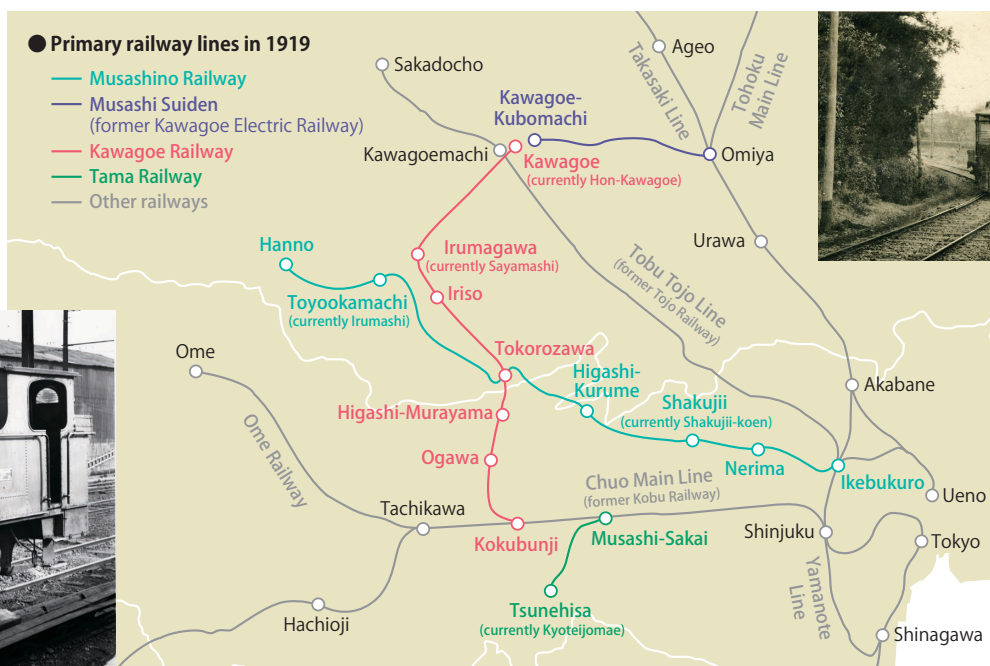
An explanation is needed here, however. Of the lines operated by the present-day Seibu Railway, the oldest is the Kokubunji to Kawagoe (currently Hon-Kawagoe) line, which opened in 1895 as Kawagoe Railway. Thus the two strands of Seibu Railway’s history are Musashino Railway and Kawagoe Railway, which eventually came together and became the Seibu Railway of today.

Kawagoe Railway was founded in 1892. Not having a direct service to Tokyo, the company faced a management crisis in the early 20th century and entered into an absorption-type merger with an electric power company in 1920. In the reorganization of the electric power industry that followed, the company underwent several changes, such as being owned by another power company and absorbing other railway lines, and became the former Seibu Railway (a different company from today’s Seibu Railway) in 1922. This company opened a line between Takadanobaba and Higashi-Murayama in 1927, which is the foundation of today’s Shinjuku Line.

Right graphic: The main rail routes of western Tokyo/southern Saitama Prefecture in the early 20th century. The Musashino and Tojo (currently the Tobu Tojo Line) railway lines linking central Tokyo with suburban areas have opened. The photo on the right shows Kawagoe Electric Railway, which linked Kawagoe and Omiya. The bottom photo is Musashino Railway’s no. 4 locomotive.

● Primary railway lines in 1919

- Musashino Railway
- Musashi Suiden (former Kawagoe Electric Railway)
- Kawagoe Railway
- Tama Railway
- Other railways



Kawagoe Railway's Kawagoe Station. The first tracks laid in Kawagoe were those laid in 1895 for Kōbu Railway (currently the JR Chūō Main Line) connecting Kawagoe and Kokubunji.

Rivalry spurs railway network construction; owner/chief executive orchestrates merger

To recap, the history of Musashino Railway began in 1912. The Ikebukuro–Hanno Line opened three years later. It proved profitable, attracting many passengers from both central Tokyo and suburban areas. This is the original Seibu Ikebukuro Line.

From the early to mid-20th century, two major railways serviced the Musashino region. They were the former Seibu Railway and Musashino Railway. The former Seibu Railway absorbed Seibu Kido (a tram line on Ōme Highway) and opened the Murayama Line, while Musashino Railway increased its transportation capacity by double-tracking and electrifying its routes.

In 1929, the Ikebukuro Line was extended from Hanno to Agano, enabling the transport of tourists and building materials. As rivals, the two companies engaged in healthy competition to build an extensive rail network in northwest Tokyo.

The two railways were well-matched in the 1920s and early 1930s, but Musashino Railway surged ahead after 1939, when the Tokyo City Streetcar (currently the Toei Streetcar) between Ikebukuro and Gōkokuji opened, turning Ikebukuro into a major transport hub and sharply increasing the number of Ikebukuro Line passengers as a result.

Shortly after the end of World War II in September, 1945, the two main railways of the Musashino region in the late 19th and early 20th centuries reached a turning point. Musashino Railway absorbed the former Seibu Railway to



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form the foundation of today's Seibu Railway. Seibu Group founder Yasujiro Tsutsumi scripted and directed one of the greatest dramas in the history of Japan's railways.

Seibu Railway moves with the times from post war chaos to a period of high economic growth

While the former Seibu Railway was competing with Musashino Railway, Yasujiro Tsutsumi was running a real estate company called Hakone Tochi, developing resorts in Karuizawa and Hakone and having success with housing development projects in suburban Tokyo. Aware as a housing developer of the importance of railway infrastructure, Tsutsumi decided to go into the railway business himself and established Tamako Railway in 1928.

The entry of newcomer Tamako Railway in a market dominated by the former Seibu Railway and Musashino Railway enabled Tsutsumi to increase his presence in the railway business. He acquired the management rights to Musashino Railway and went ahead with a merger with Tamako Railway. A few years later he was appointed president of the former Seibu Railway. Having become the owner of both major railways in a short period of time, Tsutsumi proceeded to merge the two companies.

After making a fresh start in 1945 following the end of World War II, Seibu Railway's first priority was to boost passenger capacity and pioneer tourist services. The company extended routes and built new tracks in the years of rapid economic growth that followed, steadily expanding in scale.

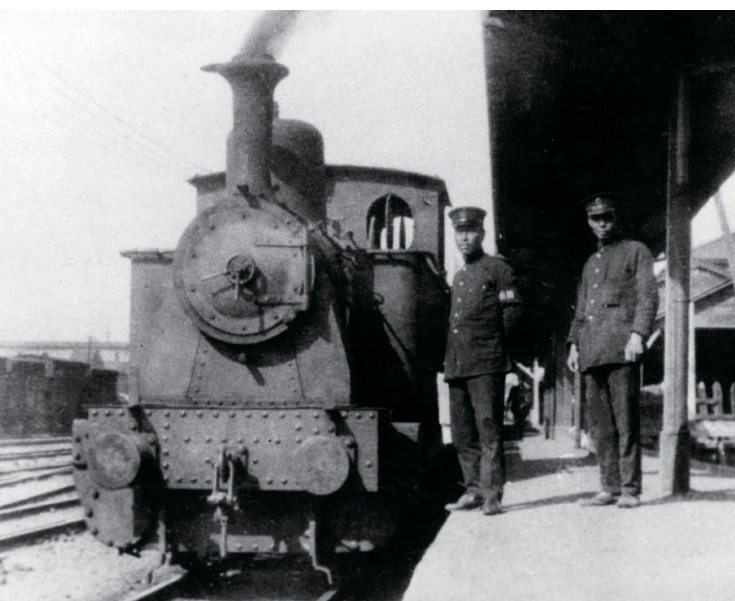
Seibu Railway was also well known for rolling stock development. Its rail cars were often painted in unusual, striking colors. For example, its warm gray and deep raspberry rail cars were called Akaden ("red train") and are forever imprinted in the memories of railway geeks. The 5000 series Red Arrow made its debut in 1969 as Seibu's first limited express train.

This history of Seibu Railway can be summed up as two separate tracks joining forces to become a great river. The following chapters will tell the stories of each historical period in more detail.

II Initial Period of Seibu Group Real Estate Development

III Business Expansion and Renewal Period

IV The Rebuilding Period



Musashino Railway's Ikebukuro Station. Although a steam locomotive can be seen, the railway was one of the first to be electrified, running electric trains between Ikebukuro and Tokorozawa from 1922.