The History of Seibu in Photos (Part 1) I The Early Days of Seibu Railway (1892–1969)

Part 5

Post War, Line Names That Continue Today Fell in Place with the Extension of the Line Between Takadanobaba and Seibu-Shinjuku

F ollowing the war, Japan's nation-building experienced a change in direction nearly as drastic as that which accompanied the Meiji Restoration. What pulled the country through reconstruction and subsequent growth was, of course, the railroads. Much countryside remained along Seibu Railway's lines, with war-related damage minimal compared to Tokyo's urban center and eastern regions, and there was thought to be ample room for development. As the post war chaos settled, Seibu Railway embarked on a more aggressive approach.

While damage was minor, stations near terminals were affected, and like many other railways, both railcars and facilities suffered from inadequate maintenance. As waves of housing encroached on the railway lines and railways transported more customers out buying provisions, some private railways for a time resorted to running wooden trains or trains that had been damaged in the war or in accidents, which they took over from the national railway. As the number of people moving from urban Tokyo to regions along its lines, Seibu Railway was said to have taken on a particularly large number of these railcars.

Seibu-Shinjuku Station, originally intended as a temporary measure to facilitate through service to JNR's Shinjuku Station

In 1952, an epoch-making event occurred that is essential in telling the history of today's Seibu Railway: The extension of the line between Takadanobaba and Nishi-Shinjuku. At the time, Takadanobaba was just a mid-scale station on the Yamanote Line in terms of ridership, and the shopping arcade fronting the station saw less than adequate growth. However, as can be seen from the station's structure, this was never considered a permanent terminal. With the platform adjacent to the east side of the Yamanote Line, both inbound and outbound trains have to make a major detour under the Yamanote Line tracks. It is easy to imagine that access would have been much simpler if the platform had been placed to the west of the Yamanote Line. That was not done because, at the time, the builders envisioned a connection to central Tokyo.

The original plan was to extend the line from Takadanobaba toward Waseda, connecting to the municipal subway and its link to central Tokyo. Because that route was ultimately never realized, Takadanobaba was used as a terminal station, followed by the opening of the section between Takadanobaba and Seibu-Shinjuku. As of 1948, Seibu Railway had obtained a license through to JNR Shinjuku Station, so with future through service to JNR Shinjuku Station's east entrance, the station to the west of Kabukicho was intended to be temporary. While for various reasons that did not happen, it was later remodeled to include a hotel and shopping arcade, becoming the Seibu Shinjuku Building that remains today.

Until the extension to Seibu-Shinjuku Station, this line was known as the Murayama Line. With the opening of the extension, the name was reconsidered, with the section between Seibu-Shinjuku and Hon-Kawagoe called the Shinjuku Line and the section between Ikebukuro and Agano called the Ikebukuro Line.

Aggressive tourism development begun before the war continued during the post war reconstruction period

An aggressive approach to tourism development carried on after the war, with the first effort being the development of the Sayama Hills region encompassing Lake Tama and Lake



The photo at upper left shows the Otogi Train which began service between the Tamako Hotel and Kamientei in 1950. The line was extended to UNESCO Village the following year. In the top center photo is Seibu-Shinjuku Station around the time it opened. The bottom center photo shows the first private railway 10-car train, introduced to meet the increase in commuter transport during Japan's high economic growth period. At bottom right is the 5000 series limited express Red Arrow, which began operation with the opening of the Seibu Chichibu Line.



Sayama. In 1947, Seibu Railway acquired this tract of land, 170,000 *tsubo* (approximately 562,000 m²), and began construction of Higashi-Murayama Bunka-en. This largescale park development included, among other facilities, a wedding hall, hot springs, camp site, concert hall, dance hall, botanical garden, zoo, and a ranch, and was essentially an extension of the large-scale amusement park concept Hakone Tochi had come up with before the war. The park opened in 1950, and when UNESCO Village opened the following year, the name was changed to Seibuen.

Reorganization of the railway network in this district also progressed, with a new line starting from midway on the Chosuichi Line (between Higashi-Murayama and Murayama-chosuichi) that the former Seibu Railway had built before the war, and ending at Seibuen. At the same time, the Otogi Train connecting the Tamako Hotel and UNESCO Village began operation, and by 1952, this developed into the Yamaguchi Line. Taking on such a large-scale tourism development project prior to the period of high economic growth must have required bold management judgement. This made full use of Yasujiro Tsutsumi's foresight, and built a foundation for dramatic growth as Japan entered a period of high economic growth.

The start of that growth period saw preparation of residential property in northwestern Tokyo proceed at a feverish pitch. Characteristic of residential land development during this period were the housing estates built by the Japan Housing Corporation, Metropolitan Tokyo and the Tokyo Metropolitan Housing Supply Corporation. Large-scale housing complexes also appeared along Seibu Railway lines, and with the opening of the Hibarigaoka housing estate in 1959, Tanashimachi Station, the closest station, was renamed Hibarigaoka Station.

With expanded lines, station construction and the introduction of new railcars, aggressive management carries Seibu through the period of high economic growth To respond to growing demand for transport, Seibu worked to double-track its lines on the facilities side, while also moving to extend the length of its trains. On the Ikebukuro Line, operation of six-car trains began in 1958, and in 1961, eight-car express operations began between Ikebukuro and Tokorozawa. Further, in 1963, operation began of a 10-car express train, the first by a private railway. At the same time, station facilities evolved significantly, and were equipped to support longer trains operating at a greater frequency.

Line expansion also progressed, with the Josui Line opening between Ogawa and Tamagawa in 1950; the name was changed to the Haijima Line with the addition of the Tamagawa-Josui-Haijima section in 1968. Development took place not just in Okutama but in Chichibu as well, with the line that had gone as far as Agano prior to the war extended to Chichibu, beginning operation as the Seibu Chichibu Line in 1969. In the Chichibu region, the Bushu Railway, established after the war, had also filed for a railway license, but in the licensing process it was discovered that the railway had bribed the then-Minster of Transport, an incident that featured prominently in the news of the time as the Bushu Railway Corruption Case. Bushu Railway's plans met their natural demise, but were also seen as evidence of the attention drawn to Chichibu's potential. The Seibu Chichibu Line was designed to facilitate both mining and tourism development, based on a concept for large-scale development equal to Hakone or Karuizawa.

With the opening of the Seibu Chichibu Line, Seibu Railway also began operating its first limited express train with a separate fee and all seats reserved. This marked the introduction of the 5000 series Red Arrow, marketed with the phrase "83 Minutes to Chichibu on Seibu's Limited Express." With a concept of "Fresh & Young," the service transformed the region into a familiar tourist spot by responding to both tourism and business needs with the first limited express train to bring Chichibu within commuting distance of central Tokyo. The Red Arrow became the symbol of a new chapter in the history of Seibu Railway.