

# A Message on the Fifth Anniversary of the JTTSB



Seiji Abe  
Chairman, Advisory Meeting for Duty Improvement of the JTTSB  
Professor, Kansai University

Herbert A. Simon, a political scientist and the winner of the 1978 Nobel Prize in Economics, came up with the “Bounded Rationality” concept to explain that there are boundaries in the rationality of the human being. According to Simon, because there are boundaries in the intelligent ability of the human being, he or she cannot foresee all unexpected situations in the future. (A. Simon, *Administrative Behavior*, Fourth Edition, S & S International, 1997.) Learning from problems and accidents which have actually occurred in the past in order to broaden the outlook and scope of understanding is useful in compensating for these human boundaries. In other words, we must learn from our failures. Herein lies the importance of accident investigation activities for the purpose of preventing a recurrence of similar accidents and incidents.

In modern society, the role of transport is decisively important. It may be considered to be a fundamental condition for the existence of modern society. Paul Virilio, a French cultural theorist, pinpointed two characteristics which decisively differentiate modern civilization from past civilizations. The first is “speed” and the second is “accidents” resulting from speed. (Paul Virilio, *L' accident originel*, Editions Galilée, 2005.) Speed and accidents are accompaniments to transport in today’s society, and it is the Japan Transport Safety Board that endeavors to reduce the number of accidents, which are a negative side of the convenience the speed, through accident investigations.

Incidentally, so that accident investigation by a third-party organization is fruitful and that its investigation results may be broadly accepted by society, conditions such as those mentioned below must be fulfilled. First of all, investigations must be carried out in a fair and impartial manner. Secondly, a professional high-level investigation must be conducted. Thirdly, even if an investigation report has a high level of technical content, its form and descriptive style must be easy to read and understand for those affected by the accident and the general public. Finally, the parties relevant to the cause of the accident and the investigative organization should not have the relationship of questioner and the questioned, but rather, they should have a relationship which, while being strained, enables both sides to work together to discover the causes of the accident.

In September 2009, the information disclosure incident involving a member of the former Aircraft and Railway Accidents Investigation Commission, the predecessor to the JTTSB, which took part in the investigation of the derailment accident on the Fukuchiyama Line of the West Japan Railway Company, came to light. This person allegedly leaked information about the progress of the investigation and a draft of the report before its release to parties relevant to the cause of the accident, thereby significantly damaging the impartiality, neutrality and reliability of the Commission as an accident investigation organization. The incident occurred when the JTTSB’s predecessor was in operation, but the JTTSB understood the case as a serious problem posing a question as to the nature of an accident investigation organization, and it tried to recover the confidence of the public which had been damaged by this incident by making efforts to reform.

Therefore, the JTSB started a review to improve its duties and a reform of the accident investigation system throughout its organization in FY2011.

When the Aircraft Accident Investigation Commission was reorganized as the Aircraft and Railway Accidents Investigation Commission in 2001, I made the comment below upon request from the press.

“Now, one small, red fish is in the tank. Will this small fish grow up to be a golden red carp in the future or will it end up as an ordinary goldfish? This latest move only means the addition of the railway division to the new investigation organization, and no evaluation can be made at the present time.”

Ten years have passed since then. The JTSB is growing strongly with continuous efforts made to reform its structure. I believe it may become a fine golden red carp in the not too distant future.

The National Transportation Safety Board of the United States is known internationally as an accident investigation organization which is similar to the JTSB. The NTSB marked its 40th anniversary in 2007. On that occasion, the then NTSB Chairman Mark V. Rosenker made the following comment in his commemorative message:

“I have often said that the NTSB is one of the best bargains in government. With fewer than 400 employees, the Safety Board is responsible for investigating more than two thousand transportation accidents a year. In our 40 years, our independent investigations have played an important part in improving the safety of every mode of transportation. As a result of the efforts of the Safety Board and other government agencies, manufacturers, operators and stakeholders, the United States enjoys a safe transportation system that is the envy of the world.”

The JTSB will mark the tenth anniversary of its establishment in 2018. I do hope that a similar commemorative message will be made on that occasion by the JTSB Chairman, with continuous efforts to be made for reforming JTSB organization and beefing up its accident investigation activities.