

Hokuriku Shinkansen Ready for Opening

The Takasaki-Nagano Section of the Hokuriku Shinkansen is due to open in this autumn, although the inauguration date is yet to be announced.

Engineering works were almost finished by December 1996 on the 42-km eastern half (Takasaki-Karuizawa), and a series of test runs started on the long and steep gradient (3.0%) near Karuizawa. Works on the 84-km western half (Karuizawa-Nagano) finished in March 1997 and technical inspection and test runs start in April. The line will serve as the main means of transport for people visiting the 1998 Winter Olympics in Nagano next February.



Newly-built E2 EMU on test run near Takasaki
(Japan Railway Construction Public Corporation)



Beautiful cable-stayed concrete bridge over Chikuma River near Ueda

(JRCP)



Hokuriku Shinkansen branches from existing Joetsu Shinkansen at this switching point 500-m north of Takasaki Station
(JRCP)

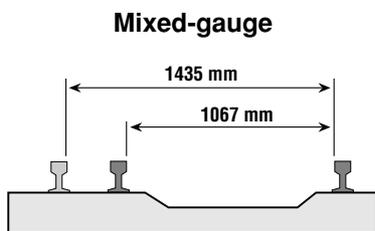
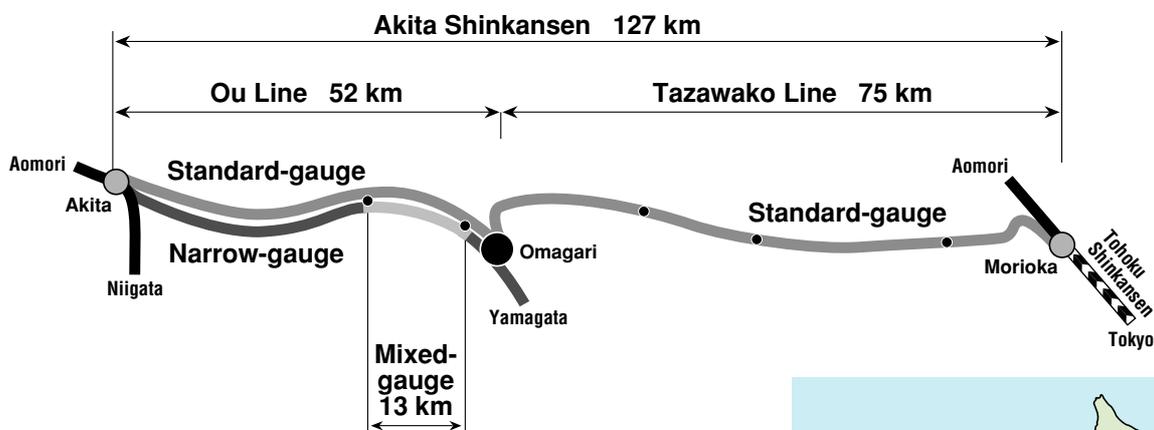


View of Nagano Station with new shinkansen platforms

(JR East)

Akita Shinkansen Opened 22 March

The Akita Shinkansen started commercial services on 22 March from Morioka to Akita (127 km). Among the 13 daily Tokyo-Akita services in each direction, three link both cities in less than four hours, and JR East hopes to take back passengers from airlines. The new shinkansen was built to 'mini-shinkansen' standards (see p. 13) by converting existing narrow-gauge tracks to standard gauge. The 75-km single-track Tazawako Line was completely rebuilt to standard gauge. Thirty-nine kilometers of the 52-km double-track Ou Line were rebuilt into parallel standard-gauge and narrow-gauge single tracks. The other 13 km was converted into one standard-gauge single track and one mixed-gauge single track, allowing shinkansen trains to pass each other. The maximum speed on the Akita Shinkansen is limited to 130 km/h, but journey time between Tokyo and Akita is cut by 40 minutes by eliminating the train change at Morioka Station and by raising the maximum speed on the Tohoku Shinkansen from 240 to 270 km/h. The new 5-car Series E3 EMU trainsets are built to a smaller loading-gauge, and run on the Tohoku Shinkansen coupled with 8-car Series E3 EMUs or 10-car Series 200 EMUs. The Tokyo-Akita direct trains are nicknamed *Komachi*, the name of a bright and beautiful poetess said to be have been born in Akita many centuries ago.



Laying mixed-gauge track

(JR East)



Mixed-gauge switching point

(JR East)



American track-renewal machine used for rebuilding to cope with limited construction period and workforce shortage
(Jr East)



Akita Shinkansen approach to Tohoku Shinkansen (right) at Morioka
(JR East)



E3 test-run train crossing Tama River near Kakunodate on Tazawako Line
(JR East)



Akita Shinkansen rolling stock
(JR East)
 From left to right: Series E3 EMU for *Komachi* services, Series 701 EMU for local services, and snowplowed DD18 diesel locomotive