

New Japanese Railway Scenery 4



JR West's Series *Kiha* 58 DMU running near Tonami on Johana Line. The line's first section (17.3-km) was opened near Fukuno in May 1897 as private Chuetsu Railway's Johana Line. The line was not connected to the government railways' Hokuriku main line at that time. It was gradually extended and connected with the main line in November 1898, when the whole 29.9-km section from Takaoka to Johana was completed. In 1920, the Johana Line was nationalized along with the Chuetsu Railway's Himi Line (16.5 km from Takaoka to Himi), called government railways' Chuetsu Line. In August 1942, the Takaoka—Johana section was renamed Johana Line. To encourage ridership, the former JNR nicknamed the line *Flower Line* in 1980, as it serves the Tonami Plain where tulips are widely cultivated. Freight trains serve factories near Futatsuka, 3.6 km south of Takaoka.

(Photo: M.Mashima Photo Office)



The photo shows the *Tanabata* festival decoration along the main street of Takaoka City, Toyama Prefecture. The *Tanabata* is one of popular traditional festivals in Japan celebrated nationwide, and a common feature is the display of bamboo branches with full of colourful paper strips (often inscribed with wishes) and lanterns or other small ornaments.

Tanabata derives from *Obon* traditions (a Japanese Buddhist holiday to honour the departed spirits of one's ancestors) and the Chinese star festival to celebrate the meeting of the Weaver Star (Vega) and the Cowherd Star (Altair)—who were said to be lovers separated by the Milky Way and who could meet only once a year on the seventh night of the seventh lunar month. This tradition came to Japan during Nara period (710–794), and became one of the annual events in the royal court since the Heian period (794–1185).

Tanabata is celebrated today on the 7th of either July or August according to locale. Apart from Takaoka, Sendai City in northern Honshu and Hiratsuka City south of Tokyo are famous with their *Tanabata* celebrations.

(Photo: Takaoka City Commerce & Tourism Section)

