

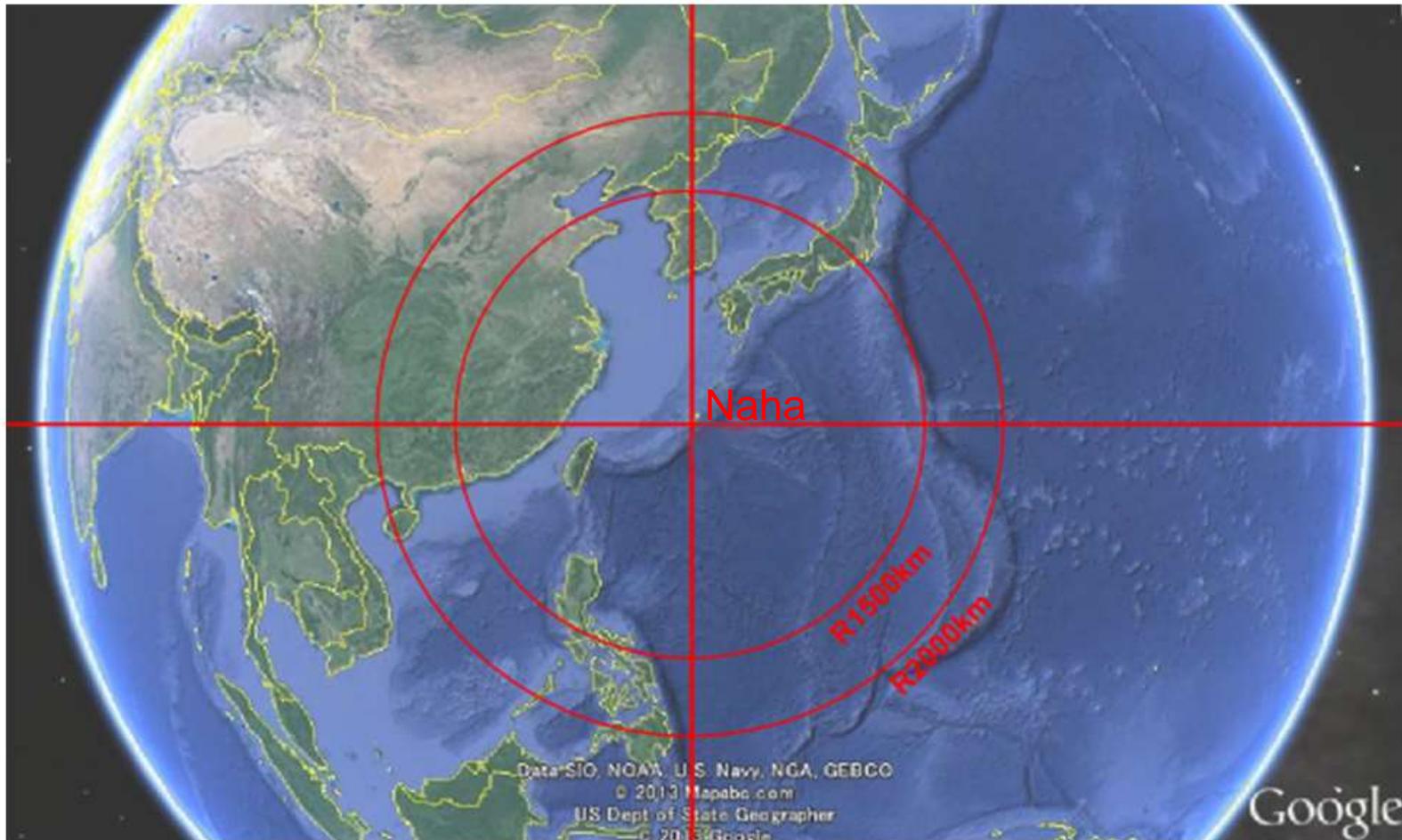
The State of Road Infrastructure in Okinawa

February 1, 2021

NPO-Green Earth

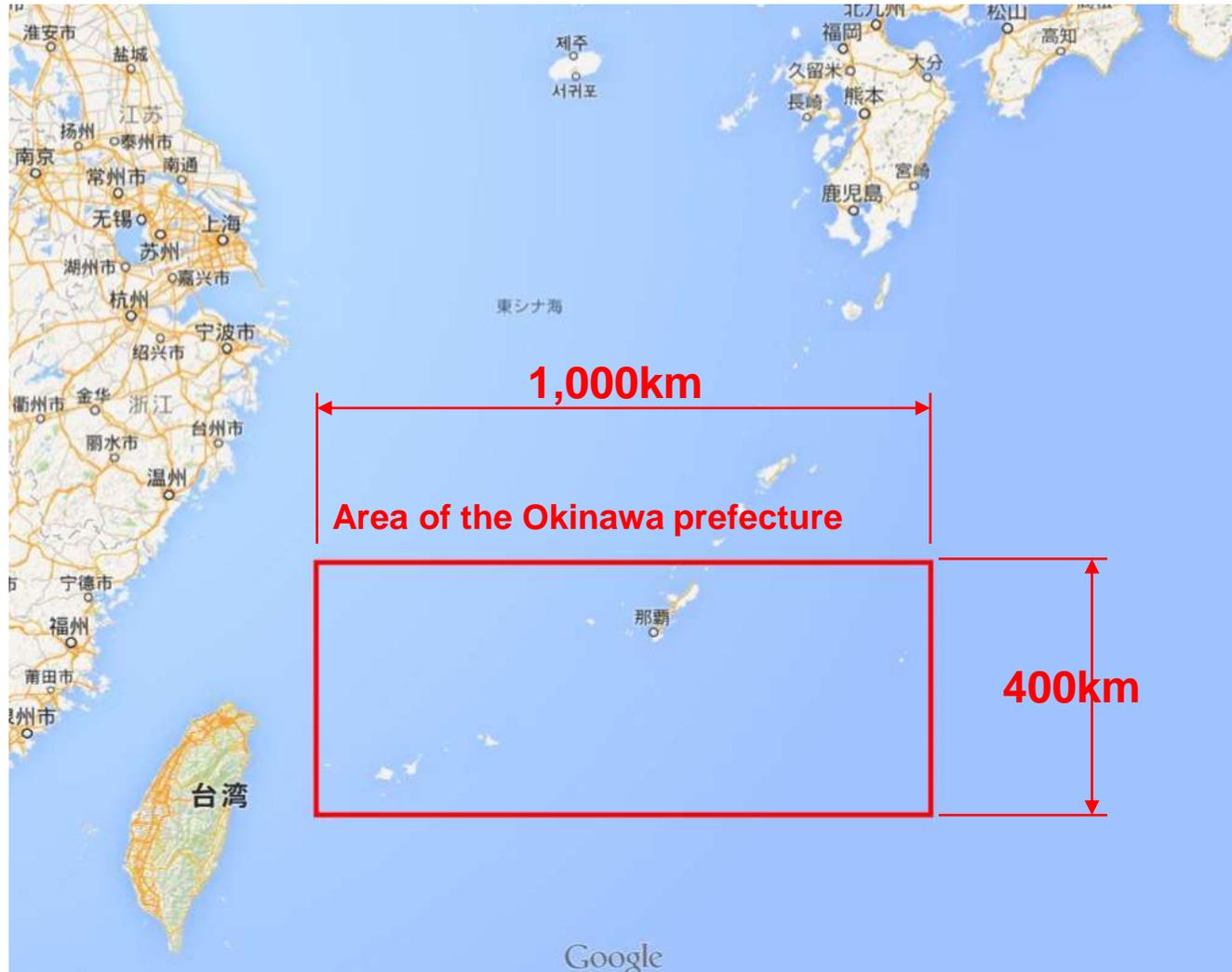
1. Location of Okinawa

Okinawa is located in the heart of East Asia, in the southwest of the Japanese archipelago. It is the westernmost prefecture in Japan and it consists of approximately 160 islands of various sizes.



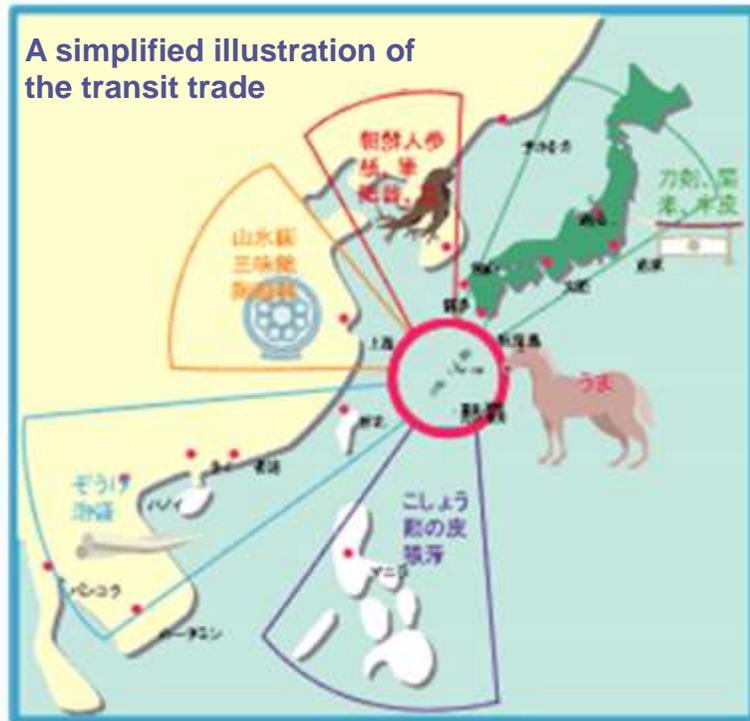
2. Area of Okinawa

A vast subtropical area stretching about 1,000km from the east to the west and about 400km from the south to the north



3. Okinawa During the Ryukyu Kingdom Period

From the 15th to the 19th century, Okinawa was an independent state called the “Ryukyu Kingdom”. It was the midway point on the trade routes between Japan and China, the Korean peninsula and various other countries in the Southeast Asia, and as such a thriving international community where goods from various countries and people from different cultures gathered. It was annexed to Japan in 1879 (about 140 years ago).



Scope of trade during the Ryukyu Kingdom period



A trade vessel from the Ryukyu Kingdom period

*Source: The History of Naha Port (Okinawa General Bureau, Naha Ports and Airport Office)

4. Okinawa During the War

Toward the end of the Pacific War in 1945, the Okinawan residents were victims of the ground warfare that took place in the Okinawa prefecture. On March 26, the American forces landed on the Kerama islands located to the west of Okinawa and reached the main island of Okinawa on April 1 with almost 1,500 warships and 540,000 soldiers, which started a war in Okinawa that lasted about 3 months. More than 200,000 people are believed to have been killed during that war, including both soldiers and civilians.



A dynamite attack on the Japanese forces



The destroyed area around Shuri

*Source: Okinawa City Office website

5. Handover of Okinawa to Japan

After the war, Okinawa was under the administration of the USA until May 15, 1972 when it was returned to Japan by the USA, 27 years after the war had ended, and became a new Japanese prefecture.



A memorial ceremony in Tokyo

*Source: Okinawa Prefectural Archives



The switch from the right-hand traffic to the left-hand traffic (July 30, 1978)

*Source: Ryukyu Asahi Broadcasting Corporation website

6. Okinawa International Ocean Exposition (1975)

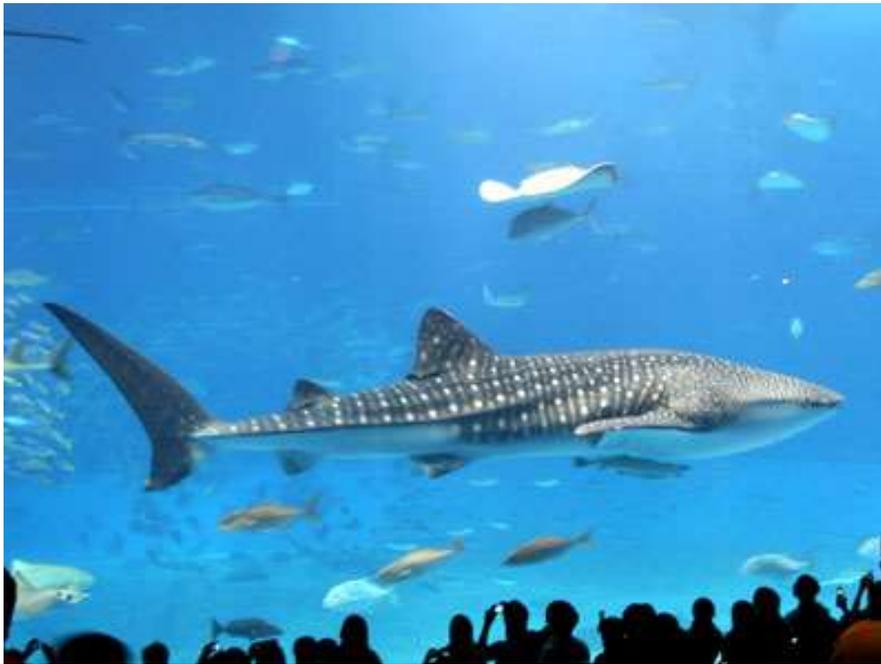
The Okinawa International Ocean Exposition was held in 1975 on the main island, 3 years after the handover of Okinawa. It lasted 183 days and turned out to be a successful event with approximately 3.5 million visitors.



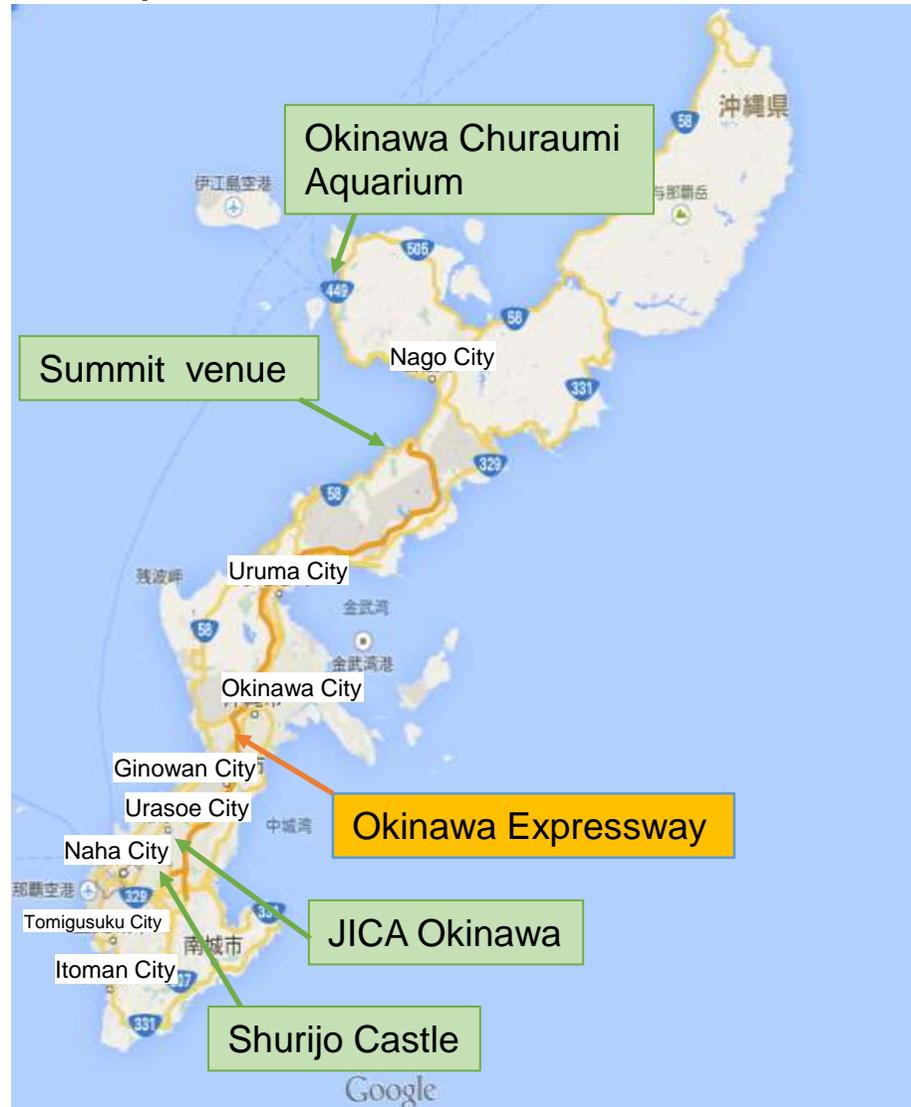
*Source: Cabinet Office homepage

7. Tourist Hub in Okinawa: the Okinawa Churaumi Aquarium

Apart from the Shuri Castle, the Okinawa Churaumi Aquarium, which occupies the facilities of the Okinawa International Ocean Exposition, is one of the famous tourist hubs in Okinawa with about 3 million visitors a year.



8. Opening of the Okinawa Expressway (1987: total length = 57.3km)



*Source: Cabinet Office

9. Kyushu-Okinawa Summit (2000)

Summit venue
(Bankoku Shinryokan)



*Source: Ministry of Foreign Affairs

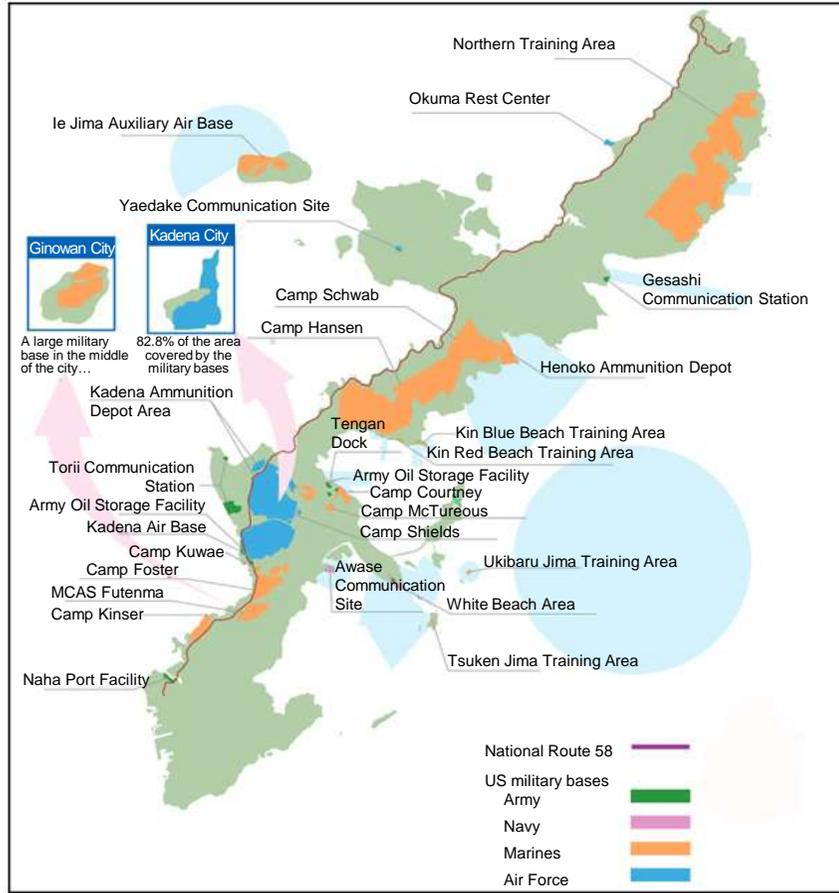
10. A Bridge to the World: Bankoku Shinryo

Bankoku Shinryo means “bridge to the world” and it is also an inscription engraved on the bell located in the main palace of the Shuriyo Castle. It symbolizes the great ambition inherited from the Ryukyuan ancestors who strived to build bridges between different peoples and cultures through the trade with China and the countries in Southeast Asia from the 14th century.



11. Issue of US Military Bases in Okinawa

Okinawa used to be under US administration and there are still many US military bases there. Those military bases cover approximately 74% of all the area belonging to the US military facilities in Japan and 10% of the total Okinawa area, significantly hampering the urban and infrastructural development in Okinawa.



US military facilities in Okinawa



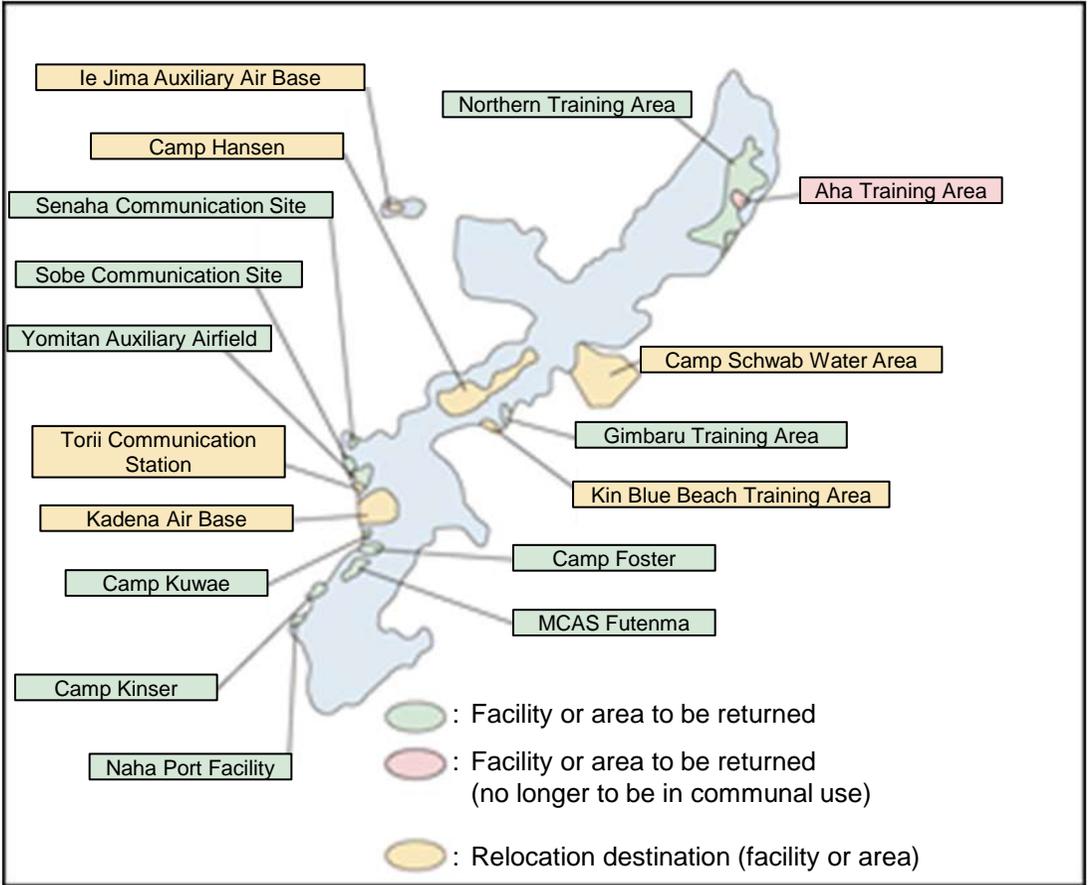
Marine Corps Air Station Futenma in Ginowan City

The US air station is located in the middle of the urban area, making it impossible to link the major roads, which leads to heavy traffic jams.

*Source: Ginowan City

12.Measures to Reduce the Burden on Okinawa

The numerous US military bases in Okinawa have a strong impact on the everyday lives of the residents. Facing a strong public demand for the reorganization, unification, and reduction of the number of the bases, the American and Japanese governments are reducing or moving the bases that can be returned in order to lighten the burden on Okinawa.

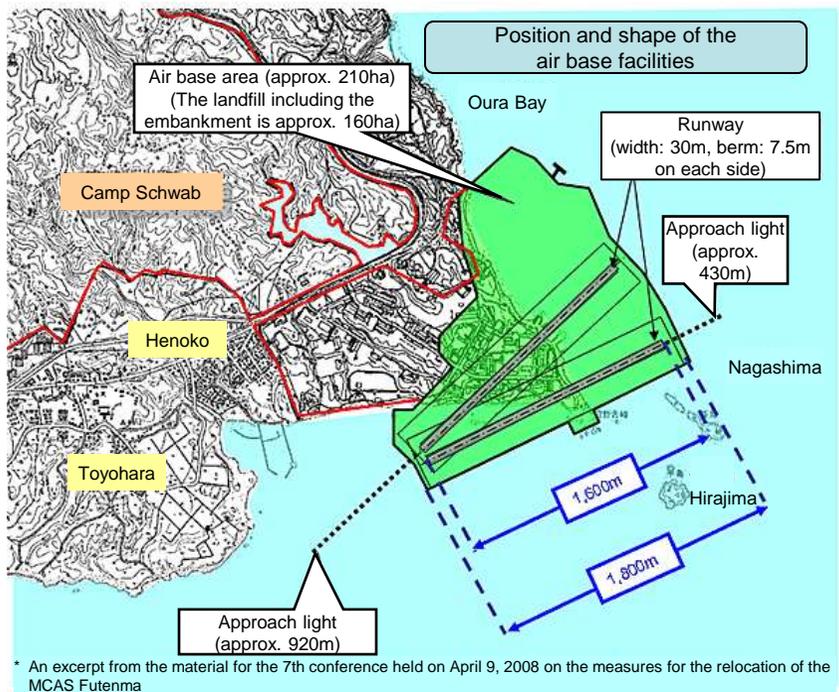


Plan to return the US military bases

*Source: Ministry of Defense

13. Relocation of Marine Corps Air Station Futenma

The Japanese government is currently planning to move the MCAS Futenma to Henoko, Nago City as an alternative solution. However, Much Okinawa citizens of the prefecture is against the relocation of the military base to Henoko which is located in Okinawa Prefecture, claiming that Okinawa will have to continue to carry the burden of the numerous US military bases. This has become a major political issue.



Relocation Plan in Henoko, Nago City

*Source: Ministry of Defense

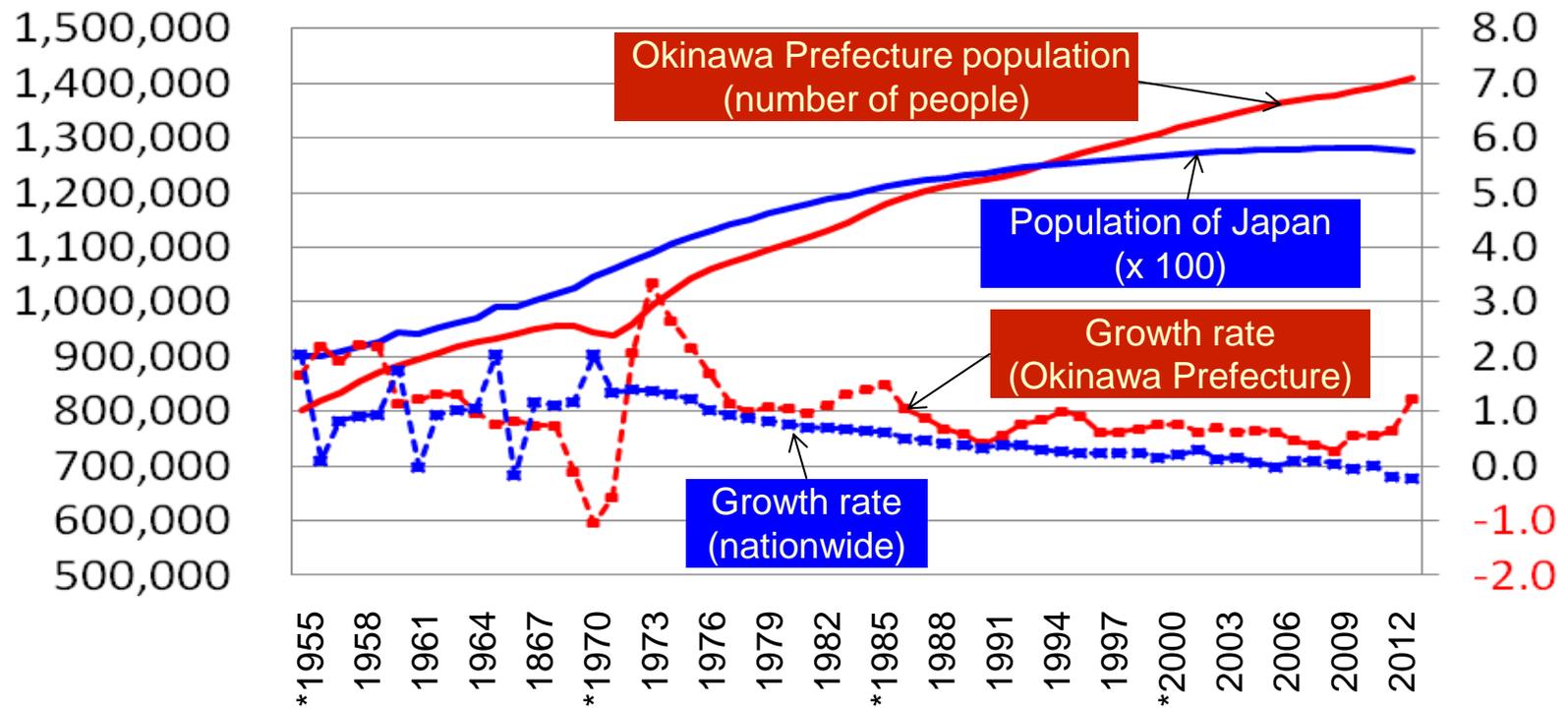


An aerial shot of Henoko, Nago City

*Source: Sankei newspaper

14. Population Growth in the Prefecture

Although the population of Japan is shrinking, the population of Okinawa Prefecture is growing every year. In 2019, Okinawa had a population of about 1.45 million, which is 1.5 times (500,000 people) larger than the population at the time of the handover.

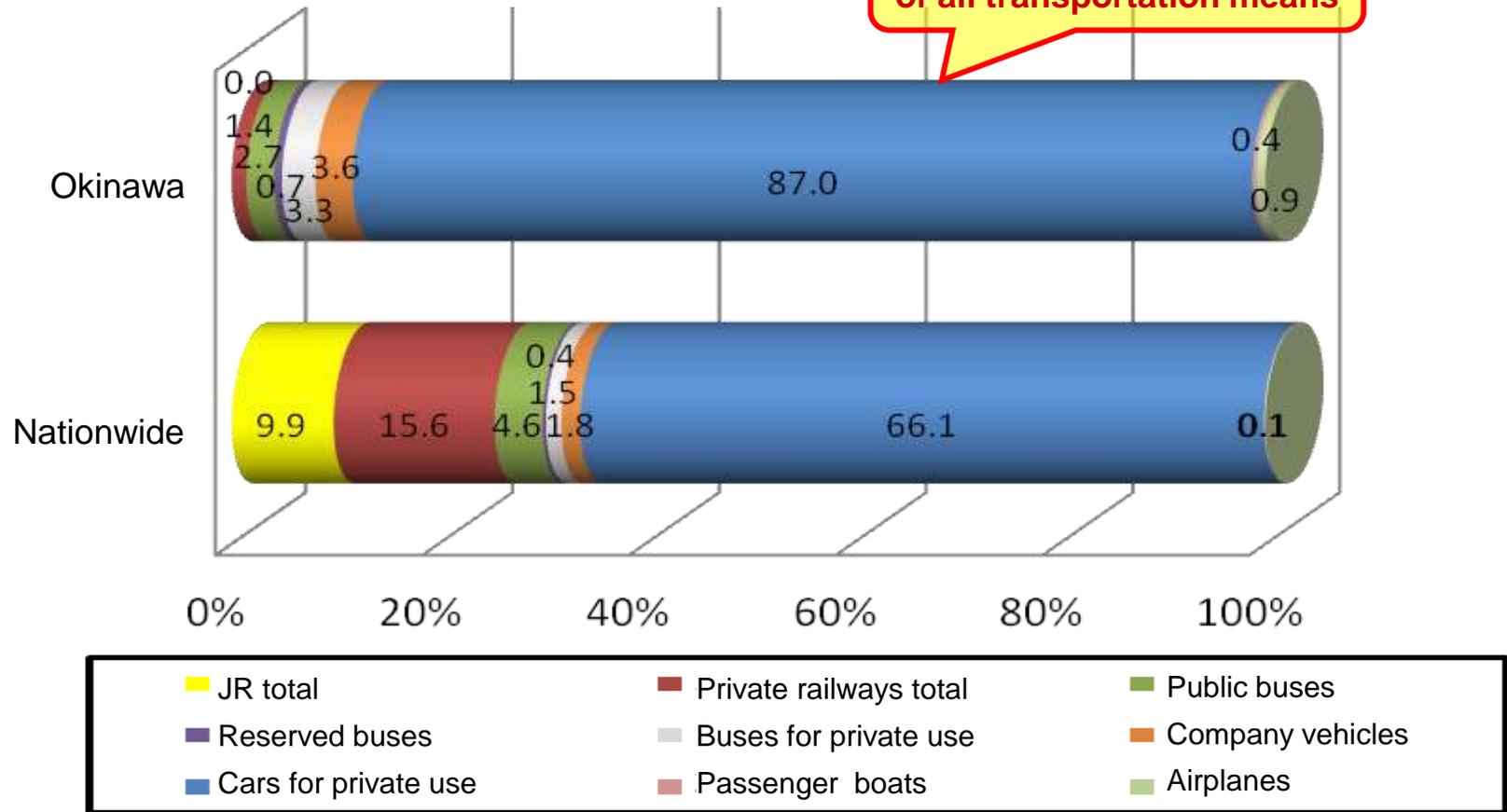


*Source: Okinawa General Bureau

15. Transportation Means in the Prefecture

The railroad infrastructure in Okinawa is underdeveloped and cars represent about 87% of all transportation means.

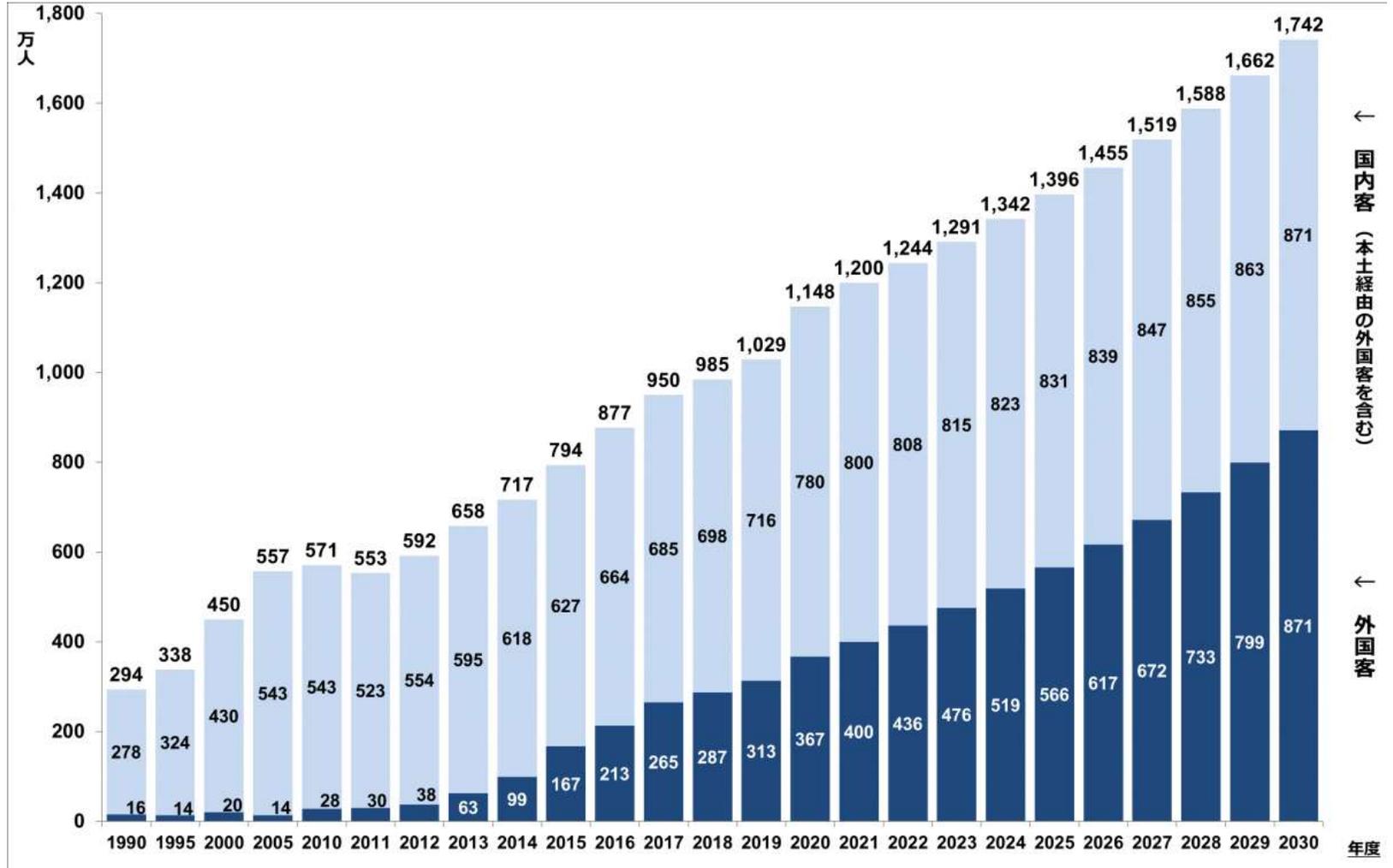
Cars represent about 87% of all transportation means



*Source: Okinawa General Bureau

16. Tourism Growth in Okinawa

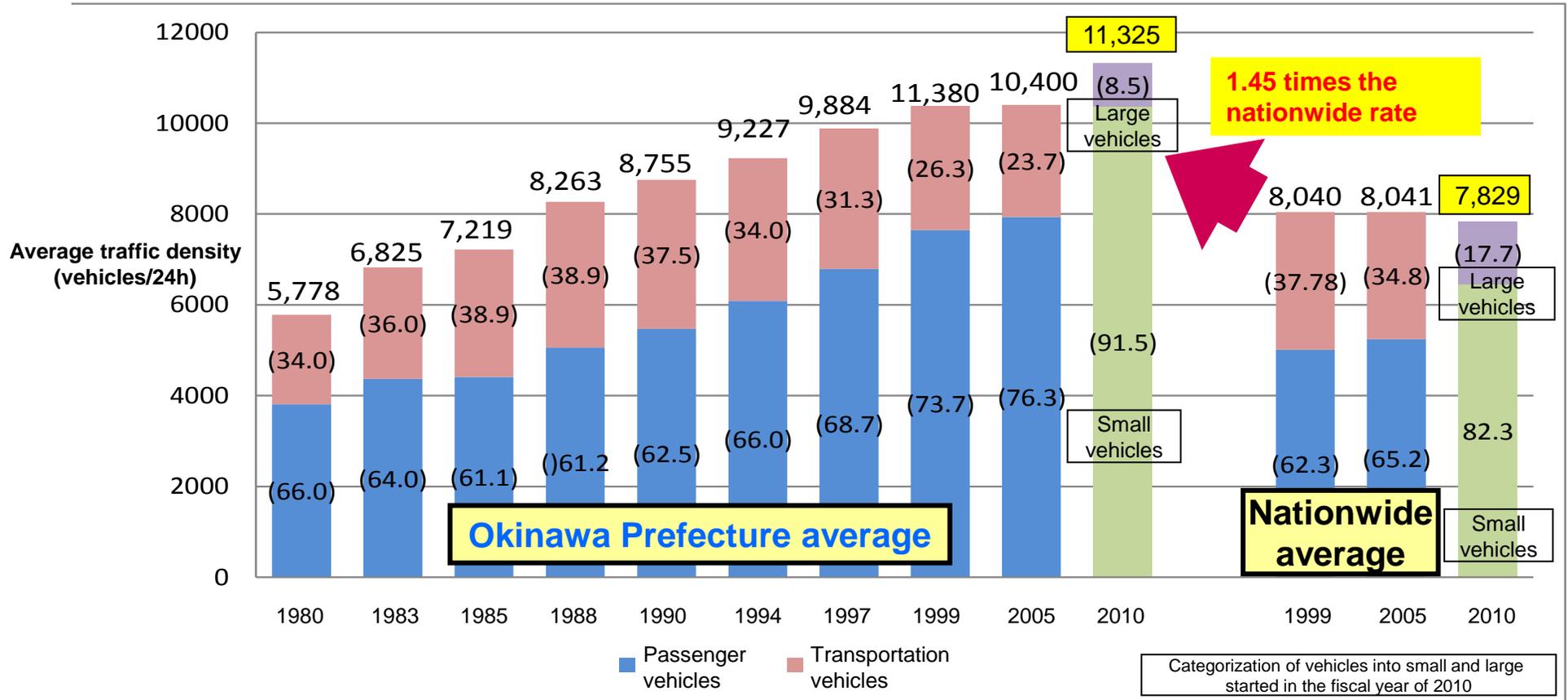
Okinawa has seen a drastic increase of tourists not only from Japan but also from the Asian countries nearby.



*Source: Okinawa Tourism Convention Bureau

17. Traffic Density Growth (Strong Growth in Demand for Logistics and Goods)

The average traffic density in Okinawa Prefecture is 11,325 vehicles per 24 hours, which is 1.45 times the national average.



Trends in Average Traffic Density

*Source: Okinawa General Bureau

18. Bridges in Okinawa

- 935 bridges in the prefecture (263 on national roads, 672 on prefectural roads)
- Okinawa also has many bridges to remote islands (20 bridges)



19. Tunnels in Okinawa

- 32 tunnels in the prefecture (16 on national roads and 16 on prefectural roads)



20. City Monorail in Okinawa

- It opened on August 10, 2003.
- It completes the 17.0-km route from the Naha Airport to Maeda, Urasoe City in 40 minutes.
- This is the only railroad in the prefecture.



*Source: The Okinawa Prefecture

21.Environment Preservation Measures

Due to its climate and geographical features, Okinawa boasts a great number of precious animal and plant species. We have to take into consideration the preservation of the ecosystem diversity of flora and fauna when carrying out works.



22. Building a Safe Road Infrastructure

Since typhoons often strike Okinawa Prefecture, fallen utility poles, split roads, and similar serious infrastructural damage is common in all areas.



Wave overtopping due to a typhoon



Fallen utility poles due to a typhoon

*Source: Okinawa General Bureau

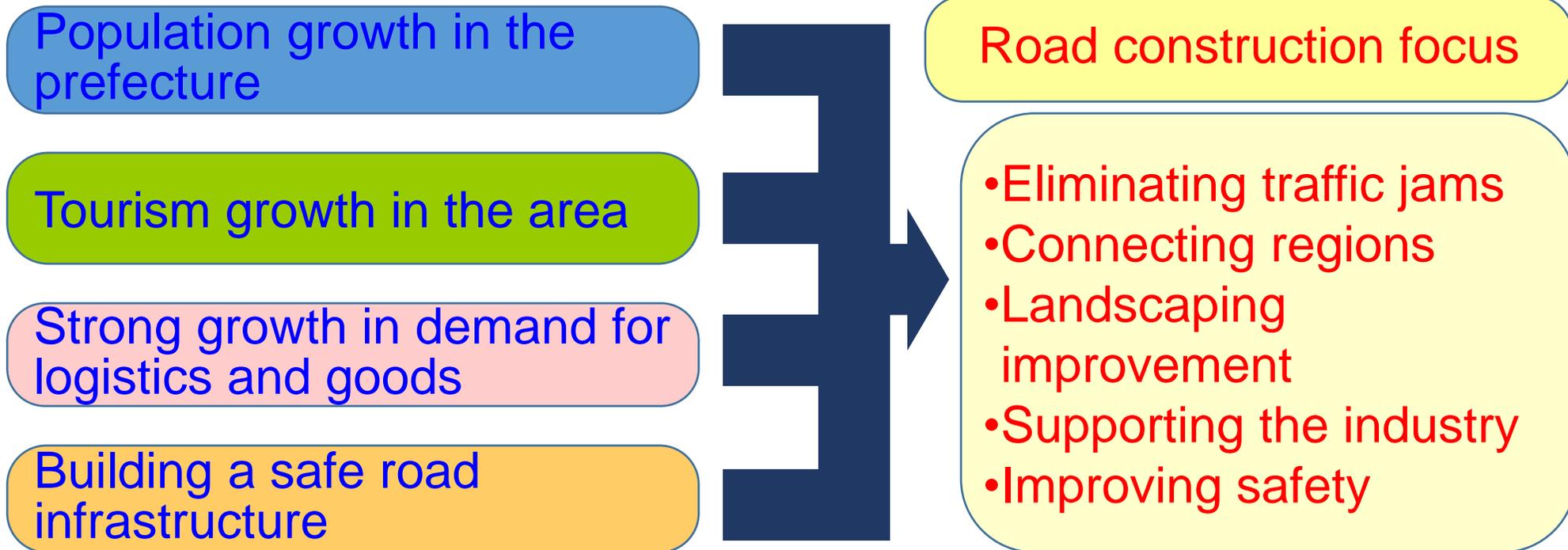
23. Information on Roads in Okinawa (Construction Status)

Road types		Extension distance (km)	Amount improved (%)	Amount paved (%)
National expressway		57.3	100.0	100.0
National route	Specified section	316.6	99.6	100.0
	Outside the specified section	171.4	96.7	93.5
Prefectural roads		1,061.1	89.5	88.6
Municipal roads		6,422.8	63.2	39.3
Total		8,029.2	69.1	49.8



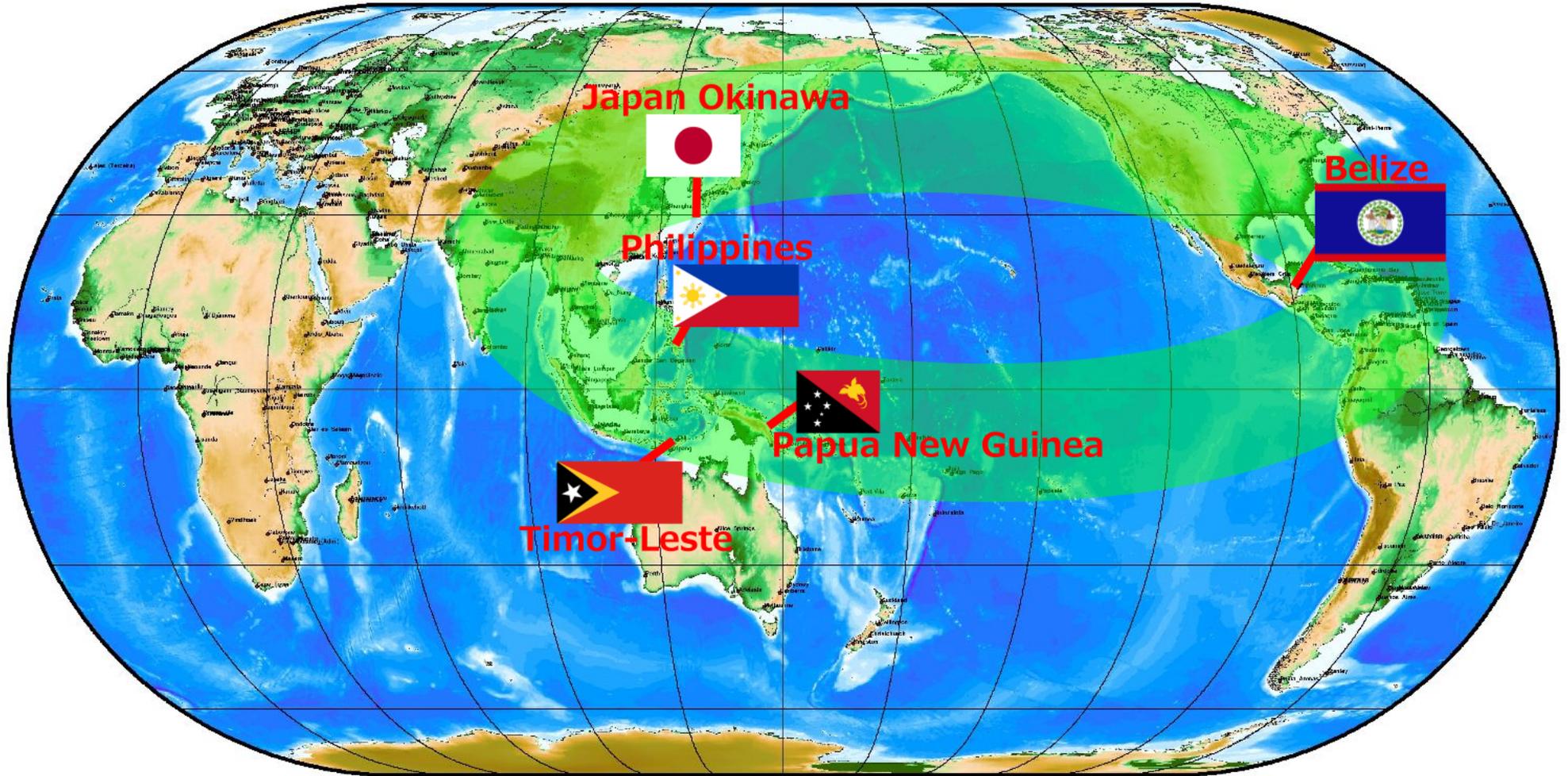
24. Focus of Future Construction Works

Due to the factors listed below, the demand for road infrastructure in Okinawa will increase in the future. Therefore, we need to build roads that will meet the demand.



*Source: Okinawa General Bureau

25.A Bridge to the World



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