Low Carbon Society and Urban Rural Conditions: Updates from NIES’ Research Projects on Low Carbon Society (Phase One)

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In the present talk, I will discuss possible policy options and measures to realize a low-carbon society at the local level, focussing on the transport/land use sector in Shiga Prefecture, Japan. In order to substantially reduce local demand for passenger transport by automobile in the long term, we need to reduce both the automobile’s share and trip length. To that end, it is important to increase the population density of inhabitable land and to maintain or increase the commuting ratio inside the municipality.

On the other hand, residents of densely populated areas or apartment houses are dissatisfied with the small living space and the lack of contact with nature. Policies to promote population concentration by increasing access to the natural environment, constructing and attracting development of apartment houses with adequate living space and amenities are effective not only from the perspective of reducing greenhouse gas emissions but also from the perspective of securing vigour of the municipalities.

Based on our estimation and analysis, Shiga prefectural government has been devising several policies and measures including the formation of a compact city, public transportation and bicycle use promotion. However, sprawling momentum and automobile-dependent lifestyles are difficult to change in reality. We should seriously reconsider the meaning of the back-casting approach to realise a low carbon society.