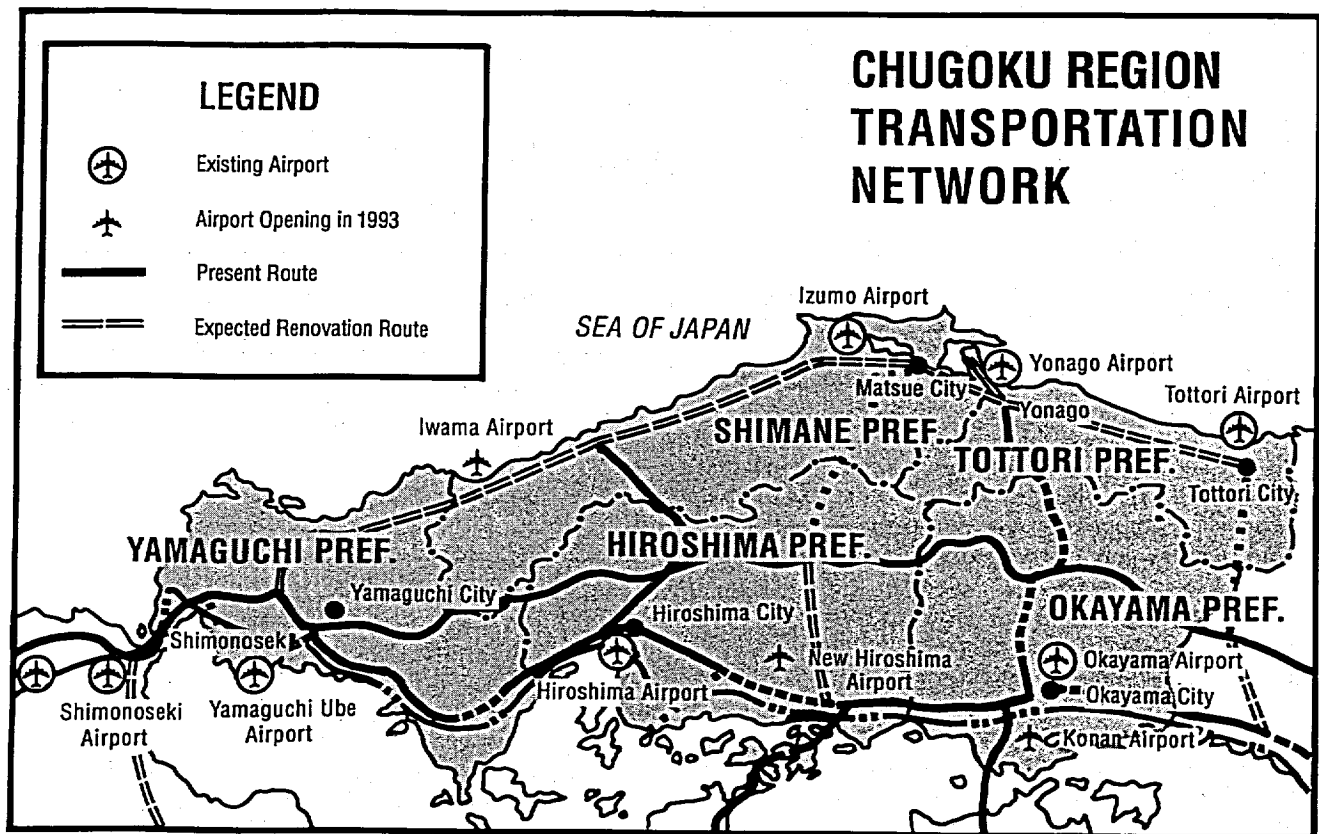




Geography and Transportation

Covering 31 788 km² — 8.4 per cent of Japan's total landmass — Chugoku is approximately the same size as Belgium.

Considering Hiroshima as typical of the region, 80 per cent of the prefecture is hilly or mountainous, about 25 per cent is defined as inhabitable and only 15 per cent is suitable for development.

The climate is warm and dry and temperatures average 15°C. Annual rainfall averages 1 300 mm and only the highest elevations receive any snow.

Tottori ranks as the most mountainous prefecture in Japan. While temperatures are similar to those in Hiroshima, Tottori receives considerably more rainfall — in excess of 2 000 mm annually.

With much of the prefecture occupied by plains and basins, Okayama boasts the largest agricultural industry in the Chugoku region.

The main transportation routes in Chugoku are part of the major national corridors and run east to west from Kobe to Kyushu.

The Inland Sea, one of the world's most heavily trafficked waterways, is used extensively by both coastal and deep-water cargo vessels. Before the railway system was developed, this waterway was the nation's main transportation artery.

Two major railway lines run along the Inland Sea coast — a conventional freight and passenger line and the shinkansen (bullet train) line which connects Tokyo, Osaka and Fukuoka.

The region's arterial route is an expressway which runs down the centre of the peninsula with spurs to major cities. A coastal toll expressway is also under construction and will serve as the feeder route for a series of three giant bridges connecting Shikoku with the main island. To date, only the link between Okayama and Kagawa prefectures has been completed.

Transportation routes along the Japan Sea coast remain relatively undeveloped, but access is improving as spurs to the central expressway are completed.