

**CREATING UNDERGROUND SPACE TO ENHANCE THE APPEAL OF THE  
NIHONBASHI AREA:  
A CASE STUDY OF THE NIHONBASHI 1-CHOME CENTRAL DISTRICT URBAN  
REDEVELOPMENT PROJECT**

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**Abstract:** Nihonbashi Bridge is renowned as one of Japan's most iconic and historically significant bridges, and the surrounding area has served as a center of commerce, finance, and culture for approximately 400 years. In recent years, the area has been expected to develop further as a tourist destination, with multiple urban redevelopment projects underway to enhance the appeal of the riverside environment. In addition, construction is progressing to relocate the Metropolitan Expressway—currently built above Nihonbashi Bridge—underground.

Among these initiatives, the Nihonbashi 1-Chome Central District Urban Redevelopment Project (hereafter referred to as “the N1-C”) is scheduled to be the first of the ongoing projects in the area to be completed. The Nihonbashi riverside area currently faces serious challenges for pedestrian circulation, including complicated and multi-level transfer routes between subway stations on different lines, which hinder smooth movement.

To address these issues, the redevelopment association for the N1-C, in which Mitsui Fudosan is also participating, has put forth four key policies: (1) Development of smooth, barrier-free underground routes, (2) Enhancement of transportation connectivity through the installation of new subway ticket gates, (3) Development of seamless connection spaces enabling smooth movement from underground to deck level, and (4) Establishment of an area-wide pedestrian network in coordination with surrounding redevelopment projects.

This paper presents the N1-C as a case study, highlighting its efforts to create underground space in collaboration with various surrounding redevelopment projects while respecting the location and historical context of the Nihonbashi riverside area.

**Keywords:** urban redevelopment project, barrier-free route, transport connectivity, connection space, collaboration

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## 1. BACKGROUND AND EMERGING CHALLENGES IN THE NIHONBASHI AREA

### 1.1. Characteristics and Challenges of the Nihonbashi Area

The Nihonbashi area, with the iconic Nihonbashi Bridge, has played a central role in Japan for several centuries. Since the Edo period (approximately 400 years ago), the area developed as a hub where people, goods, and culture intersected, functioning as the starting point of several historical roads and a base for water transportation. Furthermore, from the Meiji period (approximately 150 years ago), many companies, including financial institutions, established their offices in this area, making it an important driving force behind Japan's economic activity. In this way, the Nihonbashi area, which has long developed as a center of transportation, commerce, and culture, still possesses significant advantages today, such as its proximity to Tokyo Station—the hub of the railway network—and convenient access to the two international airports that serve as gateways to Japan. In recent years, in addition to its growing functions as an international financial and business center, the area is also expected to develop further as a globally recognized tourist destination.

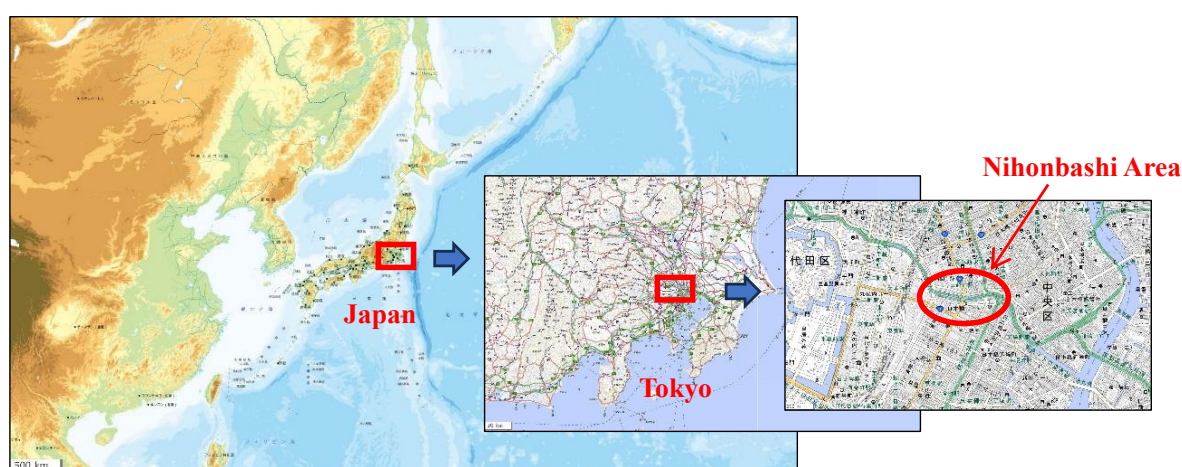


Figure 1. Location of Nihonbashi Area (source: Geospatial Information Authority of Japan)

### 1.2. Undergrounding of the Metropolitan Expressway

In the Nihonbashi area, plans are underway to relocate the Metropolitan Expressway, a large-scale transportation infrastructure, underground. Under the vision of "Restoring the Sky to Nihonbashi," this national project aims to promote urban development that leverages the appeal of the riverside environment.[1]

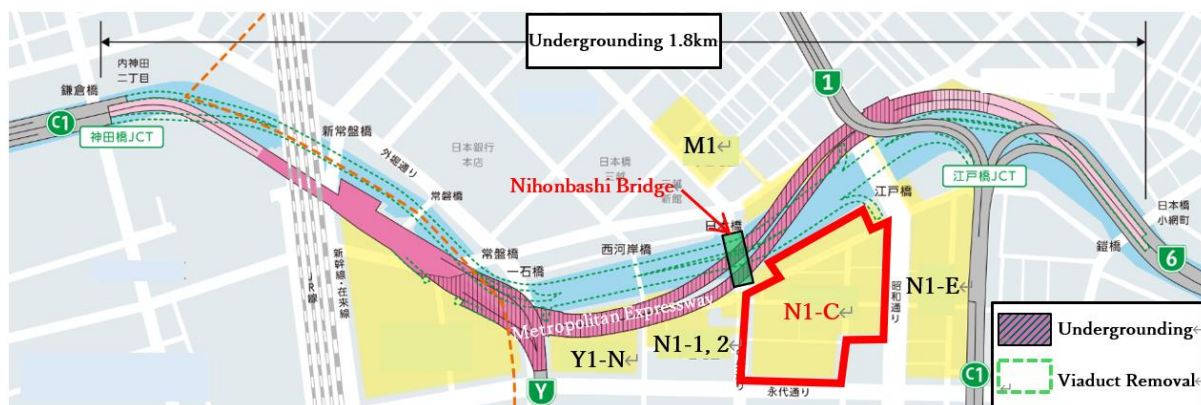


Figure 2. Illustration of the undergrounding of the Metropolitan Expressway (source: Press release by Metropolitan Expressway Co., Ltd.)



**Figure 3.** *Present-day Nihonbashi Bridge with the Metropolitan Expressway overhead (source: Press release by Metropolitan Expressway Co., Ltd.)*



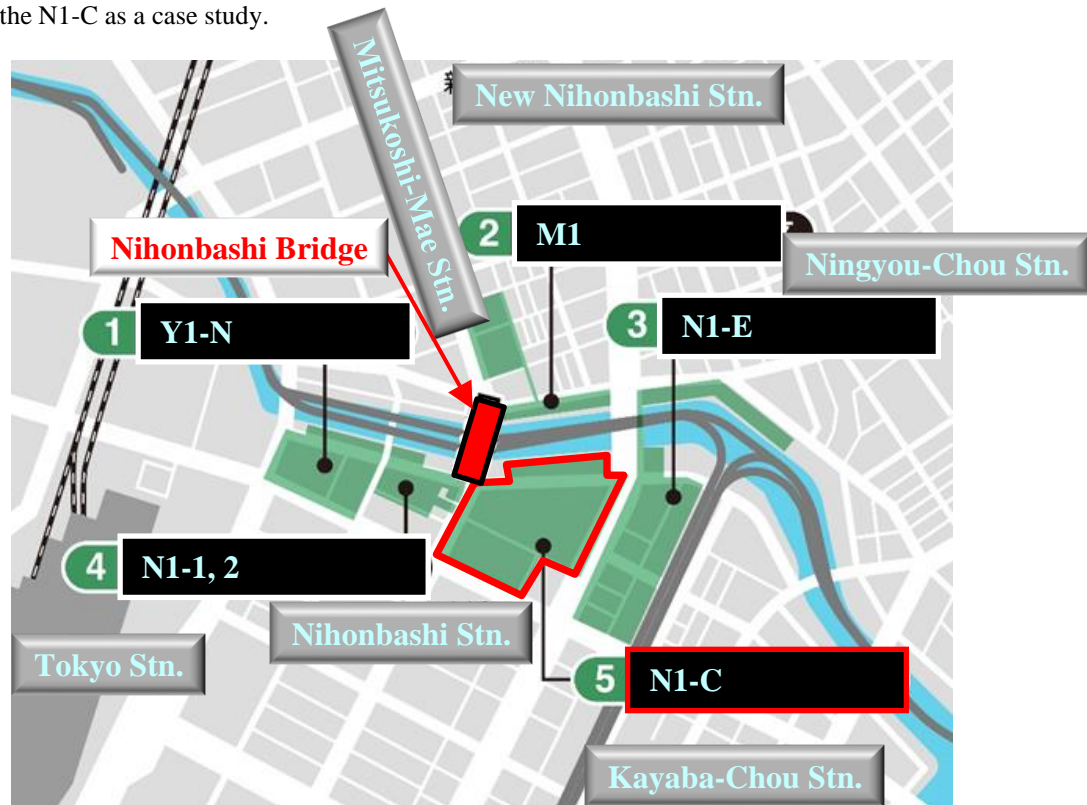
**Figure 4.** *Perspective view of Nihonbashi after the undergrounding of the Metropolitan Expressway (source: Press release by Mitsui Fudosan Co., Ltd.)*

In advancing such a large-scale project, not only the public sector entities such as the national government and the Tokyo Metropolitan Government, but also the private sector entities are cooperating. In the Nihonbashi area, multiple redevelopment projects are underway along the riverside. Each redevelopment project is collaborating under a shared vision and in coordination with the undergrounding of the Metropolitan Expressway, resulting in an integrated approach to urban development throughout the entire Nihonbashi area.



## 2. INITIATIVES IN THE NIHONBASHI 1-CHOME CENTRAL DISTRICT URBAN REDEVELOPMENT PROJECT

The Nihonbashi 1-Chome Central District Urban Redevelopment Project (hereafter referred to as “the N1-C”) is scheduled to be the first among the ongoing redevelopment projects in the Nihonbashi area to be completed. This paper introduces the creation of underground spaces aimed at enhancing the attractiveness of the Nihonbashi area, using the N1-C as a case study.



**Figure 5.** Locations of the five major redevelopment projects along the riverside in the Nihonbashi area (source: Press release by Mitsui Fudosan Co., Ltd.)

The N1-C is adjacent to the iconic Nihonbashi Bridge and is centrally located among the surrounding redevelopment projects, making it the most representative district in the Nihonbashi area. This district has also been designated as an Emergency Development Area, as well as an Urban Regeneration Project, under the relevant law. Furthermore, the redevelopment association for the N1-C, in which Mitsui Fudosan is also participating, has set forth the following four development policies to address issues related to the pedestrian network in the Nihonbashi area.[2]

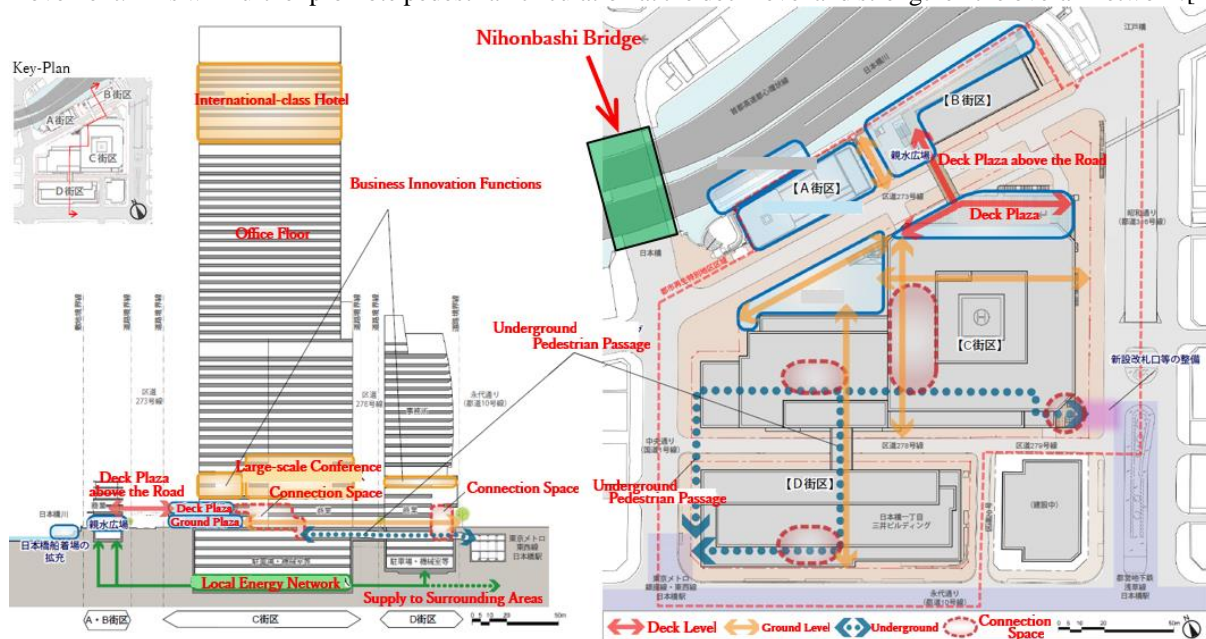
- (1) Development of smooth, barrier-free underground routes
- (2) Enhancement of transportation connectivity through the installation of new subway ticket gates
- (3) Development of seamless connection spaces enabling smooth movement from underground to deck level
- (4) Establishment of an area-wide pedestrian network in coordination with surrounding redevelopment projects.

Based on these development policies, various initiatives have been implemented, some of which are described below.

First, with regard to development policies (1) and (2), there are subway stations located underground on both the east and west sides of the N1-C. On the west side, a new underground passage will be constructed to connect with the existing ticket gates, while on the east side, not only a new underground passage but also new ticket gates will be installed at the subway station. In this way, a smooth and barrier-free route will be ensured between the eastern and western subway stations. This will further enhance the district's function as a transportation hub connecting Tokyo Station with the international airports.

Next, with regard to development policies (3) and (4), pedestrian passages, open spaces for walkways, and through-passages that connect to the surrounding roads and plazas of the N1-C will be constructed, establishing an area-wide pedestrian network in coordination with neighboring redevelopment areas. In addition, new

connection spaces will be created to link the underground level with the deck level, enabling smooth vertical movement. This will further promote pedestrian circulation at the deck level and strengthen the overall network. [4]



**Figure 6.** Overview diagram of the pedestrian network (source: Outline of City Planning, Mitsui Fudosan Co., Ltd. and Nomura Real Estate Development Co., Ltd.)

Furthermore, promenades, including waterside plazas, will be constructed along the riverside. These developments will contribute to the creation of a new waterfront pedestrian network that maximizes the appeal of the river space. [3]



**Figure 7.** Perspective view of an urban space integrating people, the river, and the city (source: Press release by Mitsui Fudosan Co., Ltd.)

In order to carry out such large-scale developments, collaboration and coordination with a wide range of stakeholders are essential. Although managing and executing these efforts under the leadership of the N1-C, as a private sector entity, presents significant challenges, they have been successfully implemented.



### 3. IMPLICATIONS OF UNDERGROUND SPACE CREATION FOR THE URBAN REDEVELOPMENT OF NIHONBASHI

Urban development in the Nihonbashi area has entered a new phase by promoting redevelopment projects aimed at overcoming existing challenges. Through the collaboration of multiple redevelopment projects, including the N1-C, a multilayered pedestrian network is being created, linking underground, ground, and deck levels. Furthermore, the plan to relocate the Metropolitan Expressway underground to “restore the sky to Nihonbashi” will not only improve the landscape, but also create spaces that rediscover and utilize the appeal of the waterfront environment. These initiatives will enhance convenience and comfort, promote barrier-free access, and strengthen transportation connectivity, resulting in significant advances in the urban functions of the entire area. The Nihonbashi area is thus expected to evolve into a world-class center for international exchange, where history and innovation are seamlessly integrated.



*Figure 8. Perspective view of the five redevelopment districts centered on the Nihonbashi River and the surrounding Nihonbashi Riverwalk area (source: Press release by Mitsui Fudosan Co., Ltd.)*

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