HONDA

News Release

March 31, 2026

Honda Announces the Establishment of PathAhead Co., Ltd., a Startup Originated from IGNITION, a Honda New Business Creation Program
— PathAhead will offer the world's first high-durability road construction material made from desert sand —

TOKYO, Japan, March 31, 2026 – Honda Motor Co., Ltd. (Honda) today announced the establishment of PathAhead Co., Ltd. (PathAhead), a startup business venture originated from IGNITION, Honda's new business creation program.

PathAhead has developed Rising Sand, the world's first artificial aggregate made from desert sand. Going forward, the company will work to establish mass-production technology and conduct demonstration testing to verify its workability and durability in asphalt road construction. After these steps, the company aims to begin mass production of Rising Sand at its own production plant, scheduled to be built in Republic of Kenya in 2028, and establish a system and capability to ensure stable supply to construction companies in Africa.

Rising Sand, artificial aggregate developed by PathAhead

Official website of PathAhead: URL: https://pathahead.jp/ (Japanese)
https://pathahead.jp/en (English)

In recent years, African countries have seen a rapid expansion of their economies in line with rapid population growth. At the same time, insufficient construction and maintenance of infrastructure such as roads has been a major constraint on economic growth. Currently, the percentage of paved roads in the African region remains low, at approximately 20%[*2], and the deterioration of existing paved roads is progressing, which is resulting in higher logistics costs and economic losses.

Furthermore, aggregates used for road paving are made of relatively inexpensive natural resources such as sand and crushed stone, which tend to have variability in strength depending on where they were mined and the geological layers, making it difficult to secure consistent level of quality required for paving materials.

PathAhead recognized the potential of desert sand as a locally available resource and developed an artificial aggregate, Rising Sand, that achieves both high cost efficiency and durability. Rising Sand is produced using PathAhead's original technology to granulate fine, non-uniform desert sand grains into more uniform, high-hardness artificial aggregate, which is suitable for a wide range of applications, including road paving, concrete, and materials for the base course/sub-base of roads.

As the first step toward commercialization, PathAhead will conduct demonstration testing of Rising Sand for road paving applications over a period of approximately three years, first in Kenya starting in 2027, then in Tanzania, followed by South Africa. The company will verify workability, durability, and the consistency of quality while considering local climate and traffic conditions in each country, aiming to establish specifications that satisfy the requirements for road pavement materials for mass production.

Based on the results of the demonstration testing, PathAhead will start mass-production of Rising Sand at a production plant scheduled to be constructed in Kenya in 2028, then in Tanzania, followed by South Africa, with the goal of building a stable supply system through local sourcing and local production.

＜Key features of the Rising Sand＞

Rising Sand is an artificial aggregate produced by granulating the round grains of fine desert sand with a diameter of approximately 100 micrometers (μm)[*3] into larger granulated sand clusters with a diameter of several ten millimeters (mm), using PathAhead's original, patent-pending granulation technology. This technology reduces variations in the size and shape of sand clusters, thereby increasing its strength as aggregate.

While roads constructed with conventional natural aggregates typically have a service life of about 10 years, roads constructed with the Rising Sand are expected to achieve a service life of more than 20 years[*4], which will reduce the frequency of road repairs and is estimated to reduced lifecycle cost by approximately 60%[*4] compared to that of conventional roads using natural aggregates. Furthermore, by using locally available resources such as desert sand and additives, PathAhead will strive to offer Rising Sand at a price comparable to that of natural aggregates.

As the depletion of natural resources, such as sand and crushed stone extracted from mountains and rivers, is becoming a serious global issue, Rising Sand can be used as a sustainable alternative that fulfills a wide range of construction needs, beyond applications for road pavements, including applications for concrete and materials for the base course/sub-base of roads.

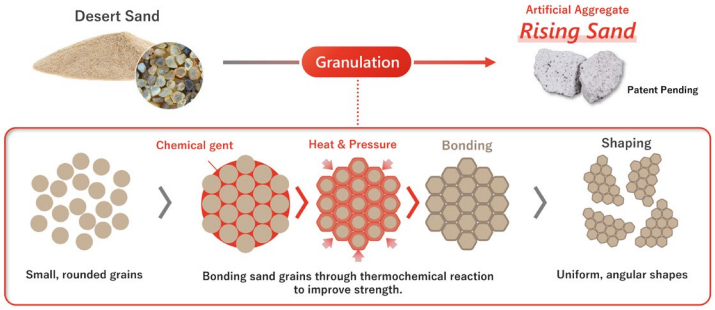
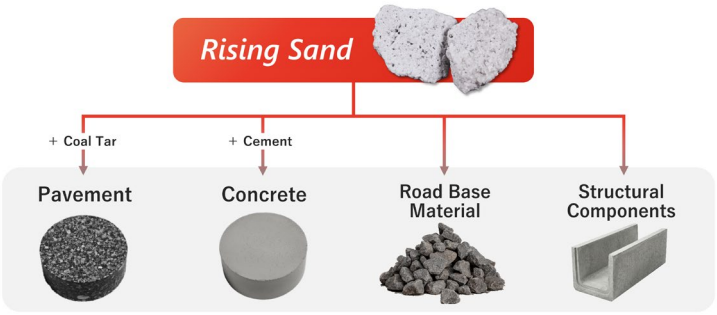


Image of granulating desert sand to produce Rising Sand



Key applications of Rising Sand

*1 Granular materials used as a component in construction mixtures, such as pavement material.

*2 PathAhead estimate based on “The World Factbook” published by the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA).

*3 1μm = 1/1000 of a mm.

*4 Based on research by PathAhead.

<Comments by Masayuki Iga, Representative Director & CEO of PathAhead Co., Ltd.>

“At Honda, I worked on research and development of automotive materials and fundamental research on mobility-related technologies, based on what our customers expect of our finished vehicles. I established PathAhead based on my desire to leverage technologies and insights I amassed through such experience to swiftly and directly address challenges facing our society.

In Africa, the low durability of roads significantly constrains the mobility of people, logistics, and economic activities. Roads are more than mere infrastructure: they connect people, expand access to education, healthcare, and industry for more people, and form the foundation that supports the potential of the region. PathAhead is committed to more than just building roads: by providing highly durable materials, we take on a challenge to create sustainable road networks. With our end-to-end commitment — from fundamental research to locally rooted real-world implementation — we will leverage the power of our technology and enable people and society to unleash their limitless potential, starting from the ‘roads’ they use.”

＜Comments by Keiji Otsu, President and Representative Director of Honda R&D Co., Ltd.＞

"Each and every Honda associate pursues their dreams and continues to take on challenges with strong conviction in order to offer our customers around the world the 'joy and freedom of mobility' through our mobility products and services. It is encouraging to see that the technologies and ideas Mr. Iga developed through his experience in research on mobility-related materials have led to a new idea that contributes to the infrastructure and is beginning to take shape as a solution to a societal challenge. Through our IGNITION program, Honda will offer ongoing support for this PathAhead initiative, while also accelerating co-creation with other internal and external partners and continuing to create new value and strive to address more societal issues."

＜About the IGNITION new business creation program＞

The IGNITION is a new business creation program of Honda, designed to discover the original ideas, technologies and designs of Honda associates and apply them to contribute to solving societal issues and creating new value for customers and society. The program started in 2017 as an initiative to encourage Honda associates to create new business within Honda. In 2020, the program added an option for qualified associates to start their own business ventures to realize earlier possible real-world implementation of their technologies. Furthermore, in 2023, by expanding the eligibility for participation to individuals and businesses outside Honda, the IGNITION was further advanced into a program under which participants strive to achieve innovative value creation by combining the ideas of people outside the company with the technologies and expertise of Honda.

＜Key Features of IGNITION system (for Honda associates)＞

- All full-time Honda associates who work for Honda operations in Japan are eligible to submit proposals regardless of their length of employment and assigned division.
- Proposals selected in the first-round evaluation will receive approximately six months of business development support. During this period, a taskforce team consisting of internal specialists will be formed to support each proposer.
- Ideas that pass the second-round evaluation will be commercialized through a startup venture or within the company.
- For startups, the possibility of investment from Honda will be considered in a meeting of the Corporate Venturing Council held after the second-round evaluation.
- External investors provide advice to each proposer throughout the evaluation process.
- In order to ensure independence of the startup, the ratio of capital contribution by Honda will be limited to no more than 20%.

The IGNITION program official website URL:
https://global.honda/jp/ignition/ (Japanese)