Panasonic makes vacuum gadget to rescue wireless earbuds from train tracks

Panasonic is working with one of Japan's biggest railway companies to solve a new problem that has sprung up in recent years: a rise in people dropping wireless earbuds onto train tracks.

JR East, the part of Japan's formerly private railway group that covers the Tokyo and Tohoku regions of the country, says that there were 950 incidents of dropped earbuds across 78 Tokyo train stations in the July-September quarter, Jiji Press reports. The figure apparently accounts for a quarter of all dropped items.

According to JR East, station staff normally use a grabber-style "magic hand" tool to pick up larger items that fall onto tracks, like hats or smartphones. But the gravel between the rails makes smaller objects — like, say, a left AirPod Pro — more difficult to retrieve, meaning staff sometimes have to wait until after the last train.

JR East via Jiji Press

To combat the issue, Panasonic has been tapped to collaborate with JR East on a vacuum cleaner-style device that is said to be much better suited to picking up stray earbuds. You can see it in the picture above.

The device is being tested at Ikebukuro station, a major hub in northern Tokyo, and early results suggest it works much faster than the traditional grabber.

https://www.theverge.com/2020/11/6/21552305/tokyo-dropped-earb

uds-train-stations-panasonic-vacuum