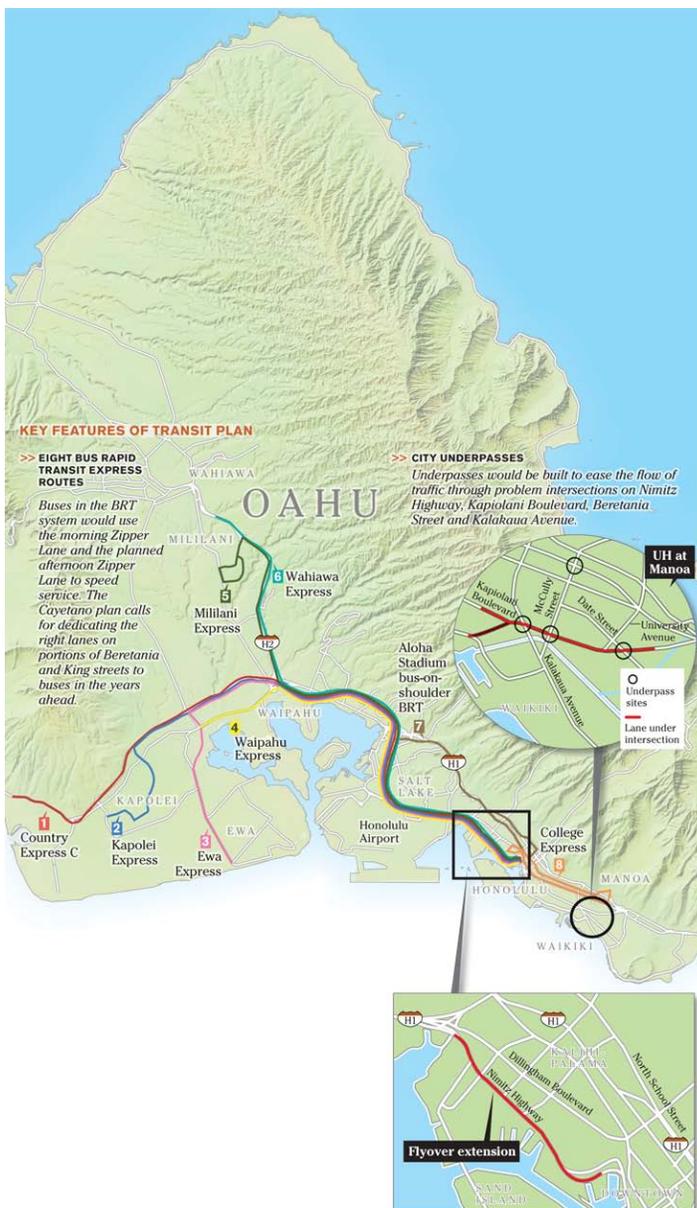


Cayetano lays out transit plan

The anti-rail candidate's \$1.1 billion FAST proposal creates dedicated bus lanes and underpasses in key spots

By Kevin Dayton / Gordon Y.K. Pang — Sep 28, 2012

Former Gov. Ben Cayetano unveiled a transportation plan Thursday that features new Bus Rapid Transit routes, high-tech traffic signal systems to instantly respond to traffic snarls and plans for two-lane underpasses to ease the flow of traffic on Kapiolani Boulevard and other thoroughfares.



The Cayetano plan would also feature a 2.2-mile, two-lane extension of the double-decked segment of Nimitz Highway, and would route express buses along a newly created dedicated bus shoulder lane on Moanalua Freeway.

Cayetano estimates his plan, dubbed Flexible Affordable Smart Transportation, or FAST, would cost \$1.1 billion, or about one-fifth the cost of the Honolulu rail transit project, and be largely completed within four years.

"Unlike heavy rail, which will take 10 or more years to complete, Honolulu commuters will see traffic congestion reduced by our FAST program within six months," Cayetano said.

Cayetano is running for mayor, and promises to halt the city's \$5.26 billion rail transit project if elected.

He has told audiences during the campaign that he favors a Bus Rapid Transit alternative to rail, and his FAST proposal includes specific new traffic fixes that are designed to appeal to Leeward and Central Oahu communities

that would not be directly served by the planned 20-mile rail line.



Ben Cayetano:
The mayoral candidate said his plan would be done within four years

The Cayetano camp estimates his package will reduce the average Oahu peak commute time from Kapolei to Honolulu to 25 minutes from 29 minutes.

Cayetano's opponent, former city Managing Director Kirk Caldwell, attacked the Cayetano plan as a "last-minute, half-baked plan that is driven more by politics than by trying to solve Honolulu's serious traffic congestion."

The Cayetano transportation package calls for eight Bus Rapid Transit routes including the existing Route C County Express. The new routes would use the existing eastbound Zipper Lane and the already-planned westbound Zipper Lane to speed express bus service to Wahiawa, Mililani, Ewa, Kapolei and Waipahu.

An additional BRT route would circulate from Aloha Stadium to downtown, and a "College Express" route would loop between the University of Hawaii at Manoa, Honolulu Community College and Hawaii Pacific University downtown.

That plan would require about 36 new city buses, Cayetano said, and his BRT plan eventually calls for dedicating one lane each on Beretania and King streets for buses. Other vehicles would be allowed to use the lane to make right turns.

Other pieces of the Cayetano plan call for constructing a two-lane viaduct above Nimitz Highway from the H-1 freeway at Middle Street to an area near the Hilo Hattie store. That project was considered years ago by the state Department of Transportation but was shelved in 1997 because of community opposition.

The Cayetano plan also calls for underpasses to be constructed at selected intersections on Kapiolani Boulevard, Beretania Street, Kalakaua Avenue and Ala Moana Boulevard at Alakea Street to push traffic more quickly through those areas.

Cayetano's FAST plan also proposes contra-flow lanes on King and Dillingham streets to speed traffic during the morning and afternoon rush hours, and improving synchronization of traffic lights to reduce traffic tie-ups and give priority to buses.

Because BRT is now considered by federal officials to be a fixed-guideway type of transit system, money generated by the half-percent excise tax surcharge could go toward funding it, Cayetano said. The rest of the surcharge revenues could then possibly be used for other city or state needs.

Besides cost, the former governor said, FAST is superior to the rail system in that it would be much easier to tinker with if necessary.

"We have an opportunity, I think, to deal with our transportation problems and maintain the beauty of our city," he said.

Wayne Yoshioka, director of the city Department of Transportation Services, said the city is already working on a number of the solutions proposed by Cayetano, including upgrades in the systems used to optimize traffic signals to ease the flow of traffic.

As for the Bus Rapid Transit solution Cayetano is proposing, "a lot of the elements in here were evaluated previously in the BRT study, so they contain the same issues that were in the BRT studies that essentially led to BRT not being adopted," Yoshioka said.

One major sticking point with the BRT proposal is the planned conversion of lanes on Beretania and King streets into dedicated bus lanes. "That proved to be very, very unpopular with most of the public" because it reduces the space available for other vehicular traffic, Yoshioka said.

Yoshioka said the extension of a two-lane viaduct or "flyover" above Nimitz Highway is a good idea but was never completed because of cost. He also agreed with Cayetano's proposals to promote telework and flextime to ease peak commuting times, but said those plans would have a small impact.

Yoshioka is a longtime supporter of the city rail project.

Caldwell, Cayetano's opponent in the mayor's race, issued a written statement warning that "cheaper is not better."

"Ben's BRT plan simply does not have the capacity, reliability and safety of an elevated rail system," Caldwell said in his statement. "A single two-car train holds about the same number of passengers as more than five buses."

He added, "This BRT proposal appears to be nothing more than a Band-Aid approach that does nothing to alleviate traffic from Central and West Oahu and adds congestion to our main thoroughfares in downtown Honolulu."

Caldwell also pointed out that BRT would have to start over with new environmental studies and public vetting that has already been done for rail.

"Rail has already gone through the federal environmental impact study process, the public voted for it, the financial plan is in place and the work has begun. Why start all over again?" he asked.

Meanwhile, Honolulu Mayor Peter Carlisle and City Council Chairman Ernie Martin said that during their recent visit to Washington, D.C., federal transit officials warned that any significant shift from the current plan, including a switch to a BRT project, would seriously jeopardize any possible funding.

"If we have a pro-rail candidate who is elected mayor, we will get \$1.55 billion in federal funding, to a degree of certainty," Carlisle said. "On the other hand, if we have an anti-rail candidate who is elected mayor, then that certainty evaporates."

Switching to BRT would require a new environmental impact statement, he said.

Carlisle said the BRT plan would put people out of work and hurt the local economy.

Martin said FTA Administrator Peter Rogoff told city officials "the federal government would seek recovery of some of the funds we've already spent."

Major features of the FAST plan announced by former Gov. Ben Cayetano include:

» New Bus Rapid Transit express routes for Ewa, Kapolei, Waipahu, Mililani and Wahiawa, while continuing the existing Route C County Express route. There would be eight express bus systems, including some such as the C route that already exist.

A new express route from Aloha Stadium would run on a dedicated shoulder lane of Moanalua Freeway, exiting onto King Street and traveling to Maunakea and Hotel streets and Vineyard Boulevard before heading back. Cars would be allowed to use the shoulder lane only to exit. Buses in the BRT system would benefit from the morning Zipper Lane and the already-planned afternoon Zipper Lane.

Another BRT route incorporated into the Cayetano plan would be the "College Express," which would run in a loop from the University of Hawaii at Manoa along Beretania Street to Hawaii Community College and then loop back to the downtown area to Hawaii Pacific University.

The Cayetano plan also calls for the bus system to adopt new high-tech cards or passes that will require passengers to pay before they board. That is expected to speed the loading of buses.

» The city would construct two-lane underpasses on Kapiolani Boulevard at McCully Street and Date Street that would allow one lane in each direction to travel under the intersection. Similar underpasses would be constructed at Kalakaua Avenue at Kapiolani, and on Beretania at McCully. The plan also proposes an underpass on Nimitz Highway at Alakea Street and Halekauwila Street.

» The plan features a new 2.2-mile, two-lane "flyover" or extension of the H-1 freeway above Nimitz Highway that would extend from above Middle Street to an area near the Hilo Hattie store to be built by 2018.

The two lanes of that new viaduct from the freeway would be reversible, flowing eastbound in the morning to ease traffic into the downtown area, and switching to westbound during the afternoon rush hour to funnel traffic from Nimitz to the freeway. That piece of FAST had already been planned by the state Department of Transportation but was shelved, according to Cayetano campaign staff.

» Cayetano also wants to add contra-flow lanes on King Street and Dillingham, and do what is described as relatively minor construction to make King a six-lane thoroughfare from Middle Street to Liliha Street. King Street today narrows to four lanes in some places along that stretch, but that can be remedied by moving utilities and making other fixes that do not involve removing any buildings.

Contra-flow lanes would then be established on King Street along with another contra-flow lane on Dillingham Boulevard that would be similar to the contra-flow lanes on Kapiolani Boulevard, which would help the flow of traffic toward downtown in the morning.

Cayetano said those fixes and the new Nimitz "flyover" can add as much as 55 percent additional eastbound traffic capacity in the morning and as much as 60 percent westbound capacity in the afternoon.

» The plan would also involve island wide traffic signal synchronization and traffic management, including a system that would use cameras to allow workers to manually monitor troublesome intersections and adjust lights to help clear the intersections when traffic backs up.

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