



28 December 2007

Honorable Mufi Hannemann
Mayor, City and County of Honolulu
530 S. King Street
Honolulu, Hawaii 96813

SUBJECT: Honolulu High-Capacity Transit Corridor Project

Dear Mayor Hannemann:

As I'm sure you are aware, the American Institute of Architects Honolulu Chapter (AIA Honolulu) supports Honolulu's proposed High-Capacity Transit Corridor Project and we applaud your efforts in championing the development of this system.

We are however deeply concerned about the shape of the system and potential adverse affects to our beautiful island. The recently published Request For Information To Suppliers Of Fixed Guideway Vehicles (RFI-001) by the City and County of Honolulu (City) requires system characteristics of "High Floor" and "Third Rail or equivalent collection (no Overhead Contact System)," which are characteristics only of elevated systems. Thus, the City is precluding an at-grade option.

AIA Honolulu joins many other community groups in our sentiment that an elevated guideway will create a blight, particularly in our urban environments, and will obstruct otherwise protected mauka/makai view corridors. Not only are elevated alignments the most invasive of the technology options, they are a far more expensive option than at-grade systems. This is clearly evidenced by the fact that of all the fixed transit system mileage built in the U.S. in the past ten years, less than 10% are elevated.

Furthermore, the potential for successful Transit Oriented Development (TOD) is significantly better with an at-grade system. For instance, at the City's TOD Community Workshop on July 14, 2007, virtually all the systems shown in the visual presentations were at-grade. And according to the City's TOD guest speaker, Debbie Bischoff, Senior Planner with the Portland Bureau of Planning, "At-grade works best for TOD."

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Enormously costly examples to remove overhead transit structures previously separating downtown areas from the waterfront, such as San Francisco's Embarcadero and Boston's Central Artery, demonstrate that we must build the project right the first time. As noted in the Washington Post regarding Boston's Central Artery: "Almost as soon as the ribbon was cut on the elevated highway in 1959, many were already wishing it away."

According to comments made by the City's transportation consultants, the decision to design an elevated system was mandated by the City and was not the result of the recommendations of industry experts.

We implore you to open the technology options to include at-grade light rail, for the benefit of a higher quality of life for our island and its future.

Sincerely,
AIA HONOLULU

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'P. Vincent', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Peter N. Vincent, AIA, NCARB
2007 AIA Honolulu President/AIA Honolulu Transit Committee Chair

cc: Congressman Neil Abercrombie
Honolulu City Council
Toru Hamayasu, Department of Transportation Services
Mark Stewart, PB Americas
David Arakawa, Land Use Research Foundation of Hawaii
David Miller, AIA, Urban Land Institute
John Whalen, FAICP, American Planning Association
Mary Steiner, The Outdoor Circle
Sidney Char, AIA, AIA Honolulu
John Fullmer, AIA, AIA Hawaii State Council
Amy Blagriff, AIA Honolulu