

The significance of the phrase, "Traffic congestion with rail will be worse than it is today" and why City officials have tried their best to avoid saying it.

Last Wednesday, the City Council held an informational hearing on the Final EIS for the rail project. During our testimony we remarked that after five years of trying to get Director Yoshioka to say it, finally he had responded to our Draft EIS comments by writing in the Final EIS, "You are correct in pointing out that traffic congestion will be worse in the future with rail than what it is today without rail." (We call these the magic words).

We further commented that the FTA must have waterboarded the Director to get him to say that; anything less would have been insufficient to pry it out of him. When it was Yoshioka's turn to testify and was questioned by Councilmember Kobayashi, he did not want to even admit to the existence of the magic words that are now enshrined in the Final EIS over his signature. He danced his famed Yoshioka two-step all around the issue and never addressed it.

Since then the Mayor has gone into overdrive to obfuscate the issue. Director Yoshioka, in Doug Carlson's Yes2Rail blog responded sarcastically, "No kidding, in the future, traffic congestion will be greater than it is today. I don't think that is any earth shattering news."

However, what Yoshioka will say in a blog is totally different from what he will say on a broadly seen medium like television.

Over the years Mayor Hannemann and his staff and the Parsons Brinckerhoff people have stoutly fended off all attempts to get them to use the magic words. Here are three examples of the extremes they will go to in the 2008 Mayoral debate, the pre-election KHVH debate, and a public hearing at the Blaisdell Hall.

During the 2008 Hawaii Theater mayoral debate, Dr. Panos Prevedouros posed the question to Mayor Hannemann, "Tell the audience, yes or no, will traffic congestion with rail in the future be worse than it is today?" The Mayor danced all around the subject but would not admit it.

On November 3, 2008, the day before the 2008 rail referendum, KHVH's Rick Hamada hosted a two-hour panel to discuss the rail issue. The panelists were:

- Cliff Slater, Chair, Honolulutraffic.com
- Mike Schneider, President, InfraConsult LLC, which provides management oversight of the rail project, and was formerly Executive Vice President of Parsons Brinckerhoff.
- Wayne Yoshioka, Director of the City Department of Transportation Services and formerly a local manager for Parsons Brinckerhoff.
- Dr. Panos Prevedouros, UH Professor of Civil and Environmental Engineering.

Following is a transcript of a four minute segment of the program. [Click for audio](#) to check the accuracy:

Cliff: "Mike, are you saying that while traffic congestion with rail in the future will be worse than it is today, it will be less worse than it would be if we did not have the rail line."

Mike: "Of course, that is exactly what I am saying."

Cliff: "But the point is that 73 percent of the people in Hawaii as polled by the Advertiser believed that by building rail we would reduce traffic congestion and reduce their commute time."

Mike: "It clearly will reduce their commute time. There is no question that those who take the rail will have a reduced commute time."

Cliff: "Oh, no. They are talking about traffic; traffic congestion. "

Wayne: "Cliff, I think you are talking about traffic congestion. Look at the traffic congestion. *[The Director then rolls into his famed Yoshioka two-step trying to get off the subject. Please work your way through it so you will understand what we have to go through.]* We are saying that ... Well, originally in the Alternatives Analysis we were projecting a 11 percent reduction in traffic congestion. Now, In the DEIS that is now up to 21-22 percent. Over twice what we had projected. Because again, the DEIS was more accurate. Well, originally in the Alternatives Analysis we were projecting an 11 percent reduction in traffic congestion. Now, In the DEIS that is now up to 21-22 percent. Over twice what we had projected. Because again, the DEIS is much more detailed in its scope and was able to identify the true (sic) more accurately what the benefits would be. Now the point is that this 20-21-22 percent of reduction in congestion is double what you see when schools are not in session. And the point is that, yea, you may have congestion but there are different kinds of congestion. The kind of congestion that drives us mad is when it takes us 15 minutes to move two blocks. That would drive anyone up the wall, and that's the kind of congestion you are looking at when you are talking about gridlock without doing anything about the future. Whereas, again, if the congestion is there, but it moves in a reasonable manner, most people are OK with that. And that is exactly what we are saying, your choice is between absolute gridlock and it just takes an inordinate amount of time to move a short distance or congestion that actually flows to some extent and is reasonable for peak hour conditions. If you look at what is happening now, for example, is a good indicator. Before, growing up here, I remember it used to be it used to be only peak hours used to be really congested. Now, Saturdays are congested, Sundays are congested all times of the day are congested. It is getting to that point that if you allow this to continue without providing an alternative, what you going to get is to get to that gridlock point and we are trying to avoid that."

Cliff: "I wouldn't argue that point but I am just coming back to the thing that the public has a different take of what is going to happen with traffic congestion in the future than you do or we do. We in the room here all understand that traffic congestion is going to get worse with rail in the future. That is not what the public understands. The public thinks that traffic today — today's unendurable traffic congestion going from here out to Kapolei — will be reduced from today's levels once rail goes in. That's what they believe. We don't believe it — you and I don't believe that. But on the other hand that is what the general public believes."

Wayne: "What the public is asking for ... the public is asking for is some kind of relief and I think that the only realistic relief they can expect is through the rail system as opposed to putting more cars, more buses on the already jammed street system. That is not going to give them the relief."

The third example was at a City hearing on rail in 2008 at the Blaisdell Exhibition Hall where a number of us briefly took over the meeting. We said that we would sit down quietly if the City staff or Parsons Brinckerhoff would admit 'the magic words.' I personally asked Mark Scheibe, PB's #2 in Hawaii, to admit it but he would not say the words. It started to get a little heated and then City employee Joe Magaldi laid hands on Dennis Callan, one of our members, and we gave up concerned that matters were getting out of hand.

The reason they do not want to admit it is that the great majority of folks living in the Ewa plain have been led to believe by the City that rail transit will relieve traffic congestion and it will be less in the future than it is today. We believe this misinformation is the major underpinning of the support for rail.