

WAIKIKI AREA RESIDENTS ASSOCIATION

444 Nahua Street, Penthouse 9

Honolulu, HI 96815

Phone 922-6188

March 28, 2008

Mr. Henry Eng, Director  
Department of Planning and Permitting  
City and County of Honolulu  
650 South King St.  
Honolulu, HI 96813

Subj: **WRA OPPOSITION TO RAIL**

Dear Mr. Eng,

This letter responds to your March 7, 2008 request for review and comment concerning the Public Infrastructure Map Revision for the Honolulu High-Capacity Transit Corridor Project (2008/PIM-1).

The Waikiki Area Residents Association (WRA) opposes the proposed rail system in its entirety. Our reasons fall generally in the area of ineffectiveness, extreme cost, and environmental consequences – social, physical, and economic. Those same reasons apply to any planned rail spur into Waikiki. The planned spur promises to harm Hawaii's premier tourism resource.

Our specific comments concerning the proposed Waikiki spur are attached. Thank you for this opportunity to comment on this project.

Sincerely,



Robert R. Kessler  
Chair, Board of Directors  
Waikiki Area Residents Association

Cc:

Councilmember Charles Djou  
Robert Finley, Chair, NB9  
Rick Egged, Waikiki Improvement Association  
Representative Tom Brower  
Senator Gordon Trimble

# WAIKIKI AREA RESIDENTS ASSOCIATION

## COMMUNITY CONCERNS ADDRESSING THE SIGNIFICANT IMPACTS OF THE PUBLIC INFRASTRUCTURE MAP REVISION FOR THE HONOLULU HIGH-CAPACITY TRANSPORTATION CORRIDOR PROJECT (2008/PIM-1) MARCH 28, 2008

**Hawai'i, our home, as described on the Hawaii Visitors and Convention Bureau Web Site, gohawaii.com:**

*“The fresh, floral air energizes you. The warm, tranquil waters refresh you. The breathtaking, natural beauty renews you. Look around. There’s no place on earth like Hawaii.*

*Whether you’re a new visitor or returning, our six unique islands offer distinct experiences that will entice any traveler. We warmly invite you to explore our islands and discover your ideal travel experience.*

*Step off the plane and it's as if the volume on your senses has been turned up. Smell the fresh plumeria in the air. See sapphire seas, emerald valleys, and halos of rainbow arches. Feel the warm radiance of the sun on your cheeks while a cool rush of ocean water sucks the sand from between your toes.*

*It's no secret that the Islands of Aloha are a scenic paradise for the senses, but an exploration of the rich cultural history of the Hawaiian people makes your first visit to the islands even richer. With so much to experience, you'll find the warm embrace of Hawaii waiting for you on your second visit and beyond.”*

**The ill-planned industrial elevated rail guideway will change the landscape of Honolulu forever. Since the far-reaching costs will far outweigh any benefits of building the system, the Waikiki Area Residents Association strongly opposes the elevated guideway system as presently planned, and therefore objects to the proposed revision to the Ewa, Central Oahu and Primary Urban Center Public Infrastructure Maps for the following reasons:**

### **I. A PERMANENT BLIGHT ON OUR ISLAND LANDSCAPE**

*“The breathtaking, natural beauty renews you. Look around. There’s no place on earth like Hawaii... See sapphire seas, emerald valleys, and halos of rainbow arches... It's no secret that the Islands of Aloha are a scenic paradise for the senses ...an exploration of the rich cultural history of the Hawaiian people makes your first visit to the islands even richer.”*

**The concrete elevated rail guideway is proposed to slice through some of Oahu’s most scenic areas and across the historic Honolulu Waterfront.** The monolithic structure threatens a significant visual blight on the landscape from the Honolulu Waterfront to Waikiki. The elevated track is planned to bisect the historic sites of Aloha Tower, Irwin Park and the Dillingham Transportation Building along the Honolulu Waterfront, and the new Kaka’ako

## WAIKIKI AREA RESIDENTS ASSOCIATION

Mauka neighborhoods recently adopted in a community-based master plan. The snaking elevated guideway must then rise upgrade to the top of Ala Moana Center then arch downward before again leaping **80 feet above H-1 freeway into the Manoa campus. An alternate spur is planned to slice through the Waikiki skyline, sacrificing views and a struggling Hawaiian sense of place with a noisy, unsightly train.** The concrete elevated rail guideway will be akin to the **Embarcadero Freeway**, the infamous eyesore that blighted the San Francisco waterfront for decades and was finally demolished.

## II. UNENDING NOISE POLLUTION

*“Step off the plane and it's as if the volume on your senses has been turned up.”*

Visitors arrive in Hawaii expecting a relaxing and peaceful tropical cultural experience. While the Waikiki environment already offers sirens, car alarms, back-up beepers, loud motorcycles, and other noise sources, **adding a steel-on-steel rail system will measurably increase existing noise pollution at frequent intervals.** The 75-decibel volume value common to today's steel-on-steel technology is the equivalent of being within 50 feet of a weed whacker and 5 feet of a loud vacuum cleaner. Already at an alarming noise level, the steel-on-steel wheels and rails will also create a high discomfort level in Waikiki with the characteristic **high-frequency sound of metal squealing and screeching around curves and during stops.** In Waikiki the sounds emitted from the elevated guideway - whether steel-on-steel, rubber tire on concrete or any other technology - will be reflected and amplified throughout the high building corridors along Kuhio Avenue, mauka to the Ala Wai residential area, and makai through the resort area.

*“Whether you're a new visitor or returning, our . . . unique islands offer distinct experiences that will entice any traveler.”*

This additional noise pollution will require Waikiki visitors and residents to resort to a closed, air conditioned room to assure a quiet night's sleep. Of equal importance is peaceful day-time enjoyment for visitors and residents who wish to sunbathe and listen to the waves on the beach during a well-earned vacation or after a long week of work. Guests in hotels immediately adjacent to rail tracks in Waikiki may be disrupted to the point of changing their quarters, as they did during previous projects involving pile-driving, or ultimately never returning. Clearly, this plan is the antithesis of enhancing the Hawaiian experience for visitors and residents alike.

## III. THE TRAIN = EXACERBATED WAIKIKI TRAFFIC CONGESTION

*“...explore our islands and discover your ideal travel experience.”*

Kuhio Avenue is one of only three east-west thoroughfares in Waikiki, and the only one that is bi-directional. It also is one of two main arteries serving a majority of Waikiki's residents.

## WAIKIKI AREA RESIDENTS ASSOCIATION

The previous City Administration removed four traffic lanes from Waikiki; one each from Kalakaua and Ala Wai Boulevard, and two lanes from Kuhio Avenue. **This ill-devised maneuver reduced vehicle carrying capacity in Waikiki by nearly 30%.** In addition, remaining lanes on Kuhio were reduced in width, creating acute traffic hazards requiring remedy. Even now, when large buses and trucks pass each other going in opposite directions, mirror to mirror clearance does not meet Federal safety standards. In addition, Kalakaua Avenue is closed for community events approximately 50 to 70 times annually, e.g., eight (8) street closures in March 2008, and each closure requires that **all 6 Diamondhead bound traffic lanes use Kuhio Avenue during the closure.**

**Emergency response vehicles (police, fire equipment, ambulances) use Kuhio Avenue approximately 10-15 times per day on response calls,** and the presence of the overhead train system's infrastructure along Kuhio Avenue will compound the **adverse effect on the route options available to emergency response vehicles. The overhead train system's infrastructure will further reduce vehicular carrying capacity along Kuhio Avenue, impeding traffic flow for freight delivery, The Bus, trolleys, limousines and taxis, and tour buses.** The resulting increased traffic congestion will disrupt the flow of goods – and customers - to businesses and hotels throughout Waikiki, particularly along the Kuhio corridor.

**Thus, the traffic congestion the rail system is supposed to mitigate will actually be aggravated by the rail system's construction and implementation, with all of the consequences for increased fuel consumption, constrained emergency vehicle access and egress, and economic harm to the neighborhood.**

## IV. COMPROMISED SAFETY AND CONVENIENCE

*"We warmly invite you to explore our islands and discover your ideal travel experience."*

The two train stops planned in Waikiki **are not conveniently positioned for most hotels.** Some rail communities (e.g., Fruitvale and Portland) have experienced increases in assaults and other crime in locales adjacent to train stations. This will require **additional police or other security personnel, adding to system operating costs.**

Passengers en route to most hotels, condotels and condominiums will be forced either to walk or transfer to another transportation mode. However, other transportation modes will be affected by the additional street congestion and impediments created by the presence of the rail system. In addition, those entering and exiting Waikiki by other transportation modes will encounter the same street congestion, particularly en route to destinations along the Kuhio corridor.

*"With so much to experience, you'll find the warm embrace of Hawaii waiting for you on your second visit and beyond."*

We in Waikiki are acutely aware of the possibility of power failures, seismic activity, tsunamis, hurricanes or other emergencies which might disrupt train operations or damage train

## WAIKIKI AREA RESIDENTS ASSOCIATION

infrastructure. Medical emergencies pose similar problems. **Emergency evacuation of passengers from elevated train cars (some as high as 80 feet in the air) will be hazardous, and will complicate the duties of emergency responders.** And further transporting patients by ambulance will be hindered by the chronic street congestion induced by the elevated train infrastructure.

*“Feel the warm radiance of the sun on your cheeks . . .”*

Significantly, the planned Waikiki spur will effectively block out sunlight on Kuhio Avenue, adversely affecting Kuhio Avenue’s thriving vegetation, and producing at street level **a dark, barren corridor. Crime, graffiti and illicit activities are known to thrive in this type of contained and covered environment. Transit Oriented Development will soon become Transit Oriented Blight.**

## V. CARRYING CAPACITY AND OUR ENVIRONMENT

*“Whether you’re a new visitor or returning, our . . . unique islands offer distinct experiences that will entice any traveler.”*

We already have seen the fragility of the existing power grid when a seismic event on the Big Island cascaded into a statewide power failure. The proposed rail system will operate on electrical power and will impact on the entire island’s finite power grid. **Additional electrical generation capacity, consuming additional fossil fuels and emitting more air pollution, will be required.**

*“The fresh, floral air energizes you. The warm, tranquil waters refresh you... Smell the fresh plumeria in the air... while a cool rush of ocean water sucks the sand from between your toes.”*

It is projected that there will be a train every 90 seconds during the peak periods, and ensuing **vibrations will impact aged sewers, water mains, and adjoining structures.** Sewer, electrical, and water supply infrastructure – particularly those infrastructure systems of advanced age – may be damaged by the constant vibration. Waikiki is already famous for a major sewage spill migrating to the beaches from the Ala Wai Canal.

Rail vibrations apply not only to public sewer and water infrastructure, but equally to the plumbing and power infrastructure within older structures in the community. The empirical experiences with previous projects involving pile driving serve as vivid examples. Rail vibration could also impact the several medical clinics present in Waikiki. For example, Lasik labs, electron microscope and other procedures that are very sensitive to vibrations may not function properly if located within several hundred feet.

WAIKIKI AREA RESIDENTS ASSOCIATION

## **VI. COMMUNITY CONSENSUS IS MISSING**

**No documented community consensus exists on a preferred type of transit system. Indeed, no community consensus exists on the need for any fixed guideway system of any type. Less costly, more effective alternatives have been actively ignored by the City.**

**We urge the City Administration and City Council to put the elevated rail guideway issue on the November 2008 General Election ballot for the voters to decide.**



**Robert R. Kessler, President  
WAIKIKI AREA RESIDENTS ASSOCIATION  
444 Nahua Street, Penthouse 9  
Honolulu, HI 96815**

**Louis Erteschick, Vice President  
Anne V. Stevens, Secretary  
Bert Benevento, Director  
Helen Carroll, Director  
Raymond Gruntz, Director  
Michelle S. Matson, Director  
Laura Millman, Director  
Reg White, Director**