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SEEKING COST-EFFECTIVE SOLUTIONS TO TRAFFIC CONGESTION

April 4, 2007

## WHY WE ARE HERE:

The primary reason for our protest is that the Oahu Metropolitan Planning Organization has failed to follow the federal regulations concerning metropolitan planning processes.

“The planning regulations require that the metropolitan transportation planning process include a proactive public involvement process that provides complete information, timely public notice, reasonable public access to key decisions, and supports early and continuing involvement of the public in developing plans and TIPs.”

<http://www.fta.dot.gov/FY2007TriReview/11planning.htm#Q6>

- **First**, there has been no attempt by OMPO staff to practice “proactive public involvement” as required by regulation. *Involvement* is a word that has a far stronger meaning than mere notification, or of the public having the ability to comment on draft documents. To charge someone with involvement in a crime can lead to a death sentence; that is the level of participation that *involvement* means. The American Heritage Dictionary describes it as, “To engage as a participant; to connect closely.” It comes from the Latin for *enwrap*, to make part of, to be a participant. In short, to be involved is to be part of the process. It is an understatement to say that we have never, at any time, been *involved* in the process.

For example, we have never been able to get a clear answer as to how OMPO arrived at the projected cost of the Managed Lanes (HOT lanes) Alternative.

Posted on [www.honolulutraffic.com/Slater-Lum.pdf](http://www.honolulutraffic.com/Slater-Lum.pdf) are two letters from Hawaii’s Office of Information Practices (OIP), describing our failed attempts to get at the assumptions being made for the ORTP rail transit ridership modeling. If these are examples of *pro-active public involvement*, we must be speaking a different language.

- **Second**, while our members submitted comments on the Draft 2030 Oahu Regional Transportation Plan (ORTP) and the Modification to it in March and April of 2006, OMPO has yet to respond to them.
- **Third**, there were significant changes made to the Draft ORTP after it was circulated to the public. We had no opportunity to comment on them.

The final ORTP was not posted on the OMPO website main page until March 2007. The text of the final ORTP, after staff editorial changes, differs markedly from what was presented to the public and also, assumedly, approved by the OMPO Policy Committee. The following are examples of changes that we would have liked to comment on:

1. “We will also not be able to eliminate congestion by building more highways, for we do not have the resources to keep up with the demand.” ORTP 2030 p. 4.

We would have disputed that statement since the rail/bus system, according to the ORTP 2030 (p. 6) will need \$5.62 billion in operating costs while highways would only need \$532 million for operating costs in the same period. Further, toll roads normally pay for themselves.

2. With rail the “... the transit mode share is projected to increase from 5.7% to 8.9%,” ORTP 2030. p. 7.

We would also have disputed this forecast since no metro area in the U.S. has had a 56 percent increase in market share during any 20-year period. In fact, none have had any increase, let alone 56 percent.

- **Fourth**, we object to the lack of clear unambiguous statements in the ORTP process.

At no time does the ORTP make it clear to the public that its own data shows *that highway traffic congestion will be far worse in the future — even with rail transit in operation*. This most important fact is just one instance where OMPO does not give “complete information” but rather uses the ORTP as a selling document — one that tells its readers only the advantages of a project, not its flaws.

There is no discussion of the urban blight in residential areas caused by noisy elevated steel-wheel on steel rail heavy rail transit. It is an important fact since many communities have torn down their elevated highways and rail lines because of the blight it caused.



View from under the Varsity Theater rail station looking makai. The column widths are well understated a rail line 60 feet above ground. (City rendering)



View along Nimitz from Smith St. looking Diamond Head (AIA, Hawaii Chapter rendering)

- **Fifth**, the paucity of information in the ORTP pamphlet is deplorable, especially considering that between consultants and staff, total costs were well in excess of a million dollars. Exclusive of the project listing section, the final ORTP consists of 14 pages. In comparison, the Kansas City RTP is well over 300 pages and is replete with vital information.

## SUMMARY

The plan process is highly political that it insufficiently *involves* the public, is designed to obfuscate the real problems, and downplay the disadvantages of the solutions offered. In short, it is the same process used to grow mushrooms; keep them in the dark with an occasional sprinkling of bull manure. We have had enough of it.