

Dumb and Dumber: Why Honolulu Should Abandon Rail

It's dumb to ditch a half-built rail project after spending \$4 billion. It's even dumber to spend another \$6 billion to \$9 billion for slight traffic improvement and serious environmental harm.

By [Randall Roth](#) [Cliff Slater](#) / April 27, 2017

Forget all the exaggerations, the spin, the incompetence, and the mismanagement that got us to where we are today. Never mind all that, it is water under the bridge. The future of Honolulu's rail project comes down to:

We are where we are.

And where we are is that if we did the totally unthinkable and shut down the whole thing and sold the assets for what they would fetch, we would be out \$4 billion and have a worthless half-built rail line on our hands. That is a totally ridiculous idea and you may not think there could be a dumber way to deal with the rail problem.

But we can, and that is it would be even dumber to build it all the way out to Ala Moana Center at a total cost of about \$10 to \$13 billion.

Here's why:

The city claims that traffic congestion will increase by 23 percent by the year 2030 if we don't build rail, or by 21 percent if we do build rail. So by spending another \$6 billion to \$9 billion traffic can be reduced by two percent.

The following table 3-12 is from the Final Environmental Impact Statement:

Table 3-12 Islandwide Daily Trips by Mode—Existing Conditions, No Build Alternative, and Project

Trips by Mode	2007 Existing Conditions		2030 No Build Alternative		2030 Project	
	Daily Trips by Mode	Percentage of Total Daily Trips	Daily Trips by Mode	Percentage of Total Daily Trips	Daily Trips by Mode	Percentage of Total Daily Trips
Residents	Base		+23%		+21%	
Automobile—private	2,291,800	82.1%	2,815,800	81.5%	2,767,600	80.1%
Transit	166,400	6.0%	205,400	5.9%	255,500	7.4%
Bicycle and walk	333,000	11.9%	432,800	12.5%	431,700	12.5%
Total Daily Trips by Residents	2,791,200	100%	3,454,000	100%	3,454,800	100%

But that two percent depends on achieving the City's rail ridership projection of 116,000 riders daily. We demonstrated in our [recent commentary](#) that rail ridership would be, at most, half of that forecast.

So rail's net effect on traffic congestion would be half of the supposed 2 percent benefit, or a 1 percent difference. Now, we ask you, who is going to be able tell the difference?

The city tells us that rail can be taken all the way to Ala Moana Center for \$10 billion. Panos Prevedouros, chairman of the University of Hawaii Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering, forecasts \$13 billion.

If you believe the city, that additional cost of not stopping now would be \$6 billion. If you believe Dr. Prevedouros, it would be \$9 billion. All to get a 1 percent traffic reduction?

There are no other benefits. In fact, there are disbenefits.

- The rail would mortally disfigure our city and ruin our waterfront.
- All the express buses would be cancelled as the city has planned.
- The overhead noise of trains passing in each direction would be really annoying.
- The annual out-of-pocket cost of operating the trains would be \$130 million, according to the city.

Citizens, the choice is yours: Dumb or dumber.

It is dumb to be out of pocket \$4 billion and have nothing worthwhile to show for it. It is even dumber to spend another \$6 billion to \$9 billion for a 1 percent improvement in traffic at an annual financial cost of \$130 million and permanent harm to our environment. That's really dumb.

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