

# MidWeek

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## The Truth About Tampa's HOT Lanes

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By Jerry Coffee

Last November, Michael J. Lauck, an experienced light rail planner with the city in the early '90s and currently with a local engineering firm, revealed perhaps more than he intended when he wrote for a local newspaper:

"Those who continue to question whether rail transit will actually reduce traffic congestion still completely and utterly miss the entire point of a rail system on Oahu ... to actually believe that automobile traffic will ever get better on Oahu is to be completely delusional."

Nevertheless, Lauck's bottom line: "For our children's sake, rail must be built."

Well, if children are the issue, how about a transit solution that would actually make traffic "get better," giving parents more time at home with their children instead of being stuck on the highway two hours a day?

In his recent scathing indictment of Tampa's successful HOT lanes alternative, Toru Hamayasu, chief planner for the Honolulu Department of Transportation, exaggerated and sensationalized every possible downside of the project to make rail look good by comparison. But Hamayasu's obvious pro-rail bias and scare tactics were taken to task by Martin Stone, the actual planning director of the Tampa HOT viaduct:

"I am astonished that a Hawaii public official would intentionally misrepresent the facts associated with the cost and operation of our project, and how a similar HOT-lane project might provide true congestion relief for Honolulu at an affordable price. Virtually every statement about our project was either false or based upon partial information."

Stone's "affordable price" would buy the entire 28-mile system at a fraction of the cost of a 20-mile rail system that still leaves people out.

In a November interview, Mayor Hannemann, while defending his "preferred transit alternative" - rail - presented a variety of reasons why rail was the "only sensible alternative." But not once did he cite any evidence that rail would reduce Oahu's traffic congestion. Ending the interview, he summarized, "If you don't agree with the solution I put on the table then come to the table with something else. Don't tell me it's bad ... no, no, no, ... grumble, grumble, grumble ... complain, complain. I want solutions!"

OK, Mr. Mayor, here's *the* solution: dedicated elevated, reversible HOT lanes accommodating hybrid buses, vans and autos.

The entire 28-mile project (Kapolei to Manoa with airport and Waikiki spurs) could be completed in a fraction of the time, at a fraction of the cost (probably under \$1.5 billion vs. \$5 billion), and cut the

Kapolei-Manoa transit time to half of that of a 30-stop train. Simple "Park and Ride" facilities for buses and vans would be far less disruptive than rail stations with the associated development encouraged by rail proponents and developers. Tolls could be automated, and variable, depending upon the time of day (higher during peak times), the type of vehicle (lower for more fuel-efficient vehicles) and passenger load.

The entire system would cost less to operate and maintain, be more flexible in accommodating new transportation technologies, give Oahu's commuters choices and, very importantly, pay for itself.

And consider this: If a bus goes down, the traffic goes around. If a train goes down, the system goes down - Black Tuesday all over again!

Folks, we can't allow ourselves to be railroaded into paying for the mother of all white elephants that will not reduce gridlock. And of all the politicians who are looking to rail for their career "legacy," few will be around when the economy hits the next inevitable down cycle and our taxes have to be increased again to subsidize a feel-good railroad, and we're still bumper to bumper.

Who will be held accountable? Don't let it happen. The HOT option is still open. Call, FAX or e-mail your city councilmember now!

For more advantages of HOT lanes, please go to <http://www.honolulutraffic.com>

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