

"...it (the G.E. tax) is a multistage tax, applied at every level the goods or services are traded until it reaches the final consumer. It is for this reason that the ever so slightest change -- either up or down -- will have a substantial impact on taxpayers. Lowell L. Kalapa 1/23/05 Tax Foundation of Hawaii Weekly Commentary

I hate the traffic, but I feel like I'm getting a heavy sell job on a light rail transit system. It reminds me of the rug dealers in Times Square. Cheap price, high quality, you need it, special deal, this price won't last.

Remember the old saying, if it's too good to be true, it probably is? Well, given the track record of this state with expensive failed "fixes" (van cams, pot hole filling machine, HPDs two way radios, Kapolei's second city, to name a few), the light rail train, the biggest budget buster of all, is likely to fall off the track, too.

But what is true? And who should you believe? The pro-rail camp has their convincing spin and the anti-rail does, too. But, the more spin I hear from politicians on how great this will be, the more I don't want to buy the "rug."

I don't trust politicians whose answer to every problem is a tax hike. Or those who promise our money is safe in a sacred "special fund" for fixing the sewers, roads, or to give hurricane relief, then moves it to the general fund for pay raises for groups that supports them politically.

Good rules of thumb: Follow the money. And, no matter what they say, look at history.

If you feel uninformed and nervous about this huge tax raise (see above) that is intended to fund an unplanned, unproven light rail system, look beyond the State Capitol and Honolulu Hale.

A couple of reasonable voices deserve to be heard over the "we have to have" rail sales pitch: Retired Hawaii businessman, Cliff Slater, spoke out against rail in 1993, and through exhaustive research, has become an eminent expert on rail systems across the country. He has absolutely nothing to gain financially and is pretty much hated by the pro rail people. (His web site is www.honolulutraffic.com). And, lone opposing voice, City Councilman, Charles Djou, who says flatly, to raise the G.E.Tax is obscenely onerous, will hurt the poorest of us the most, our state economy, and that we can't afford the rail system. "The public simply does not have unlimited amounts of money," he says. "Light rail would be wonderful, if money grew on trees."

If I were building a house, I'd draw up some plans, do a cost analysis, then go to the bank and ask for the money. Not the reverse. The plan should come first, the debate on the plan second, and if the public wants it, the tax hike comes last. That's not how our politicians are used to playing "run the state," but it's time they started. They've already jumped the gun and asked for federal funding. Now they have to come up with a complete plan anyway before a dime is sent from Washington. But shouldn't we be talking about other alternatives to rail that don't require a tax increase?

Ask yourself these questions. Then ask your City Council representative and Legislator.

- Will light rail really reduce the number of cars on the road? Or add to it? Statistics in cities nationwide with light rail show the latter. Ridership increases mean nothing if there are still the same number or more cars on the roads.
- Will the rail system service all our communities? What about Windward and Hawaii Kai folks?
- Will the Bus, which has a decreasing ridership, continue to operate? At what cost?
- What about Waikiki? And if the train pulls into Kalakaua Ave., how do you get from there to your final destination? More state subsidized trolleys?
- Will the “transit-supportive” development (envisioned high rise condos) around the train stations draw even more cars to the area?

*Will we be able to pay for it down the road? On Slater’s web site he has a spread sheet that shows a \$2 billion shortfall. (A tax hike for our children and grandchildren?)

*What are all our options for traffic alleviation?

Why buy a “rug” when what we need is a magic carpet? And a genie who will tell us the truth?