

## Vote NO on the Transit Authority question

Vote NO since all that the Authority will do is insulate our elected officials from any accountability for the inevitable cost overruns, ridership shortfalls and traffic congestion that will be caused by rail's construction.

Last December, the Honolulu City Council voted 8-0 to place a proposed City Charter amendment on the ballot. On November 2<sup>nd</sup> the voters of O`ahu will be asked to vote on it. Its passage would lead to the establishment of a public transit authority to govern the activities of the Honolulu Rail Transit Project. The ballot question will read:

"Shall the revised City Charter be amended to create a semi-autonomous public transit authority responsible for the planning, construction, operation, maintenance, and expansion of the City's fixed guideway mass transit system?"

What are the benefits? The City Administration tells us that,

"If established, a transit authority would have the ability to make decisions more quickly because of its singular focus: the success of the rail transit system. An appointed transit authority board would also provide for timely and efficient management of the planning, construction, operation, maintenance, and expansion of the rail transit system, with sound principles and objectives for project delivery."

"The transit authority would manage the rail transit system's budget and fares, and be required to properly maintain the agency's financial status. It would also work hand-in-hand with the City Council for City funding and include the public in crucial issues such as setting fares and adopting a budget, further enhancing transparency and accountability."

What they mean by "make decisions more quickly" is that they will be authorized to bypass many of the safeguards in place to prevent overly quick decisions on eminent domain, bond issues, and large expenditures.

A Transit Authority for "enhancing transparency and accountability"? Now we know they are kidding. In reality, the Transit Authority is to shield elected officials from being accountable. Let's take a detailed look at this so-called accountability.

Last year the Federal Transit Administration released a study, "[Rail Modernization Study Report to Congress](#)," that had been requested by a number of U.S. Senators whose states contained the seven largest transit systems. Together, these agencies "serve more than 80 percent of all rail transit riders."

Below are the seven agencies. Note that they are all either an "Authority," or in the case of San Francisco's BART "District" and New Jersey's Transit "Corporation," they are the same type of

Agency	semi-autonomous public organizations as the "Authorities."
Chicago Transit Authority (CTA)	
Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA)	
Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA)	
New Jersey Transit Corporation (NJ TRANSIT)	
San Francisco Bay Area Rapid Transit District (BART)	
Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority (SEPTA)	
Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA)	

In the aggregate, the Study finds that to bring these systems up to a State of Good Repair (SGR) will cost the nation's taxpayers slightly more than \$50 billion.

FTA's definition of State of Good Repair does not mean "excellent" by any means. FTA has defined the State of Good Repair as 2.5, halfway between "marginal" and "adequate." FTA rated the state of each rail line's assets on a scale of five from the table below:

TERM Condition Rating Scale		
Condition	Ratings	Description
Excellent	5.0 to 4.8	New asset; no visible defects
Good	4.7 to 4.0	Asset showing minimal signs of wear; some (slightly) defective or deteriorated component(s)
Adequate	3.9 to 3.0	Asset has reached its mid-life (condition 3.5); some moderately defective or deteriorated component(s)
Marginal	2.9 to 2.0	Asset reaching or just past the end of its useful life; increasing number of defective or deteriorated component(s) and increasing maintenance needs
Poor	1.9 to 1.0	Asset is past its useful life and is in need of immediate repair or replacement; may have critically damaged component(s)

And how about the, "efficient management of the ... maintenance, and expansion of the rail transit system," that our City Administration promises us? The study tells us,

"FTA found that, while all seven agencies maintain comprehensive asset inventories for capital planning purposes, other asset management practices are lacking. For example, only 1 of 7 uses decision support tools to help conduct "what if" analysis; only 2 of 7 use a rigorous process to help rank and prioritize their investment needs; and only 3 of 7 have committed to conducting comprehensive asset condition assessments on an ongoing basis."

Note that it was the "Authorities" that were responsible for the existing seven rail lines being \$50 billion behind in maintenance.

It is interesting to Google these various agencies with the Authority's name and the word "blame." You will get many newspaper reports as the results of such searches. In each case the Authority is being blamed for the problems; there is not the name of a single elected official to be found.

This is why elected officials want a "Transit Authority." It is to where they will all point their fingers when matters go awry and the "giant sucking sound" is the unexpected hits on the City Budget. It is so that the anonymous officials in the "Transit Authority" take the heat while the elected officials can "tut, tut," on the sidelines.

All that a "Transit Authority" will do is to insulate our elected officials from any accountability for rail in the future. It is known elected officials that need to be held accountable for the misfortunes that will overtake rail, not an appointed board of unknown, unelected, group of the usual suspects.

Do not let our councilmembers hide behind the Authority; vote no on November 2.

Sources:

FTA Study — [http://www.fta.dot.gov/documents/Rail\\_Mod\\_Final\\_Report\\_4-27-09.pdf](http://www.fta.dot.gov/documents/Rail_Mod_Final_Report_4-27-09.pdf)

Council Resolution:

<http://www4.honolulu.gov/docushare/dsweb/Get/Document-95397/RES09-252,%20CD1.pdf>

Honolulu Rail Transit Update email. City and County of Honolulu. October 8, 2010