



Honolulu Star-Bulletin

Gathering Place

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## City glossed over truth about cost of HOT lanes

At the conclusion of the City's Alternatives Analysis<sup>i</sup> process, the City and Parsons Brinckerhoff officials declared that the HOT lanes alternative (also known as Managed Lanes) would not be studied further as they found it too expensive; the two-lane HOT lanes, they said, would cost \$2.6 billion.

To believe that, you would have to believe three things:

First, that each lane-mile of this simple two-lane elevated highway would have to cost, allowing for construction inflation, twice as much as the H-3 freeway, presently the world's most expensive highway since it had to bore two miles of tunnels through the Koolaus.

Second, that the HOT lanes would have to cost as much per mile as the Mayor's proposed rail line, despite the huge five story high, 270 foot long rail stations every mile, each with escalators, elevators and stairs, and despite the cost of electrical power transformer sub-stations every mile, and 50 computer-controlled trains and the steel rails and the heavy copper lines to convey the high electrical load.

Third, you would have to believe that the Tampa Reversible Express Lanes did not get built for \$400 million since there is no way that one can reconcile the costs of similar project in Tampa for \$400 million with a city estimate of \$2.6 billion for our proposal for Honolulu. City officials have done all they can to try minimize this project and have outraged Tampa public officials in the process. In this respect, Dr. Martin Stone, Director of Planning for the Tampa Expressway, said,

“As the public official responsible for planning Tampa's elevated Reversible Express Lanes project, I am astonished that a Hawaiian 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.” (His emphasis).

Panos Prevedouros of the University of Hawaii added that, “the most egregious violation of FTA's rules on alternative specification and analysis was the deliberate under-engineering of the Managed Lanes Alternative to a degree that brings ridicule to prevailing planning and engineering principles.”<sup>ii</sup>

The clincher is that at no time did the City contact the Figg Bridge Co., who designed the Expressway and its construction methodology, the Expressway Authority, the public body responsible for administering the project, or PCL Construction, who built it. Had the city administration sincerely wanted to reconcile the difference between the \$400 million cost of the

Expressway and their \$2.6 billion projection for the Honolulu HOT lanes, they would have done so.

They would have learned, as Figg Bridge tells us, that from their new technology, "We have experienced savings of approximately 40 percent to 50 percent when using precast segmental span-by-span construction in urban settings when compared to segmental balanced cantilever construction."<sup>iii</sup>

Prevedouros and his students have since modeled the HOT lanes proposal and find it the most cost-effective way to reduce traffic congestion.<sup>iv</sup>

The exclusion of the HOT Lanes (Managed Lanes) was for the simple reason that since highways are put out to bid they do not generate campaign contributions. Rail lines, on the other hand, being non-bid, are healthy generators of "funny money."

This behavior is the norm for U.S. city transit officials<sup>v</sup> and is why Dr. John Kain, Chair Emeritus of the Harvard Economics Department and one the nation's leading urban transportation authorities, declared that, "Nearly all, if not all, assessments of rail transit systems have used costly and poorly designed all-bus alternatives to make the proposed rail systems appear better than they are."<sup>vi</sup>

*Cliff Slater is Chair of HONOLULUTRAFFIC.COM where the footnoted version of this opinion piece may be found.*

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i [www.honolulutraffic.com/AAD.pdf](http://www.honolulutraffic.com/AAD.pdf)

ii [www.honolulutraffic.com/NEPAScopingReport.pdf](http://www.honolulutraffic.com/NEPAScopingReport.pdf) p. A-180

iii Personal Communication, CEO, Figg Bridge Company.

iv [www.honolulutraffic.com/UHCS\\_Report41.pdf](http://www.honolulutraffic.com/UHCS_Report41.pdf)

v Wachs, Martin. *How planners lie with numbers*. American Planning Association Journal. Autumn 1989. pp. 476-9.

[http://www.honolulutraffic.com/Wachs\\_3.pdf](http://www.honolulutraffic.com/Wachs_3.pdf)

vi Kain, John F. *The Use of Straw Men in the Economic Evaluation of Rail Transport Projects*. American Economic Review, Vol. 82, No. 2, Papers and Proceedings of the Hundred and Fourth Annual Meeting of the American Economic Association (May, 1992), pp. 487-493. <http://www.honolulutraffic.com/kainrail.pdf>