MidWeek

Comparing Transit Alternatives

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As the final decision on the best transit system for Oahu draws nearer, an objective comparison of the two major alternatives (Rail vs. Elevated, reversible HOV/bus lanes) is very revealing.

Fixed Rail System

* By time of completion, the technology will be obsolete.

* With 26 stations/stops from one end to the other, speed will be only a fraction of the alternative system.

* Even at $4 billion to $5 billion, it will fall short of the original concept, Kapolei to UH, hence lower ridership. That plus escalating costs will make completion later doubtful.

* Minimal flexibility adjusting to varying peak usage times.

* A malfunction (power outage or stalled train) could shut down entire system.

* Incalculable additional costs and delays for contested private property condemnations for stations and parking.

* Disregards established needs and habits of Oahu's commuters; private school drops/pickups, medical appointments, kids lessons/activities, errands, shopping, etc.

* Increased requirement for electrical power plus HECO's commitment to more petroleum-fired generation equals more greenhouse gasses.

* Inevitable delays, cost overruns, high operating costs of train and 26 stations, and ultimately low ridership will likely require more increases in GET, an imminently unfair tax on the majority for the benefit of a tiny minority with - after years of disruption for construction , *no* decrease in traffic congestion.

Elevated Reversible HOV/Express Bus Lanes

* Kapolei to UH with high speed ON/OFF ramps at, for starters, Pearl City/Pearl Harbor/Stadium, Airport/Salt Lake, Ward Avenue (for Downtown/Ala Moana Center), Waikiki - all at half the cost and in half the time of rail.

* Dedicated lanes for modern, articulated, high-speed, hybrid, mostly express (for longer distances, like Kapolei to UH in 25 minutes) buses compatible with existing streets to minimize transfers at destination end; schedule variable with need.

* Dedicated HOV lanes with automated, variable tolls, depending on number of occupants and time of day (highest toll for single occupant at peak traffic).

* Significantly lower maintenance and operating costs which, in any case, could be covered by toll income.

* Responsive to advancing technology in fuel efficiencies of natural gas, biofuels, hydrogen, etc., and developing “autopilot” technology which maintains direction, speed and interval between autos.

* Less vulnerable to “shut downs” with ON/OFF ramps affording bypass of accidents, and access to regular streets and freeways.

* Provides ultimate flexibility for Oahu’s commuters; the freedom of choice to fulfill their specific needs on any given day.

In making our decision, a particular aspect of the recent bridge collapse in Minneapolis is instructive for Oahu’s commuters. A 1999 inspection of the bridge by engineers found that cracks in the bridge were “a major concern.” And yet, all of the $12 million recently secured by Minnesota’s congressional delegation from the federal transportation bill went for “feel-good” projects, including Minneapolis’ “light rail network that has a negligible impact on traffic congestion.” Only 2.8 percent of Minneapolis’ commuters use buses or rail, but these systems get 25 percent of the funding. “None went for bridge repair.”

One wonders how much of Oahu’s transportation infrastructure will suffer as the mayor’s “legacy project “requires the lion’s share of transportation funding into the future.

As expressed in a recent PBS debate - Councilman Gary Okino’s disdain for the ability of Oahu’s voters to grasp the complexity of the alternatives notwithstanding - this isn’t rocket science, folks!

The pros and cons are very easy to understand.

If you agree, please let your city councilperson know immediately in no uncertain terms.

Otherwise, we’ll be carrying water for a huge white elephant well into the future.
