

2ISFO Session 22 – HI Private Sector  
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Congestion:

The other panelists have dealt in detail with the direct costs of congestion but there is also lost opportunity cost which is also important.

There is a limit to geographical area that many businesses can serve because of traffic congestion. They have to limit the area that they can cover to stay competitive in what they charge.

For example, a downtown plumber is not going to make a repair trip to a customer ten miles away because he will not be able to compete with other plumbers who are located close to the customer.

This goes for many in the home repair business such as pool maintenance, appliance repair and carpet cleaners, among many others.

These people set an area within which they calculate they can do business profitably depending, of course, ON THE TRAFFIC.

Let us say that today our plumber limits himself to an area within a radius of four miles. Of course, as traffic gets worse that radius will get smaller.

On the other hand, that radius could get larger if the authorities were to decide that traffic congestion is THE major problem and that then they were to do something about it such as coordinating the traffic lights. Dr.

Prevedouros tells me that this alone could reduce travel times in town by 30 percent.

That would have a profound effect on our plumber's business because now our plumber can travel 5.5 miles in the same amount of time it took him to travel four miles. That doubles the AREA he can cover and be competitive.

This benefits our plumber of course but consumers also gain since there will be more plumbers able to do business where we live and thus there is more competition for our business.

And this principle of reducing traffic congestion and vastly improving business to benefit business people and consumers alike applies one way or another across virtually every business situation.

For example, employees seeking work within 30 minutes of their homes have far more choices among potential workplaces when they can double the

area within which to look. Employers will at the same time enjoy a far greater choice among a much larger pool of applicants.

Reducing traffic congestion would also reduce the significant number of deaths due to emergency vehicles unable to reach people with life threatening problems, for example, heart attacks and aneurisms.

But traffic is not going to get reduced in Honolulu until such time as our governments recognize that a) it is the major transportation problem, and b) something can be done about it.

You all know that in producing an Environmental Impact Statement the most important part of the process is the first one, the *Purpose and Need statement*, which is to say, defining the problem — before you define the solution.

Let me read to you the Need statement in the Draft EIS for the \$5.5 billion rail transit project. It is all in the paragraph heading:

*Need for Transit Improvements*

“There are several needs for transit improvements in the study corridor, etc.” There is nothing in the statement about needing to reduce traffic congestion.

And then, *Purpose of the Project*.

“The purpose of the Honolulu High-Capacity Transit Corridor Project is to provide high-capacity rapid transit in the highly congested east-west transportation corridor ...”

At the end of the paragraph it says,

“... [It] would moderate anticipated traffic congestion in the study corridor.”

Parse that last sentence because what it is saying is that future congestion with rail will be far worse than it is today but not quite as bad as it would be if we did not build rail.

The significance of the *Purpose and Need statement* is that if you improperly define the PROBLEM you are going to arrive at the wrong solution.

The Secretary of Transportation launched in 2006 a “National Strategy to Reduce Congestion on America’s Transportation Network”. Its says:

“Congestion is not a fact of life. It is not a scientific mystery, nor is it an uncontrollable force. Congestion results from poor policy choices and a failure to separate solutions that are effective from those that are not.”

Recently Washington State DOT released a [Congestion Relief Analysis report](#) [abstract only] prepared at the request of the Washington State legislature with a team led by Parsons Brinckerhoff.

The report says that "transit expansion alone is not shown to be effective in reducing total delay." It goes on to say that, "[Congestion] pricing in the form of High Occupancy Toll (HOT) lanes is found to reduce corridor delay and make the corridor operate more efficiently. HOT lanes make corridor travel time more reliable, which benefits everyone, including occasional users."

In summary, our greatest transportation problem is traffic congestion and until we define it as such in our planning documents we are destined to have traffic congestion in the future far worse than it is today.