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## Mayoral errata

Some comments on the Mayor's Sunday op/ed, "We must take a bold step toward rail transit." Star-Bulletin, July 10, 2005.

The Mayor begins with,

"Traffic congestion is killing our quality of life ... we need to tackle the problem now ... rail transit offers the most promising solution."

We know that he knows that rail transit will do little or nothing about traffic congestion. We have shown him the traffic congestion data from other metropolitan areas with rail and so he knows that no area has reduced their traffic congestion by building a rail line. Even Councilmembers Garcia and Okino have admitted,<sup>1</sup> reluctantly, in small group meetings, that rail will do nothing for traffic congestion, but they say, "it will give people a choice."

Then the Mayor says,

"Every Mayor since Neal Blaisdell and at least two governors have advocated some sort of rail system for Oahu."

What about Mayor Eileen Anderson who cancelled one? And have not more governors opposed rail? Governors Burns, Ariyoshi and Cayetano for openers.

The Mayor quotes the House Finance Committee's use of \$245 per family of four annually rather than the Tax Foundation's \$450 as the impact of the ½ percent tax hike. However, divide the \$245 by four and that is \$61 per person. Multiply that by Oahu's 900,000 population and you get \$55 million. That does not even cover the projected operating loss, let alone provide the funds to build the rail line.<sup>2</sup>

So, if the Mayor's \$245 is right he is going to need a two percent hike in the tax to build the rail line. He has to admit that either the \$245 is too low or the half percent is not enough; he cannot have it both ways.

The Mayor then says, "We would have to raise the fuel tax 284 percent" to raise the equivalent of the ½ percent GE tax hike. He omits to say that he is only referring to the city's part of the gas tax and that it would raise the price of gasoline 55¢ a gallon. That is still a scary number, but not as bad as "284 percent."

Then the Mayor says that,

"Some argue that a rail system is unrealistic in a time of declining transit ridership. This is simply not true. The national transit data compiled by the federal government shows that transit ridership increased from 1996, and the rate of increase in transit use outpaced the rate of increase of car users."

— continued on reverse

<sup>1</sup> Garcia at the Chamber of Commerce first forum held 5/26 and Okino at second forum held 6/21.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.honolulutraffic.com/railfunding4.pdf>

We have shown him, and he did not dispute, that the nation's commuters increased 13 million from 1990 to 2000 and that it resulted in 13 million more people in automobiles and a slight decline in those using transit.<sup>3</sup> Honolulu's transit commuters have also declined for the past twenty years despite burgeoning population growth.<sup>4</sup> The numbers the Mayor is discussing is for "boardings," which counts every time a person gets on a transit vehicle — regardless of transfers; we are counting commuters.

For example, the brief national up tick in boardings, 1996-2001,<sup>5</sup> occurred mainly because New York, which is 30 percent of the nation's boardings, changed their policy and allowed pass holders to use both subway and buses for the same price. This move alone generated over half the nation's increase. What happened was that many New Yorkers used to walking the last few blocks to work from the subway, instead took the bus. It changed the people commuting by transit not one iota.

A similar event occurred when Portland instituted a free fare zone for a few blocks in its downtown area and many people and schoolchildren started taking the bus for a few blocks where before they had walked. Again, it resulted in no change in auto drivers, just an up tick in boardings. In any case, since 2001, even the boardings have resumed their decline.

Next the Mayor says that the 12-mile (actually 10-mile) two-lane HOT lanes we have proposed would cost \$2-\$3 billion to construct. Taking a lower than average of these numbers, say \$2.4 billion, that gives us \$200 million a mile, which is absurdly high. The consultants we used for the 2002 Governor's Conference on Reversible Tollways agreed on a cost of up to \$70 million a mile and, in the end, we added \$30 million a mile for unforeseen problems and other cost overruns.<sup>6</sup>

Ask the Mayor where he gets his numbers, especially since he would have us believe that a simple highway, only slightly wider than the rail guideway, would cost one-third more per mile than a rail line with all its trains, rails, together with stations, each with their escalators stairs, and elevators.

He says, "This is the last chance ..." etc. We have been hearing that continually since the 1967 Oahu Transportation Study. If this veto sticks, what chance is there that we will not hear from rail proponents again? None.

At the end, he delves into the absurd, "Imagine an Oahu where people will live, work, shop and play near transit stations ... a rail system could even improve the city and state's credit worthiness." With a \$3.6 billion bond issue?

That last statement tells us he is having Visions; it seems to go with the office.

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.honolulutraffic.com/JTW9000B.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.honolulutraffic.com/honjtw.htm>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.apta.com/research/stats/ridershp/trips.cfm>

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