

The one-page case against rail transit

First, in the whole U.S., since the advent of the “Rail Renaissance” in 1974, [no metropolitan area that has built a rail transit line has succeeded in increasing the percentage of commuters that use public transportation.](#)

The percentage is critically important and here’s why.

In Honolulu today, 8 percent of commuters use public transportation while the vast majority of commuters — 70 percent — drive to work.

If Oahu officials were able to halt the current decline through the use of rail transit, and were able to increase public transportation commuters to 10 percent (something that no other urban area has done), then for every 10,000 new commuters, there would be 1,000 new public transportation users and 7,000 more cars and drivers on the road. Obviously, even this kind of increase is not going to help traffic congestion.

This is why every metro area that has installed rail transit has, *in practice*, experienced regular and unremitting [increases in traffic congestion.](#)

Our problem is a lack of road capacity; Honolulu has [fewer miles of roads per capita](#) than any other urbanized area in the nation yet we have a similar number of cars. We have built very few new lane-miles of roads in the past 25 years.

If we go ahead with the new G.E. tax increase to build rail and its per family cost of \$900 a year, and, on top of that, have to pay the additional annual \$52 million operating subsidy, it will use every spare dollar in the community. It will mean that we will be unable to take those actions that have been shown to help with congestion.

For example, we can start with a reversible two lane [High Occupancy/Toll \(HOT\) lanes between Waialeale and Pier 16.](#) It qualifies for the same \$500 million funding as rail transit. But the *local funding* required is a fraction of that needed for rail transit — \$300 million versus \$2.1 billion for rail.

As experienced in [San Diego and Houston,](#) HOT lanes with priorities for buses and vanpools carry four times the number of occupants per vehicle as regular freeway lanes. Thus its two lanes carry the same number of people as eight freeway lanes in one direction or 16 lanes bi-directional.

Summary: Honolulu does not have a public transportation problem; we have a traffic congestion problem. We need policies that manage automobiles — not trains.

For more detail, go to www.honolulutraffic.com

Tell your [elected officials](#) that you are opposed to the rail tax increase and would prefer highway options rather than rail options.