

Rail's operating costs are understated

The City forecasts for rail transit's operating costs are \$68 million annually in today's dollars while boarding 30 million passengers. And since the City keeps telling us that rail costs less to operate than buses, we thought it a good idea to look at the elevated heavy rail systems in the country and their associated bus systems and see how their actual performance compares to that *projected* for Honolulu.

There are only two modern rail lines in the U.S. that are elevated third rail systems. We used data from the National Transit Database to compare them to Honolulu.

System	Annual		Operating costs per passenger
	Operating costs	Ridership	
Miami's Metrorail ⁱ	\$80.6 million	12.9 million	\$4.61
San Juan's Tren Urbano ⁱⁱ	\$53.4 million	7.8 million	\$6.83
Honolulu (<i>projected</i>) ⁱⁱⁱ	\$68.0 million	29.9 million	\$2.27

Since San Francisco's BART is supposedly the most efficient of the modern heavy rail systems we decided to include it in the comparison since some sections of it are elevated.

San Francisco's BART ^{iv}	\$458.9 million	109.0 million	\$4.21
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You will note that we would have to at least double the City's projected operating costs to be in line with these others. But one of the more interesting factors that came out of this review was to find that in each case the associated bus system was less expensive per passenger trip than rail — exactly the opposite of what the City has been telling us. San Francisco's buses are even less expensive than its Muni light rail line both per passenger mile and per passenger trip.

The latest FTA Report^v evaluating rail transit's operating costs forecasts showed an average cost overrun of 87 percent. This was remarkably close to the only other assessment of operating cost overruns — the *Pickrell Report* averaging 83 percent.

It is obvious from this is that the projected operating costs for the rail project are severely understated. And since these costs will come directly from property taxes and not from the GE tax, the City Council needs to take a hard look at what they are getting us into.

Endnotes:

ⁱ http://www.ntdprogram.gov/ntdprogram/pubs/profiles/2007/agency_profiles/4034.pdf

ⁱⁱ http://www.ntdprogram.gov/ntdprogram/pubs/profiles/2007/agency_profiles/4094.pdf

ⁱⁱⁱ [Draft EIS](#) Table 3-16 for daily ridership and Table 6-3 for operating costs.

^{iv} http://www.ntdprogram.gov/ntdprogram/pubs/profiles/2007/agency_profiles/9003.pdf

^v http://www.fta.dot.gov/documents/CPAR_Final_Report_-_2007.pdf