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Parsons Brinckerhoff's Scoping meeting last night was a thorough disappointment. Those hoping for preliminary forecasts of benefits and costs found nothing; just professionally prepared display boards of information that PB had already provided on the www.honolulutransit.com website.

Since benefits and costs are at the bedrock of scoping decisions it seemed strange that they are not available. This was especially true since they had eliminated our High-Occupancy Toll (HOT) lanes proposal on the grounds of "cost and funding concerns." Yet Toru Hamayasu, the City's chief planner, told us they had not developed any costs.

The City's Hamayasu, who is also Vice-Chair of the Oahu Metropolitan Planning Organization (OMPO) Technical Advisory Committee (TAC), also told us that while OMPO had developed ridership data for the rail they had not shared it with the City. Really?

All this really makes a mockery of Hawaii's Uniform Information Practices Act, the preamble of which states,

[§92F-2] Purposes; rules of construction. In a democracy, the people are vested with the ultimate decision-making power. Government agencies exist to aid the people in the formation and conduct of public policy. Opening up the government processes to public scrutiny and participation is the only viable and reasonable method of protecting the public's interest. Therefore the legislature declares that it is the policy of this State that the formation and conduct of public policy—the discussions, deliberations, decisions, and action of government agencies—shall be conducted as openly as possible.

Hamayasu also told us that the elimination of our HOT lanes proposal for "funding concerns" was because the FTA had said they would not fund it. We asked if FTA had given the City that ruling in writing and he said they had not. This does not surprise us since the FTA had told us the precise structure of the proposal would determine whether they would fund it, but if buses were to have priority, they could not see why they would not.

As is stands, Parson Brinckerhoff (PB) has substituted, in place of the reversible HOT lanes, a Managed Lanes Alternative, a two-lane elevated highway with one lane in each direction for,

"buses, paratransit vehicles and vanpool vehicles. The lanes would be managed to maintain fee-flow speeds for buses, while simultaneously allow High-Occupancy Vehicles (HOVs) and variable pricing for toll-paying single vehicles."

PB has designed this to fail the "alternatives analysis" process. We do not necessarily fault PB; as U-C Berkeley's Professor Robert Cervero said of the 1992 choice of rail, "it is less a reflection on the work of the consultants [PB] and more an outcome of pressures exerted by various political and special interest groups."ⁱ Professor John F. Kain has also detailed the use of "straw men" alternatives designed to fail against rail alternatives.ⁱⁱ

Another major problem of the process so far is that OMPO has not defined our transportation problem as is required by the process.

FTA guidance: "The key principal in the identification of alternatives is that they directly address the stated transportation problem in the corridor ... It requires the addition of

alternatives that make technical sense in terms of addressing the corridor's transportation problems, even where those alternatives may not be consistent with pre-existing notions on the desired project.”ⁱⁱⁱ

PB implies in the “Project Purpose” that the problem as one of insufficient “person mobility.” If defined this way, one set of alternatives will be preferable. If on the other hand, PB were to define the problem as “traffic congestion hampering the movement of autos and goods vehicles,” then another set of alternatives will be preferred.

After all, national, state and city formal transportation goals are as follows:

“Advance accessible, efficient, intermodal transportation for the movement of people and goods.” Federal Transportation Policy.

“To create a transportation system which will enable people and goods to move safely, efficiently, and at reasonable cost.” City and County of Honolulu, *General Plan for the City and County of Honolulu*

“To provide for the safe, economic, efficient, and convenient movement of people and goods.”
State of Hawaii, Hawaii State Plan

Rail transit does absolutely nothing for the movement of goods “safely, efficiently and at reasonable cost.” PB has entirely overlooked that goods move by roads on Oahu, while admitting that traffic congestion, and the movement of goods, will not benefit from a rail line.^{iv}

FTA rightly quotes Shakespeare’s “There’s small choice in rotten apples”^v in telling us, “The importance of a rigorous and objective AA study process cannot be understated. Alternatives analysis is the earliest, yet arguably most critical, phase of project development.”

Let’s hope that this process improves before it goes much further.

Endnotes:

ⁱ [An Evaluation of the Honolulu Rapid Transit Development Project's Alternative Analysis and Draft Environmental Impact Statement.](#) Hawaii Office of State Planning and University of Hawaii. May 1990.

ⁱⁱ John F. Kain, "The Use of Straw Men in the Economic Evaluation of Rail Transport Projects," American Economic Review, Vol. 82, No. 2 (May 1992).

ⁱⁱⁱ [Definitions of Alternatives.](#) p. 3..

^{iv} [Honolulu Advertiser article, December 14, 2005.](#)

^v The Taming of the Shrew. Act I, Scene I. Shakespeare.