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Our comments on the city's "TOP 5 REASONS FOR RAIL"

The best indicator that rail transit is a poor choice is that the City has to spin, obfuscate and toy with the truth trying to drum up support for it.

When they behave this way they essentially concede that our transit proposal, HOT BRT, or Express Buses on HOT Lanes, is superior to rail. Otherwise they would merely state the truth about both projects.

We believe that an even handed comparison between HOT BRT and rail transit would show that HOT BRT can carry more people, is twice as fast, is far less costly and offers greatly reduced traffic congestion.

Take the City's latest effort at spin on its website www.honolulutransit.com, "TOP 5 REASONS FOR RAIL" which is shown below italicized (in full) together with our comments.

#1. Rail transit moves MORE people FASTER — Rail will provide Honolulu the capacity of 4 to 5 freeway lanes in each direction moving at 55 mph constantly. It moves many people at once. "

Our comments: Capacity is not the issue. If it were, we would win that argument hands down. The I-495 busway in New Jersey carries 32,000 passengers per hour in a single bus lane whereas the city is only planning for a capacity of 9,000 per hour.

As for FASTER, "moving at 55 mph constantly" implies that 55 mph is its average speed whereas the city is only claiming 30 mph and it will be lucky to achieve 28 mph and most probably 25 mph. On the other hand HOT BRT's Express Buses will travel at 60 mph on the HOT lanes.

"Many people at once" is not a benefit. A continuous flow of people always places less strain on infrastructure and the people themselves.

#2. Rail transit is GREEN It helps save our `aina! — With rail there's less air pollution, water pollution and greenhouse gas emissions. Rail runs on electricity and can take advantage of advances in alternative energy (like solar, H-power, wind power). Rail transit encourages efficient land use and supports intentional development along the transit lines. This smart growth helps keep the country country and focuses growth designated areas. Rail creates a permanent backbone for mobility on O'ahu.

Our comments: According to the U.S. Department of Energy, rail transit (excluding New York City) uses more energy per passenger mile than does the average automobile with just 1.1 occupants.¹ With

http://www.honolulutraffic.com/GatheringPlace2.pdf

electric cars making major advances, the alternative energy uses mentioned by the city will benefit cars as well.

Smart Growth just isn't. It is well documented nationally and locally that restrictive land use policies serves primarily to drive up the price of the average home, thus inducing our young adults to leave Hawaii for areas more hospitable to them.

The "backbone" and "spine" arguments are invalid. A door-to-door express bus traveling at 60 mph on an uncongested elevated highway with no transfers needed will encourage mass transit ridership far more than a 28 mph average train with transfers required at either the departure or destination station and often at both.

#3. Rail transit is the ECONOMIC choice — Rail technology is proven and nonproprietary (long-term use in many cities and multiple vendors). We CAN afford it with the 1/2% GET and projected federal funds. We CAN maintain it because the maintenance of our transit system with rail is lower than a bus-only system. And, rail provides an alternative to \$4 per gallon of gas. A recent ICF International study showed that on average a two-worker family can save \$6,251 per year by taking public transit.

Our comments: We cannot afford the designated Locally Preferred Alternative and the City's Financial Feasibility Report² shows it. Table 4-3 shows revenues with an undesignated "other sources" as \$1.586 billion. In addition, it shows federal New Starts Funds as \$1.2 billion. The only Federal Transit Administration number the city has in writing is \$500 million.³ This likely federal shortfall of \$700 million together with the "other sources" amount totals \$2.3 billion. Further, the only way the financing plan keeps it that low is by delaying the start date (and the operating losses) to 2020 whereas the Mayor is currently saying operations will start in 2011.

As for "We CAN maintain it," the City's Alternatives Analysis, ⁴ page 5-4, shows that the future operating costs of the combined bus/rail system would be \$256 million versus the existing bus system of \$132 million — both in 2006 dollars.

The ICF International study was commissioned by the American Public Transportation Association, the chief promoter of rail transit in the U.S., which makes it, shall we say, questionable. For example, they measure ridership by boardings instead of linked trips, which is highly misleading.⁵

This rail project has already forced the highest tax increase in Hawaii's history. Now the city plans to build Transit-Oriented Developments (TODs) around the rail stations and these will require further tax subsidies. ⁶ Rail's operating loss will either require bus cutbacks or further property and gas tax hikes.

² www.honolulutraffic.com/FFR.pdf

http://oahumpo.org/PC/pc2004/pc04mm0323.html

www.honolulutraffic.com/AA.pdf

⁵ See our discussion of this issue at www.honolulutraffic.com/boardings.pdf

⁶ We have been unable to find any TODs that are not significantly subsidized.

#4. Rail transit is HEALTHIER — It lowers stress because you're not fighting traffic. You get a fitness walk going to and from stations. Travel time becomes personal time - you can read, sleep, listen to music, or surf the web while riding rail. You can count on reliable travel times, so you know you don't have to worry about getting to work or school or home on time.

Our comments: Most people do not want to work up a sweat walking to work. And, yes, travel time by rail is reliable — reliably slow. Only at the peak hour may the train be faster than one's car and then only slightly, according to the city. And trains would be only half the average speed of Express Buses on HOT lanes.

#5. Rail transit is the BEST ALTERNATIVE — Buses were studied – they can't do it; HOT lanes were studied – they can't do it. The data show that even with planned improvements to highways, such as PM Zipper lanes, new HOV lanes, major interchange upgrades, highway widening and traffic light synchronization, traffic is FAR worse with HOT lanes and less congested with rail. Note: The Tampa toll lanes are not providing a practical alternative so Tampa is now looking at building more light rail.

Our comments: PB should make up its mind. First they said that their "comparison of person moving capacities for various U.S. rail and HOV projects...appears to cut through the myth that HOV facilities (e.g. busways) do not have the person carrying equivalent of rail lines. Both modes can serve the person carrying capacity needs of about any corridor in North America."

Then they said about Honolulu's BRT program, "The light rail transit alternative was dropped because subsequent analyses revealed that Bus/Rapid Transit using electric-powered vehicles could accomplish virtually all of the objectives of light rail transit at substantially less cost."

We believe the HOT lanes analysis was rigged by projecting a cost of \$2.6 billion. In order to justify such a price tag, you would have to believe:

First, that each lane-mile of this simple two-lane elevated highway would have to cost, even allowing for construction inflation, twice as much as the H-3 freeway, presently the world's most expensive highway since it had to bore two miles of tunnels through the Koolaus.

Second, that the HOT lanes would have to cost as much per mile as the Mayor's proposed rail line, despite the huge five story high, 270 foot long rail stations every mile, each with escalators, elevators and stairs, and despite the cost of electrical power transformer sub-stations every mile, and 55 computer-controlled trains and the steel rails and the heavy copper lines to convey the high electrical load.

⁷ www.honolulutraffic.com/AA.pdf Table 3-6.

⁸ Charles A. Fuhs. High Occupancy Vehicle Facilities. Parsons, Brinckerhoff, Quade & Douglas. December

⁹ MIS/Draft EIS of the Honolulu Bus/Rapid Transit Program, August 2000. pp. 2-2 to 2-4. Prepared by Parsons Brinckerhoff Quade & Douglas.

Third, you would have to believe that the Tampa Reversible Express Lanes did not get built for \$400 million since there is no way that the city can reconcile the costs of the Tampa project for \$400 million with a city estimate of \$2.6 billion for our proposal for a similar project in Honolulu. City officials have done all they can to try disparage the Tampa Expressway and have outraged Tampa public officials in the process. In this respect, Dr. Martin Stone, Director of Planning for the Tampa Expressway, wrote to the Honolulu Advertiser,

"As the public official responsible for planning Tampa's elevated Reversible Express Lanes project, I am astonished that a Hawaiian public official would **intentionally misrepresent the facts associated** with the cost and operation of our project – and how a similar HOT lane project might provide true congestion relief for Honolulu at an affordable price." (His emphasis). ¹⁰

The University of Hawaii's Dr. Panos Prevedouros added,

"... the most egregious violation of FTA's rules on alternative specification and analysis was the deliberate under-engineering of the Managed Lanes Alternative to a degree that brings ridicule to prevailing planning and engineering principles." 1

As for the City's absurd remarks about Tampa, please note that The International Bridge, Tunnel and Turnpike Association (IBTTA), awarded the Tampa Expressway project the 2007 Toll Excellence Award. This award is given to the best new toll operations project in the world. Then review Dr. Stone's comments above.

In short, rail will cost \$billions and \$billions and \$billions and will result in traffic congestion far worse than it is today — by the city's own projections.¹³ How could it be otherwise? Developers are planning on building 60,000 more homes on the Ewa Plain without any general widening of the H-1 freeway.

For all these reasons, and more, rail transit is not the best alternative; it is clearly the WORST ALTERNATIVE.

http://www.honolulutraffic.com/StoneTampa.pdf

www.honolulutraffic.com/NEPAScopingReport.pdf p. A-180

http://www.ibtta.org/Events/content.cfm?ItemNumber=3066

www.honolulutraffic.com/AA.pdf Alternatives Analysis, Table 3.12.