

VOTERS DESERVE ANOTHER CRACK AT THIS RAIL

From day one in the pursuit to bring rail to our landscape, the state legislature and city officials have made certain everything except the most effective means of traffic relief would actually be advanced. This has spawned a lawsuit that stands to derail the current rail project.

How did our government dupe the public into thinking we were to get the best traffic solution available? It did so via ACT 247, Hawaii Session Laws 2005 that included language that any General Excise Tax increase on Oahu cannot be used for highway technology such as managed lanes, reversible expressways or what we refer to as bus rapid transit. The state knew that if all forms of transportation technologies were examined, the conclusion would yield the same results as studied by Mayor Harris earlier- that the bus beats rail on all fronts. That is why our state government acted in bad faith, pretending the tax increase would be about traffic relief when it clearly was not and forced us to pick steel wheel rail or get nothing at all.

More disturbing, is that the federal government subsidizes highway technology by eighty-percent, while rail gets at most, twenty-percent. In our economic climate, going with the smaller subsidy and taxing our residents more for a rail system that moves no goods, services or freight and is worthless in times of emergency evacuations makes little sense.

But there is hope. There are other forms of rail transit technologies available to us that can be built without the huge amounts of public subsidies dumped into them and also have the ability to sustain themselves with private investments.

If the ballot question were done over and the choices permitted were to include rail systems like the monorail and magnetic levitation, I believe the voter would reject the steel wheel on steel rail scenario and rather want a quieter, less expensive, easier to maintain rail system that is more in tune with 21st century technology.

Since the city cannot put any type of highway solution on the ballot using the GE tax surcharge as a funding mechanism, let's do rail right and get the best system for our island.

Unfortunately, as things stand now, for every family of four on Oahu over the thirty-years the GET rail surcharge is levied to build the 34-mile segment - from Kapolei to Waikiki and UH Manoa, will have paid almost \$27,000 in additional taxes just to construct this particular steel wheel rail system. In contrast, the monorail and magnetic levitation rail systems can be public-private-partnerships lessening the tax burden significantly.

I believe we have time to stop this steel rail ordeal and get a better transit system. A last ditch effort to hear everyone out before we make that final plunge is being offered by my office and will take place at the Mission Memorial Auditorium, on December 6, starting at 6pm.

In the meantime, I have authored resolution 11-328 that if passed, would put on the ballot for the 2012 election, a choice for voters to go with superior rail technology and stop this steel rail plan that needs to be scraped before it's too late. However, when the resolution was heard on November 2 at the full council meeting held at Kapolei Hale, the final outcome was that both the majority of council members by a vote of 7-2 and representatives of particular union organizations testified that they did not want the voting public to dictate and have a choice as to how their own tax money is spent.

There is something inherently wrong with this rail project when the folks who are pitching it do not want the public to weigh in on it anymore and do not want to offer the opportunity for voters who are paying for it to change their mind.

In conclusion, had my resolution passed, there would have been no delays to the rail project, no loss of federal funds, and rather the opportunity for Honolulu to get a quieter, less expensive rail system that future generations would be proud of and our construction unions honored to bring to our landscape. Instead, we are getting an archaic, iron rusty horse that will generate nothing but earaches and belongs in the Smithsonian already.

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