

VOTERS DESERVE ANOTHER CRACK AT THIS RAIL

By City Councilman Tom Berg; word count 570

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 government acted in bad faith, pretending the tax increase would be about traffic relief when it clearly was not.

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 system that moves no goods, services or freight and is worthless in times of emergency evacuations makes little sense.

In addition, no city in the United States for the last thirty-years has constructed what we are embarking upon which is a rusty iron horse classified as heavy rail. Some would describe our decision to go with steel wheels on steel rails as ill advised and once up and running, deemed as nothing more than as a noisy behemoth that belongs in the Smithsonian.

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. We cannot put any highway solution on the ballot unless the state legislature amended ACT 247 and in this town, that is not going to happen.

To shake things up, I introduced a resolution at the city council for the state legislature to consider a GE tax increase for highway technology to advance discussions on how hypocritical this whole rail tax scheme is being played out.

For example, the public was sold on a rail system that is to go to UH Manoa and into Waikiki, but to do this, another tax increase in the amount of \$3.7

billion on everything we buy on Oahu for another fifteen-years has to transpire. This will be a tax increase up to the year 2037 making this rail project as pitched to us a \$9 billion debt, and not a \$5.3 billion expenditure as perceived.

In conclusion, this means every family of four on Oahu over the thirty-years the GET rail surcharge is levied, will have paid almost \$27,000 just to construct this particular 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.

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