

FEDS BUS RAPID TRANSIT OFFER SAW NO LIGHT

By Tom Berg;

The Star-Advertiser's September 15 story entitled, "FTA officials will receive rail update from city delegation" should have instead been titled, "FTA officials will meet with city's rail delegation that refuses to disclose to its citizens the better deal."

Some of the questions that the Federal Transit Officials (FTA) should ask the city's rail delegation is, "Have you briefed your city about our offer that allows Honolulu to scrap the most expensive rail project in USA history and go with buses instead? Have you held any public hearings on our offer? Has your city disseminated any literature or held press releases of any kind about the optimization of utilizing buses on your fixed guideway?"

Here's the answer: The Honolulu Authority for Rapid Transportation (HART) and the Honolulu City Council in concert with Mayor Peter Carlisle have refused to hold a public hearing on the Federal Transit Administration's (FTA) new definition of a fixed guideway. The new definition signed into law allows bus rapid transit (BRT) systems to operate on a fixed guideway just like rail does. Subsequently, the FTA has reclassified its New Starts federal funding options to favor BRT over rail whereby buses will receive from the feds an 80% subsidy compared to rail at 30%.

For Honolulu, if the elevated fixed guideway were to cater to buses instead of rail, it would save the taxpayer billions of dollars and the federal government admits it.

A BRT system is superior to our rail system in many ways. Here are just a few of the benefits:

Approximately 90% of the electricity generated to power rail will come from oil. Buses on the other hand, are able to run 100% on electricity derived from solar powered batteries and hence have a zero waste emissions factor. This feature makes all-electric buses extremely quiet and greener than rail.

Estimates are that to put buses on the fixed guideway would be 1/5 of the costs of rail since the need for 21 transit stations and the property acquisition that goes with it would be non-existent.

The time it would take to travel on the 20-mile fixed guideway segment from end to end by bus is 20-minutes whereas by rail, it's a 43-minute journey with 20 mandatory stops along the way.

Rail cannot make sharp turns or go up and down hills at a steep grade. A BRT system though can make those sharp turns. Thus BRT can avoid going through iwi kupuna burial sites and other historical features. A BRT system can be elevated where it needs to be and at ground level making it a much less of a blight on the landscape.

And let's not forget, if we were to put buses on the fixed guideway, the need for HART and its \$22 million annual budget for some 90 employees would be history. The GET rail surcharge would dissolve and our taxes could be put to use fixing sewers, parks, water mains and roads instead.

So why is the city's rail delegation going to Washington to discuss a rail project gone awry? My guess is that the city wants to get the full funding grant agreement signed, sealed, delivered before the taxpayers of Honolulu find out en masse about the new FTA bus deal that trumps rail.

On the other hand, a better guess would be that the rush to Washington is really about what to do if a certain someone becomes mayor and how to continue to force-feed us rail no matter how much we despise it.

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NOTE: Here is a link that details all-electric buses being deployed around the world and the FTA's new deal for promoting BRT systems:
http://www.councilmanberg.com/html_pages/eblasts/e_blast_073012.html