

---

**From:** Webb, Kate <FTA>  
**To:** Rogers, Leslie <FTA>; Welbes, Matt <FTA>  
**CC:** Longo, David <FTA>; Griffo, Paul <FTA>; Borinsky, Susan <FTA>; Ryan, James <FTA>; Carranza, Edward <FTA>; Matley, Ted <FTA>; Sukys, Raymond <FTA>; Barr, James <FTA>; Ossi, Joseph <FTA>; Biehl, Scott <FTA>; VanWyk, Christopher <FTA>; Marler, Renee <FTA>  
**Sent:** 4/16/2009 4:25:41 PM  
**Subject:** RE: Honolulu rail transit

Thanks Leslie. I'll be happy to work w/ Melvin to arrange the requested Conf. call w/ Cong. Abercrombie but I think there needs to be some internal FTA discussion first. I'm out of the pocket tomorrow but could set something up for Monday (not too early...I try to remember that you guys are 3 hours behind us!). Please let me know what your schedule looks like for Monday. Thanks!

Kate

---

**From:** Rogers, Leslie <FTA>  
**Sent:** Thursday, April 16, 2009 10:04 PM  
**To:** Welbes, Matt <FTA>  
**Cc:** Webb, Kate <FTA>; Longo, David <FTA>; Griffo, Paul <FTA>; Borinsky, Susan <FTA>; Ryan, James <FTA>; Carranza, Edward <FTA>; Matley, Ted <FTA>; Sukys, Raymond <FTA>; Barr, James <FTA>; Ossi, Joseph <FTA>; Biehl, Scott <FTA>; VanWyk, Christopher <FTA>; Marler, Renee <FTA>  
**Subject:** FW: Honolulu rail transit

Matt et al.,

I returned a call today to Mr. Tabilas of Congressman Abercrombie's office today that resulted in the email below. Initially, I respectfully declined his request that we meet with representatives of the Honolulu chapter of the American Institute of Architects on their aesthetics concerns about the proposed Honolulu rail project. You will recall that the comment period on the DEIS closed in early February 2009 and the City is currently reviewing the voluminous comments received and its report on the consideration and disposition of comments is expected to be forwarded to Region IX in the near future. During our conversation, I spoke in broad terms about FTA's procedures while trying to avoid delving into too much detail.

Mr. Tabilas noted that the Congressman is seeking a conference call with FTA and when I asked if this might be characterized as a "status update" on the project, Mr. Tabilas responded "no," that the Congressman really was seeking to know "where the project stands from FTA's perspective." Following the recent release of EPA's comments (see article below) on the project, the city has been abuzz about the project and it is dominating the local media. The Congressman has been a longtime supporter of rail transit and apparently is receiving numerous constituent comments that have given rise to this request for a discussion with FTA.

I will await your guidance about the requested call. Thanks!

Leslie

---

**From:** Tabilas, Melvin [mailto:Melvin.Tabilas@mail.house.gov]  
**Sent:** Thursday, April 16, 2009 1:47 PM  
**To:** Rogers, Leslie <FTA>  
**Subject:** Honolulu rail transit

Leslie,

Thanks for working on setting up some time in the next few days to speak to both Amy Asselbaye, the Congressman's Chief of Staff, and myself. As you may know, this is a really big issue for the Congressman, so he'll more than likely be on the call if it was set up for next week. Some points that we want to discuss include:

- As you know, the EPA has recently submitted a letter questioning why alternatives to an elevated rail line, such as light rail at street level and bus rapid transit, weren't evaluated in the project's environmental impact study. Would EPA's questioning of the EIS process possibly impact the timeline of the project?
- Does the FTA EIS process allow for amendments by the C&C of Honolulu during the consideration?
- What standing does the EPA have in the EIS process? Since it's a federal agency do their views rank higher?
- Is the proposed cost of an elevated rail system in Honolulu more, less, or equal to the cost per mile of other systems currently under consideration by the FTA? It has been suggested that the elevated Honolulu system is 8 times the cost of other pending rail projects.
- Could the DEIS be rejected outright or would it be sent back to the C&C of Honolulu for amendment? What is the time frame for the EIS process?

Keep me posted.

Mahalo,

Melvin

---

Melvin Tabilas  
Legislative Assistant  
U.S. Representative Neil Abercrombie (HI-01)  
1502 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515  
(202) 225-2726  
[melvin.tabilas@mail.house.gov](mailto:melvin.tabilas@mail.house.gov)

[www.house.gov/abercrombie](http://www.house.gov/abercrombie)

## EPA wants Honolulu to change rail route to save tiny community

City's failure to study alternatives, full route also questioned by agency

*By Sean Hao  
Advertiser Staff Writer*

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has urged Honolulu officials to alter the route of a planned \$5.4 billion commuter train to avoid displacing a small Waiawa neighborhood.

The agency also has asked the city to justify why alternatives to an elevated rail line, such as light rail at street level and bus rapid transit, weren't evaluated in the project's environmental impact study. Those and other concerns were lodged with the city and the Federal Transit Administration as part of an ongoing federal environmental review.

Overall, the EPA expressed an intermediate level of concern with the 20-mile, East Kapolei-to-Ala Moana train, said Carolyn Mulvihill, the EPA's lead reviewer for the project.

However, some of the agency's recommendations, such as a change in the route, could require the city to prepare what's called a supplemental environmental impact statement. That would disrupt a timeline that calls for construction to begin in December. Federal approval of the train project's environmental study is a major hurdle in the city's effort to get \$1.4 billion in federal money to build the line.

City transportation director Wayne Yoshioka said project officials were working with the EPA to address the concerns.

"A project of this magnitude has got to have environmental impacts that have to be addressed," he said. "But we don't see any red flags in there."

The EPA isn't the only agency that's asking the city to explain why the environmental impact statement didn't analyze the potential impacts of various ground-level transit alternatives. Major landowner Kamehameha Schools, the American Institute of Architects and other groups have urged the city to build a ground-level train that would cost less and create less visual blight.

The city eliminated ground-level transit options long ago on concerns that a ground-level train would interfere with road traffic, operate at slower speeds and generate lower ridership and higher long-term costs.

## Later Impacts

The EPA also asked the city study to include information on the environmental impacts of the full planned 30-mile-plus route from West Kapolei to the University of Hawai'i-Manoa campus. The current version of the environmental study only considers the impacts of several shorter 20-mile rail alignments from West Kapolei to Ala Moana.

"The extensions should be viewed as reasonably foreseeable future actions and, as such, should be analyzed thoroughly in the cumulative impact analysis," according to the EPA's comments, dated Feb. 12.

Those comments were obtained and released by [www.Honolulutraffic.com](http://www.Honolulutraffic.com), which opposes the train project in favor of a managed highway lane alternative.

The city has decided not to release the more than 200 comments that were submitted in response to the draft environmental impact study that was released late last year. As a result, most of those comments probably will not become publicly available until later this year.

Some agencies such as the EPA have voluntarily released their comments, while others such as Ala Moana Center owner General Growth Properties have refused to release them.

The city is currently in the process of responding to those comments, which cover a range of concerns about noise, aesthetics, archaeological conservation, energy use and more.

## Bit of old hawai'i

Among the concerns the city will need to address are social justice issues surrounding plans to relocate a small community between Kamehameha and Farrington highways. The so-called "Banana Patch" is a corner of old Hawai'i where residents still live without county water, street lights or sidewalks. It is a predominantly Asian neighborhood with 55 residents, 10 homes and a church, according to the city's environmental impact study.

The area is to be converted into a park-and-ride lot that has been identified as a key way to funnel North Shore and Central O'ahu commuters onto the rail system. The EPA has asked the city to identify and select an alternative alignment that would eliminate the need to relocate the community.

Some Banana Patch property owners, such as Sam Alipio, have said they don't want to be forced out. "No, we don't want to move," Alipio said.

Alipio's property has four homes and is valued at \$311,000, according to city property tax records. Family members have said they're worried the property's value isn't enough to purchase a comparable location.

Cliff Slater, chairman of [www.Honolulutraffic.com](http://www.Honolulutraffic.com), said the EPA's concerns could force the city to conduct a supplemental environmental impact study. "That could delay things a year," he said.

That would provide the group with added time to try to rally the community to oppose the project.

At this point, the city isn't expecting to encounter any significant delays.

"We fully believe we've done things by the book according to the FTA rules and the FTA seems to be comfortable with what we're doing," said transportation director Yoshioka. "Right now it doesn't appear that there have been any issues that have been raised that would point us to (doing) a supplemental (environmental impact study)."

## Additional Facts

Benefits of elevated rail

- Lower operational costs
- Higher ridership
- Faster speeds
- Less disruption to existing roadways

#### **BENEFITS OF LIGHT RAIL/BUS RAPID TRANSIT**

- Lower construction costs
- Shorter time to build
- Less energy to build
- Doesn't block mauka-makai view corridors

-