From: Nejako, Henry <FTA>
To: Barr, James <FTA>; Bausch, Carl <FTA>; Belanger, Marcel <FTA>; Centolanzi, Patrick<FTA>; Chen, Roy Wei-Shun <FTA>; Chipman, Peter <FTA>; Eckmann, Alex <FTA>; Flanigon, Mike <FTA>; Herre, Susan <FTA>; Hodges, Tina <FTA>; Jackson, Betty <FTA>; Lesh, Matthew <FTA>; Marner, Abbe <FTA>; Ory, David <FTA>; Ossi, Joseph <FTA>; Robinson, Bruce <FTA>; Steinitz, Timothy <FTA>; Stoltzfus, Jarrett <FTA>; Wong, Richard <FTA>; Zelasko, Elizabeth <FTA>
Sent: 4/16/2009 10:49:23 AM
Subject: RE: EPA asked Honolulu why it didn't consider alternatives [Advertiser article]

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
4/15/09

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, 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, 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)."

-----Original Message-----
From: Luden, Hymie <FTA>
Sent: Wednesday, April 15, 2009 4:24 PM
Subject: FTA article: EPA asked Honolulu why it didn't consider alternatives