CS 659

Salutations

Subject: Honolulu High-Capacity Transit Corridor Project

Dear _____:

The U.S. Department of Transportation Federal Transit Administration (FTA) and City and County of Honolulu Department of Transportation Services (DTS) issued a Draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for *the Honolulu High-Capacity Transit Corridor Project* in November 2008. This letter, which is being distributed in conjunction with the Final EIS, is in response to substantive comments received on the Draft EIS during the comment period, which concluded on February 6, 2009. The Final EIS identifies the Airport Alternative (the Project) as the preferred alternative and is the focus of this document. This selection was based on consideration of the benefits of each alternative studied in the Draft EIS, public and agency comments on the Draft EIS, and City Council action under Resolution 08-261 identifying the Airport Alternative as the project to be the focus in this Final EIS. The selection is described in Chapter 2 in this Final EIS. It also includes additional information and analyses, and minor Project revisions that were made to address comments from agencies and the public on the Draft EIS. The following paragraphs address comments received in your letter dated February 9, 2009.

Headings in this response letter were taken directly from the comment letter to help orient the responses to the appropriate comments.

I IMPACTS OF CONSTRUCTION ON BUSINESS

A. Physical Impacts

Response to Comment #1 – Construction activities could have substantial economic impacts on businesses and more specific discussion of the construction impacts and proposed mitigation measures is requested.

Economic impacts during construction are presented in the Final EIS. Section 4.18.1 of the Final EIS lists mitigation measures to reduce adverse economic hardships for existing businesses (including small businesses) along the Project alignment during construction.

Your suggestions are noted. The elements suggested in the comment for enhancements to the Maintenance of Traffic Plan and Transit Mitigation Plan will be considered during the detailed development of these plans. Many of these suggested elements have been incorporated into the construction contract documents as performance specifications or as design criteria.

The request to prepare a Business Disruption Mitigation Plan will be considered during the development of detailed construction mitigation procedures. Some elements, such as having a staff person work directly with the public and property owners to resolve

construction-related problems; will be part of the MOT or public information program. The RTD will work with all adjacent property owners and their tenants during construction to minimize disruption to local businesses.

B. Economic Impacts

Response to Comment # 2 – KS requests that the discussion of economic impacts in the DEIS be expanded through an independent study and recommends certain mitigation measures.

An analysis of the impacts to businesses during construction is provided in both the Final EIS and the Honolulu High-Capacity Transit Corridor Project Economics Technical Report. An analysis of construction impacts can be found on page 5-6 of the Economics Technical Report, which can be found on the www.Honolulutransit.org website. The primary impacts are anticipated to result from inconveniences and disruptions to adjacent residents, businesses, and business customers that are inherent in any major construction project, which include the following:

- Presence of construction workers and material
- Temporary road closures and traffic diversions
- Temporary reductions in parking availability
- Airborne dust, noise, and vibrations
- Businesses' loss of visibility to their customers

Proper controls during construction, as discussed in Section 4.18 of the Final EIS, may help to mitigate these effects to protect residents' comfort and daily life, and to prevent inconveniences and disruptions to the flow of customers, employees, materials, and supplies to and from area businesses based on successful efforts on other projects.

Among the measures to be considered during construction are:

- Maintaining access to businesses during construction
- Developing a public involvement plan prior to construction to inform business owners of the construction schedule and activities
- Initiating public information campaigns to reassure people that businesses are open during construction and to encourage their continued patronage
- Minimizing the extent and number of businesses, jobs, and access affected during construction
- Coordinating the timing of temporary facility closures to minimize impacts to business activities— especially those related to seasonal or high sales periods—to the extent practicable
- Minimizing the duration of modified or lost access to businesses—as practicable
- Providing signage, lighting, or other information to indicate that businesses are open
- Providing public information (e.g., press releases or newsletters) regarding construction activities and ongoing business activities, including advertisements in print and on television and radio

- Phasing construction in each area so as to maintain access to individual businesses for pedestrians, bicyclists, passenger vehicles, and trucks during business hours and important business seasons
- Providing advance notice if utilities will be disrupted
- Scheduling major utility shut-offs during non-business hours.

No independent evaluation study is planned. The Project is only one of the factors that could affect the economics of properties in the corridor.

The City will not provide direct financial assistance to mitigate impacts to businesses. Support for measures to minimize hardships will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis. Whether businesses remain open or closed/relocated during construction is often due to economic conditions and other factors outside of the control of the Project.

II. POTENTIAL PARKING IMPACTS OF COMPLETED SYSTEM

A. Potential Parking Impacts

Response to Comment #3 – Inadequate parking for the Project will have economic consequences on surrounding businesses and properties

The comment involves three types of potential parking-related effects: off-street lost parking, on-street lost parking, and spillover parking in station areas. The number and location of on-street and off-street parking spaces to be removed by the Project are listed in Final EIS Table 3-24. The estimated demand for spillover parking at each station is shown in Final EIS Table 3-22.

As stated in Section 3.4.6 of the Final EIS, properties related to affected private, off-street parking spaces will be acquired for the Project as part of right-of-way needed along the length of the corridor and compensation will be in accordance with the requirements of the U.S. Relocation Assistance and Property Acquisition Act. The City will work with property owners to tailor any mitigation efforts for lost off-street parking as appropriate.

Regarding the loss of on-street parking, a survey of parking usage conducted in April 2009 found that, in locations where on-street parking will be removed by the Project, other parking capacity exists nearby to accommodate demand. Therefore, these on-street parking spaces will generally not be replaced by the City. However, some new on-street parking spaces will be created by the Project in the same general locations as the streets are rebuilt after project construction. New parking spaces could be short-term, long-term, or loading zones, depending on the need.

The effect of spillover parking will mean an increased demand for existing parking spaces near stations. The travel demand forecasting model estimates a spillover parking demand of about 10 parking spaces near Kapalama Station. The City will consider strategies in coordination with appropriate stakeholders to mitigate for any loss of

parking supply and for increased demand from spillover parking near stations, if such impacts occur.

B. Mitigation Measures for Parking

Response to Comment #4 – The City is requested to develop more specific mitigation measures for parking

Please see the response to Comment #3.

III. IMPACTS OF COMPLETED SYSTEM ON BUSINESSES ALONG RAIL LINE AND AT TRANSIT STATIONS

A. Physical Impacts

1. Traffic Visibility and Access to Businesses

Response to Comment #5 – A more detailed assessment of the reduction in visibility and access to business and potential mitigation measures is requested

The assessment of visual effects in Section 4.8 of the Final EIS has considered that businesses, which include owners, customers, and employees, are important viewer groups. Each viewer group's characteristics were considered in the visual quality assessment for the 20 viewpoints analyzed in Table 4-9 of the Final EIS. For example, the visibility for motorists along Dillingham Boulevard is illustrated on Figure 4-29 (Viewpoint 12) of the Final EIS. The simulated view shows that the guideway overhead will not block views of businesses or signage. The guideway support columns will be spaced at about 150 foot intervals, and views of businesses will not be greatly reduced. The overall visual effect, as noted in Table 4-9, will be moderate.

More detail on this analysis can be found in the Honolulu High-Capacity Transit Corridor Project Visual and Aesthetic Resources Technical Report. Please refer to the following tables in that report:

- Table 4-1: Landscape Unit 1 Viewpoints-Existing Visual Quality and Viewer Groups (this Landscape Unit corresponds to the East Kapolei to Fort Weaver Road Landscape Unit in the Draft EIS)
    - Table 4-2: Landscape Unit 2 Viewpoints-Existing Visual Quality and Viewer Groups (this Landscape Unit corresponds to the Fort Weaver Road to Aloha Stadium Landscape Unit in the Draft EIS)
    - Table 4-3: Landscape Unit 3 Viewpoints-Existing Visual Quality and Viewer Groups (this Landscape Unit corresponds to the Aloha Stadium to Kalihi Landscape Unit in the Draft EIS)
    - Table 4-4: Landscape Unit 4 Viewpoints-Existing Visual Quality and Viewer Groups (this Landscape Unit corresponds to the Kalihi to Ala Moana Landscape Unit in the Draft EIS)

Access

Access to all businesses located near the Project would be maintained. Traffic conditions would operate at acceptable levels-of-service except for two station areas, Pearl Highlands and Ala Moana Center. As shown in Table 3-20 of the Final EIS, park-and-ride, passenger drop-offs, and feeder buses will affect traffic at four intersections near the Pearl Highlands and Ala Moana station areas.

Narrower Lanes
As indicated in Section 3.4.3 of the Draft EIS, the guideway placements will not affect overall traffic operations in terms of the number of travel lanes available to motorists. Though the width of some lanes will be narrowed by the Project, they will remain well above the AASHTO recommended minimum standards for urban roadways. Also, no sidewalks will be closed as a result of the Project, as shown in Table 3-25 of the Final EIS.

Mitigation
Section 3.4.6 of the Final EIS identifies strategies that will mitigate potential effects associated with construction impacts. With mitigation strategies, traffic conditions in the Pearl Highlands and Ala Moana Center station areas would operate in a satisfactory manner. With regard to parking-related mitigation, as noted in Section 3.4.6 of the Final EIS, station areas with the highest estimated demands for spillover parking are at West Loch, Pearlridge, Iwilei, and Ala Moana Center. Section 3.4.4 of the Final EIS states that in locations where parking will be removed by the Project, other parking capacity generally exists nearby to accommodate demand. The cumulative and indirect effect of removing parking spaces to accommodate the Project will be that some people who parked in those spaces will either use another space nearby, will choose another mode to reach their destination, or may not make the trip. The indirect effect of spillover parking around stations will mean an increased demand for existing parking spaces. The City will consider strategies in coordination with appropriate stakeholders to mitigate for any loss of parking supply and for increased demand from spillover parking near stations, if such impacts occur. Mitigation could range from providing additional parking, parking restrictions or regulation, permit parking or shared parking, or other measures as noted in Section 3.4.6 of the Final EIS

2. Noise and Vibration

Response to Comment #6 – Disclosure of noise and vibrations and their impact according to the time of day

Section 4.10.1 of the Final EIS describes the various noise measurement locations, including the lanais of upper floors of residential buildings. Noise levels at higher-level floors were measured and analyzed as a result of comments received on the Draft EIS and are shown in Section 4.10.3 of the Final EIS. The results show only moderate noise impacts to one residential building between the proposed Civic Center and Kaka'ako Stations. There are no severe noise issues along the corridor as a result of the Project. Future buildings above the guideway at similar distances from the guideway can be expected to be exposed to comparable moderate noise levels.

3. Security, Transients and Crime

Response to Comment #7 - Additional disclosures on security, transients, and crime are requested with more specific mitigation measures

The majority of the system will be located in existing roadway medians, which is not conducive to being used as a shelter. Stations will be patrolled and will be closed at night. The system will include park-and-ride facilities with security and lighting. The City is working with the Honolulu Police Department to develop the system's safety and security program. Security will be provided at all stations and on all trains. The listed measures are under consideration and may be used where appropriate to address specific security issues.

4. Visual and Aesthetic Impacts

Response to Comment #8 – The elevated system will cause visual blight and additional details on visual and aesthetic impacts for evaluation by viewer groups would allow a more complete analysis.

The island's unique visual character and scenic beauty were considered in the visual and aesthetic analysis presented in the Final EIS. The Project will be set in an urban context where visual change is expected and differences in scales of structures are typical. The following measures will be included with the Project to minimize negative visual effects and enhance the visual and aesthetic opportunities that it creates:

- Develop and apply design guidelines that will establish a consistent design framework for the Project with consideration of local context
- Retain existing trees where practical and provide new vegetation
- Shield exterior lighting
- Coordinate project design with the City TOD planning and DPP
- Consult with communities surrounding each station for input on station design elements

The Project will provide users with expansive views from several portions of the corridor by elevating riders above highway traffic, street trees, and low structures adjacent to the alignment. Design criteria will govern all new utility construction outside of buildings, as well as the support maintenance, relocation, and restoration of utilities encountered or affected by construction of the fixed guideway.

B. Economic Impacts

1. Business Impacts

Response to Comment # 9 – KS requests that the discussion in the DEIS of the economic impacts of the completed system on businesses be expanded through an independent study

The Project is the construction and implementation of rail transit service, which is discussed in the EIS. As discussed in Section 4.19.2 of the Final EIS, transit-oriented development (TOD) is expected to occur in station areas as an indirect effect of the Project. Based on experiences with systems in other places with all types of rail systems (i.e., elevated, at-grade and underground), it is the increased mobility and accessibility afforded by the Project that will increase the desirability and value of land near stations and attract new real estate investment nearby (in the form of TOD). Planning and zoning around station areas will be established and conducted by the City's Department of Planning and Permitting under a process covered by the City's new TOD ordinance 09-4. For properties outside the boundaries of TOD station locations, these requested studies are beyond the scope of the Project and this EIS.

As noted earlier, an additional independent study is not planned.

2. Redevelopment

Response to Comment #10 – Elevated rail systems affect redevelopment options in the urban core and require additional mitigation measures

The elevated guideway will require consideration of the most appropriate TOD designs to take full advantage of the space adjacent to the Project and integrate the stations into those plans. Plans will require adaptation of the elevated station into the adjacent community. This has been successfully in cities with elevated rail such as Vancouver, B.C., San Francisco and Miami.

III. COST AND FINANCIAL ANALYSIS

Response to Comment #11 – Further study of the financial feasibility of the DEIS is suggested

Chapter 6 of the Final EIS describes the financial resources expected to be needed to pay for the capital cost of the Project and for ongoing operating and maintenance costs. Capital costs of the Project, including finance charges, are expected to be fully paid for by a combination of FTA Section 5309 New Starts and FTA Section 5307 Funds from the Federal government and revenues from the General Excise and Use Tax (GET) surcharge levied from 2007 through 2022.

The capital plan for the Project is presented in Section 6.3 of the Final EIS, which includes a description of the amount of funding anticipated from various sources. The capital plan takes the current economic downturn into account. Section 6.5 of the EIS describes risks and uncertainties associated with these funding assumptions.

The financial plan will be updated periodically as conditions warrant and as the Project moves ahead. This is a requirement of the Federal New Starts process and is intended to ensure the Project continues to be financially feasible and to avoid the types of problems encountered on other projects.

The State's announcement of a series of projects for construction as a result of a Federal stimulus program are already included in the No Build Alternative and are shown in Table 2-4 of the Final EIS. All the major stimulus projects are identified in the O'ahuMPO's Regional Transportation Plan and were also part of the No Build Alternative in the Draft EIS against which all the Build Alternatives were compared.

V. IMPACTS OF LAND ACQUISITIONS ON KS, ITS TENANTS AND THEIR BUSINESSES

Response to Comment # 12 – KS requests more specific information on what will be acquired by the City and the impact of such acquisitions and compensation to be provided. Such information should assist KS and its tenants in evaluating how the acquisitions will affect their businesses.

Individual assessments will be performed by the Right-of-Way team as the design progresses.

All acquisitions will follow the requirements of the Federal Uniform Relocation Assistance and Real Property Acquisition Policies Act.

If payment is delayed more than 30 days after the final judgment, additional interest at the rate of 5 percent shall be added to the final judgment (Section 100-25, Hawai'i Revised Statutes). For a Federal-aid project, the cost of this interest payment is not eligible for Federal reimbursement.

VI. KELO CONCERNS

Response to Comment # 13 – KS requests assurances that the City will not take private property to give to another private party, whether in the context of TOD or otherwise.

The Project evaluated in the EIS concerns the construction and implementation of rail transit service. However, as discussed in Section 4.19.2 of the Final EIS, transit-oriented development (TOD) is expected to occur in station areas as an indirect effect of the Project. Planning around stations is currently underway by the City's Department of Planning and Permitting (DPP) under a process covered by the City's new TOD ordinance 09-4. The TOD ordinance, and subsequent TOD plans, are designed to encourage private investment, in the vicinity of the stations as appropriate. The DPP has encouraged community involvement in the development of those plans. As for the Project, the City will acquire only properties needed to build the Project which includes about 190 full and partial acquisitions, mostly strip acquisitions along roadways. In any acquisitions, the City will follow the law as put forth by the U.S. Supreme Court in the Kelo Decision of 2005.

VII. TODs As Potential Mitigants

Response to Comment #14 – TOD could be a positive mitigant to the impacts described herein; however, it is premature to rely upon the benefits until a TOD ordinance is adopted and developments are integrated into the Project through Planning.

In March 2009, the City Council approved and the Mayor of Honolulu signed Bill 10 (2008) (Ordinance 09-4), which defines the City's approach to TOD around fixed guideway stations. New zoning regulations will address parking standards, new density provisions, land use, open space, and affordable housing. Financial incentives could include public-private partnerships, real property tax credits, and infrastructure financing.

In addition, land use impacts are required to be disclosed in an EIS as part of the National Environmental Policy Act process. Land use impacts, including potential TOD development, are critical criteria for FTA in ranking projects for Federal funding. Potential TOD development is addressed in Section 4.18 of the Draft EIS. This section was updated in the Final EIS to reflect Ordinance 09-4. Evaluation of TOD projects in other cities with new rail projects is beyond the scope of this EIS.

VIII. Study of the North King Street Alignment

Response to Comment #15 – Further Study of the North king Street alignment is recommended

The King Street Alignment was evaluated in the Alternatives Analysis. It would have resulted in a greater number of residential and business property impacts, historic property impacts, and noise impacts than the Dillingham Boulevard Alignment. It would have required a longer and less efficient route and would have increased the system's cost by $50 million.

IX. Evaluation of An At-Grade or Multi-Modal System in the Urban Core

Response to Comment #16 – An at-grade or multimodal transit system in the urban core is an alternative worth evaluating to determine whether it is less expensive and quicker to construct than an elevated system.

The Alternatives Screening Memorandum (DTS 2006a) recognized the visually sensitive areas in Kakaako and Downtown Honolulu, including the Chinatown, Hawai'i Capital, and the Thomas Square/Academy of Arts Special Design Districts. In order to minimize the impacts on historic resources, visual aesthetics, and surface traffic, the screening process considered 15 different combinations of tunnel, at-grade, or elevated alignments between Iwilei and Ward Avenue. As identified on pages 4-23 and 4-24 of the Screening Memorandum, four different alignments through Downtown Honolulu were advanced for further analysis, including an at-grade portion along Hotel Street, a tunnel under King Street, and elevated guideways along Nimitz Highway and Queen Street.

The Alternatives Analysis Report (DTS 2006b) evaluated the alignment alternatives based on transportation benefits, environmental and social impacts and overall benefits, and cost considerations. The report found that an at-grade alignment along Hotel Street would require the acquisition of more parcels and affect more burials than any of the other alternatives considered The alignment with a tunnel under King Street through Downtown, in addition to the environmental effects such as impacts to cultural resources, reduction of street capacity, and property acquisition requirements of the at-grade section, would cost over $500 million more than the least expensive alternative.

The Project's purpose is "to provide high-capacity rapid transit" in the congested east-west travel corridor. The need for the Project includes improving corridor mobility and improving corridor reliability. The at-grade alignment would not meet this purpose and need because it could not satisfy the mobility and reliability objectives of the Project. Some of the technical considerations associated with an at-grade versus elevated alignment through Downtown Honolulu include the following:

- **System Capacity, Speed and Reliability**: The short 200-foot blocks (or less) in Downtown Honolulu would permanently limit the system to two-car trains, to prevent stopped trains from blocking vehicular traffic on cross-streets. Even with transit signal priority, the at-grade speeds will be slower and less-reliable than an elevated guideway. Under ideal circumstances, the capacity of an at-grade system could reach 6,000 passengers per hour per direction as it does in places like Calgary, Alberta. Based on travel forecasts, the Project will need to carry over 9,000 by the early 2020s. Moreover, the system can be readily expanded to carry over 25,000 in each direction by reducing the interval between trains (headway) to 90 seconds during the peak period. To preserve a comparable system capacity, speed and reliability, an at-grade alignment would require a fenced, segregated right-of-way with no vehicular, pedestrian or bicycle crossings along the track through the Downtown.

- **Mixed-Traffic Conflicts**: With the planned 3-minute headways, the short cycle of traffic lights would affect traffic flows and capacity of the cross-streets. Furthermore, there would be no option to increase the capacity of the system by reducing the headway to 90-seconds.

- **Construction Impacts and Cost**: An at-grade system would also consume two or more lanes of existing roadways, resulting in increased congestion or requiring that additional businesses or homes be taken to widen the roadway through the Downtown. This would also have greater construction impacts and potentially affect cultural practices and burials to a greater extent than the placement of discrete column foundations for an elevated structure.

Because it is not feasible for an at-grade system through Downtown to move passengers rapidly and reliably without significant detrimental effect on other transportation system elements (e.g., the highway and pedestrian systems, safety, reliability, etc.) it would have a negative system-wide impact that would reduce ridership throughout the system. The

at-grade system would not meet the Project's purpose and need and does not, therefore, require additional analysis.

The FTA and DTS appreciate your interest in the Project. The Final EIS has been issued in conjunction with the distribution of this letter. Issuance of the Record of Decision under the National Environmental Policy Act and acceptance in this Final EIS by the Governor of the State of Hawai'i are the next anticipated actions, and will conclude the environmental review process for the Project.

Very truly yours,

WAYNE Y. YOSHIOKA
Director