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Honolulu On The Move

March 2007

An Update on the Honolulu High-Capacity Transit Corridor Project

Aloha! There is much progress to report in this issue of Honolulu On The Move.

The First Project

On February 27, 2007, the Honolulu City Council gave final approval to the mass transit Minimum Operable Segment, the First Project that will be built. This is the initial phase of the fixed guideway transit system, Honolulu's locally preferred transit alternative. In this First Project, the fixed guideway transit system goes from East Kapolei (at the planned University of Hawai'i West O'ahu) to Ala Moana Center, directly serving Leeward Community College, Pearlridge Center, Salt Lake, downtown Honolulu and other locations in between.

The council decision got extensive news coverage and the following news articles appear in our newsletter courtesy of the Honolulu Advertiser and Honolulu Star-Bulletin.

Vote clears way for initial transit work
DEBORAH BOOKER | The Honolulu Advertiser

After decades of dashed plans, Honolulu is closer than ever to building a major mass transit system to link West O'ahu with the island's urban core.

In the wake of yesterday's 5-4 City Council vote approving the first phase, Mayor Mufi Hannemann said he was "very confident" that construction would begin by 2009.

"The key to this was to be willing to compromise, to be able to give something to get something," Hannemann said.

The council voted to retain a controversial route along Salt Lake Boulevard rather than immediately link the system to Honolulu International Airport.

The 20-mile route selected yesterday would begin near the planned University of Hawai'i-West O'ahu campus and end at Ala Moana Center.

A route backed by Hannemann would have included those starting and ending points, but would have dipped south to the airport instead of following the Salt Lake path.

"We didn't get our first choice; we got our second choice," Hannemann said.

The vote cleared the way for engineering and environmental studies to begin, Hannemann said. The council and the mayor said they expect the system to eventually stretch from West Kapolei to Manoa and Waikiki. Also still to come is a decision on what kind of technology — rail, rubber-tired vehicles or other options — the transit system would use.

Hannemann allies unexpectedly had swapped the airport link for Salt Lake Boulevard last Wednesday to win a crucial swing vote from Councilman Romy Cachola that kept the project alive.

Salt Lake residents were thrilled that yesterday's vote upheld the earlier decision, but others said the city was rapidly creating an expensive mess that would benefit few.

"I'm absolutely elated," said Grant Tanimoto, chairman of the Aliamama/Salt Lake/Foster Village Neighborhood Board. "For a while there, it was touch and go. But the process played out, and the right decision was made."

Wa'anae resident James Manaku Sr. said he did not believe the system would ever help the Leeward Coast.

"It's not going to benefit us in any way, shape or form," he said. "It's just going to benefit those who develop property along the way."

POLITICAL REALITY

Voting in favor of the route last week and yesterday were Cachola and council members Todd Apo, Nestor Garcia, Gary Okino and Rod Tam.

Voting in opposition were Donovan Dela Cruz, Charles Djou, Ann Kobayashi and Chairwoman Barbara Marshall.

The decision capped a wild week of political maneuvering as supporters of other paths scrambled for votes, and angry constituents bombarded council members with phone calls and e-mails.

Apo had tried to steer the route back to Hannemann's original proposal of going past the airport by tacking on promises that later links to Salt Lake and UH-Manoa would be top priorities.

Djou, Garcia and Tam joined him yesterday. But the vote fell short when Okino, who had come up with the Salt Lake compromise last week, refused to abandon that route.

Doing so would have stabbed Cachola in the back, and someone else would then almost certainly have switched his or her vote to kill the route anyway, Okino said.

"Obviously, the airport is the better route, but this is political reality," Okino said. "I think we got the best of what we could have gotten."

Cachola said he was "ecstatic" that the Salt Lake route had held up despite the attempts to alter it.

"I'm on cloud nine," Cachola said. "Salt Lake is the best route, for the greater good."

He said an airport link should be built only if the system is later extended into Waikiki.

HARSH CRITICISM

But Djou called yesterday's decision a "train wreck" that would doom the entire project.

"This system will be a failure from the day it starts, because it has dropped UH-Manoa and the airport," he said. "We're clearly on the wrong track."

Djou had joined Dela Cruz in calling for an alternative that would have stretched from Fort Weaver Road to University Avenue and King Street via the airport. The move was defeated when Kobayashi was the only one to join them. Dela Cruz said he still supports the overall project, but was very frustrated by all the politicking.

"Some people want to build a train, but it looks like we're trying to build a roller coaster," he said. "It goes up and down, and we don't know where it will end. I hope the public doesn't start to lose confidence in the project."

Hannemann conceded that trying to break ground on the project by 2009 was "aggressive" and "ambitious." But he blasted Gov. Linda Lingle for publicly doubting on Monday that such a schedule was possible.

"The governor should really jump on board," Hannemann said. "She's really out of step and out of touch."

Yesterday's decision "takes us another step forward in erasing the image that the Honolulu City Council fumbled 15 years ago, and I think that's very, very important," Hannemann said.

A previous council killed a similar project in 1992 by voting against a tax hike that would have helped pay for it.

Former Mayor Frank Fasi had tried since the late 1970s to build a mass transit system.

Mayor sees transit rolling toward construction
With federal funding criteria met by a route choice, he looks to break ground in 2009

Star-Bulletin staff
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Mayor Mufi Hannemann said yesterday's City Council vote affirming a first rail transit route from East Kapolei to Ala Moana Center via Salt Lake means the project is right on track.

"The goal continues to be to break ground in 2009," Hannemann said.

The mayor said that he is "very confident" construction will begin in two years.

He said yesterday's Council decision is proof that the deadlines the administration set for the Honolulu High Capacity Transit Corridor Project are being met on schedule.

The mayor said he is planning to fly to Washington to meet with federal transit officials.

The city needs to decide on an initial transit route as part of the application process to obtain funding from the Federal Transit Administration.

Hannemann's original proposal offered a 20-mile segment that went from the University of Hawai'i at West Oahu in East Kapolei to Ala Moana Center via Hickam Air Force Base, Pearl Harbor and the airport.

THE CITY COUNCIL VOTE

A look at yesterday's 5-4 vote for the rail transit route from East Kapolei to Ala Moana Center via Salt Lake:

FOR: Todd Apo, Romy Cachola, Nestor Garcia, Gary Okino and Rod Tam

AGAINST: Donovan Dela Cruz, Charles Djou, Ann Kobayashi and Barbara Marshall

Instead, the Council took a preliminary vote last week that suggested going through Salt Lake instead of the airport because there were not enough votes to approve the mayor's first choice.

The mayor said yesterday that while he did not get what he originally wanted, he can live with the Salt Lake alignment because the route is cost-effective according to federal criteria.

At a construction price tag of \$3.5 billion, it is within the amount the city can afford to build with federal funding plus revenue from the recently enacted 0.5 percent general excise tax surcharge for the city's transit project.

COUNCIL APPROVES INITIAL RAIL ROUTE

Mayor Mufi Hannemann hailed yesterday's vote for a rail transit route from East Kapolei through Salt Lake and to Ala Moana Center.

Two additional routes were suggested during yesterday's Council meeting.

One, offered by Councilman Donovan Dela Cruz, resurrected the possibility of the initial line going to the University of Hawai'i at Manoa by ending at Pook's Alley, an area UH students used.

Dela Cruz said stopping a few blocks from the university would make the idea of going to UH-Manoa more affordable.

The second proposal, by Councilman Todd Apo, revived the mayor's original recommendation: in response to dozens of people who were sure that the Council bypassed the airport.

Both proposals died, however.

"I think it's a questionable system with a major mistake because it doesn't go to UH, and a total mistake because it drops the airport," Councilman Charles Djou said after the vote.

Councilman Romy Cachola, who represents Salt Lake, said there is no sense in going to the airport if there are no immediate plans to build a spur to Waikiki to connect it to the state's top visitor destination.

"It's the best birthday present," said Cachola, who turns 69 next week.

"I feel great, I feel ecstatic. I'm on cloud nine, and I have to thank my community."



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Preliminary Engineering

Preliminary engineering produces estimates of project costs, benefits and impacts. As this work incorporates earlier planning, all of these estimates are much more refined and have a much greater degree of reliability and specificity. During preliminary engineering, project management and fleet management plans are finalized.

A comprehensive preliminary engineering effort also will address the FTA's New Starts project evaluation criteria. Information on project justification and the degree of local financial commitment is updated and reported, as appropriate. As part of preliminary engineering activities, FTA encourages local communities to consider policies and actions designed to enhance the benefits of the project, as well as its financial feasibility.

Thank You

Throughout the transit planning process, the Honolulu High-Capacity Transit Corridor Project public involvement team has worked to keep you informed and engaged. From our initial scoping meetings held in 2005 to the City Council meeting last month, you have taken the time to study this issue and share your opinions and concerns. We are extremely grateful to you for taking the time to participate and we hope you continue to stay involved as the project moves forward.

Newsletter Update

We are in the process of updating our newsletter mailing list. If you'd like to continue receiving the newsletter, there's no need to take any action. If you'd no longer like to receive this newsletter, please call the transit hotline at 566-2299 or email us at www.honolulutransit.org and we'll remove your name from our mailing list.

Public scoping meetings will be held at the following locations:

- Wednesday, March 28 Kapolei Hale
1000 Uluohia Street, Kapolei 6:00 pm – 9:00 pm
- Thursday, March 29 McKinley High School Cafeteria
1039 South King Street 5:00 pm – 8:00 pm

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The Honolulu City Council’s selection of the East Kapolei to Ala Moana Center segment as the First Project was the latest event in a long process of analysis, evaluation and deliberation. After the Honolulu High-Capacity Transit Corridor Project team studied a wide range of transit alternatives, the team’s findings, contained in the Alternatives Analysis (AA) Report, were presented to the City Council. This report provided City Council members with the information they needed to select the Locally Preferred Alternative (LPA). A summary of over 2,390 individual public testimony on the LPA and responses to questions from the public are available on our project website www.honolulustransit.org.

Why an LPA and a First Project?

The LPA defines the long-range plan for a transit system, the complete route as we envision it today. The First Project represents the first portion of the system that is to be built within anticipated revenues – federal funding and money generated through the transit surcharge included in O’ahu’s general excise tax.

Next Steps

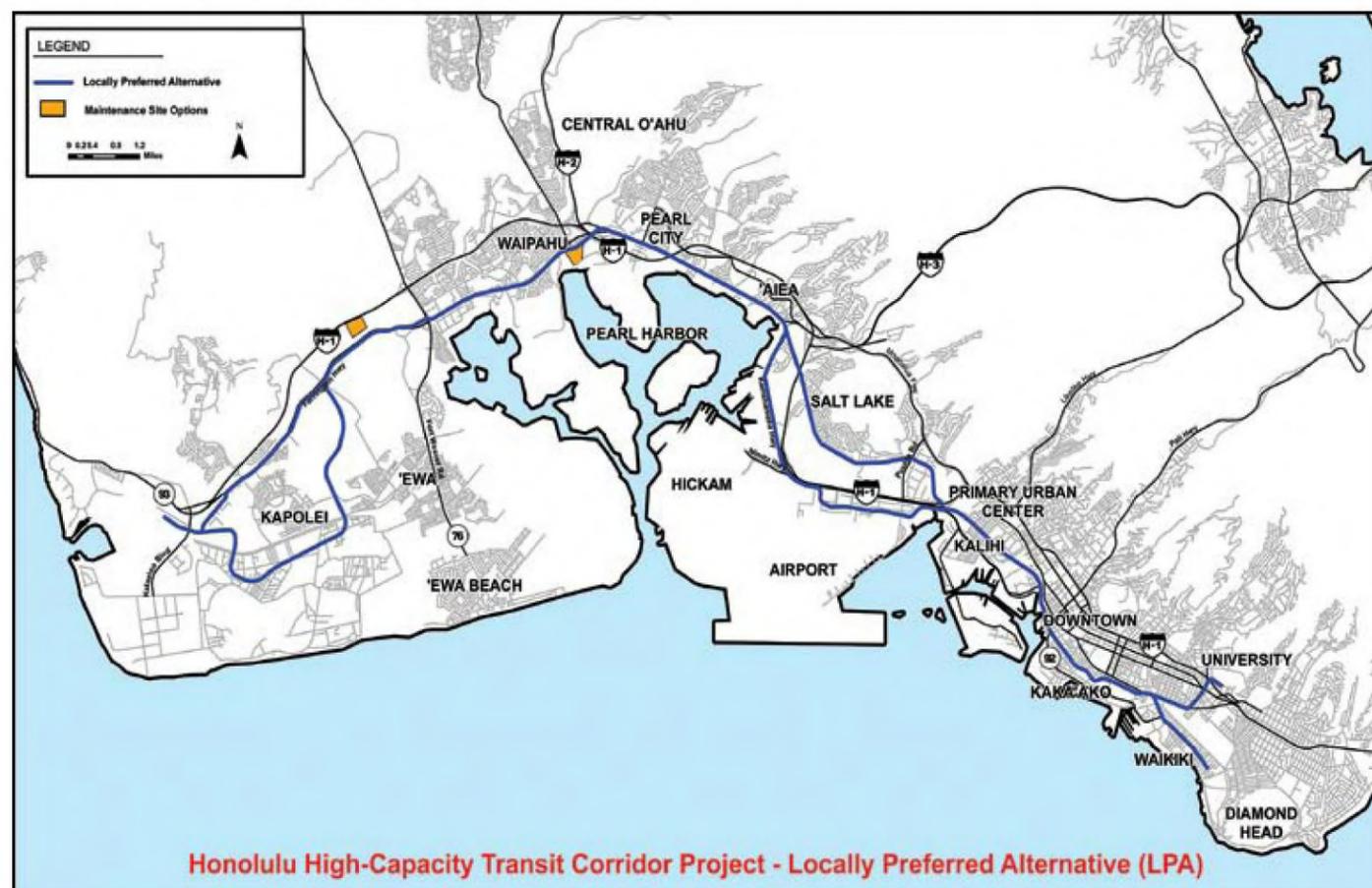
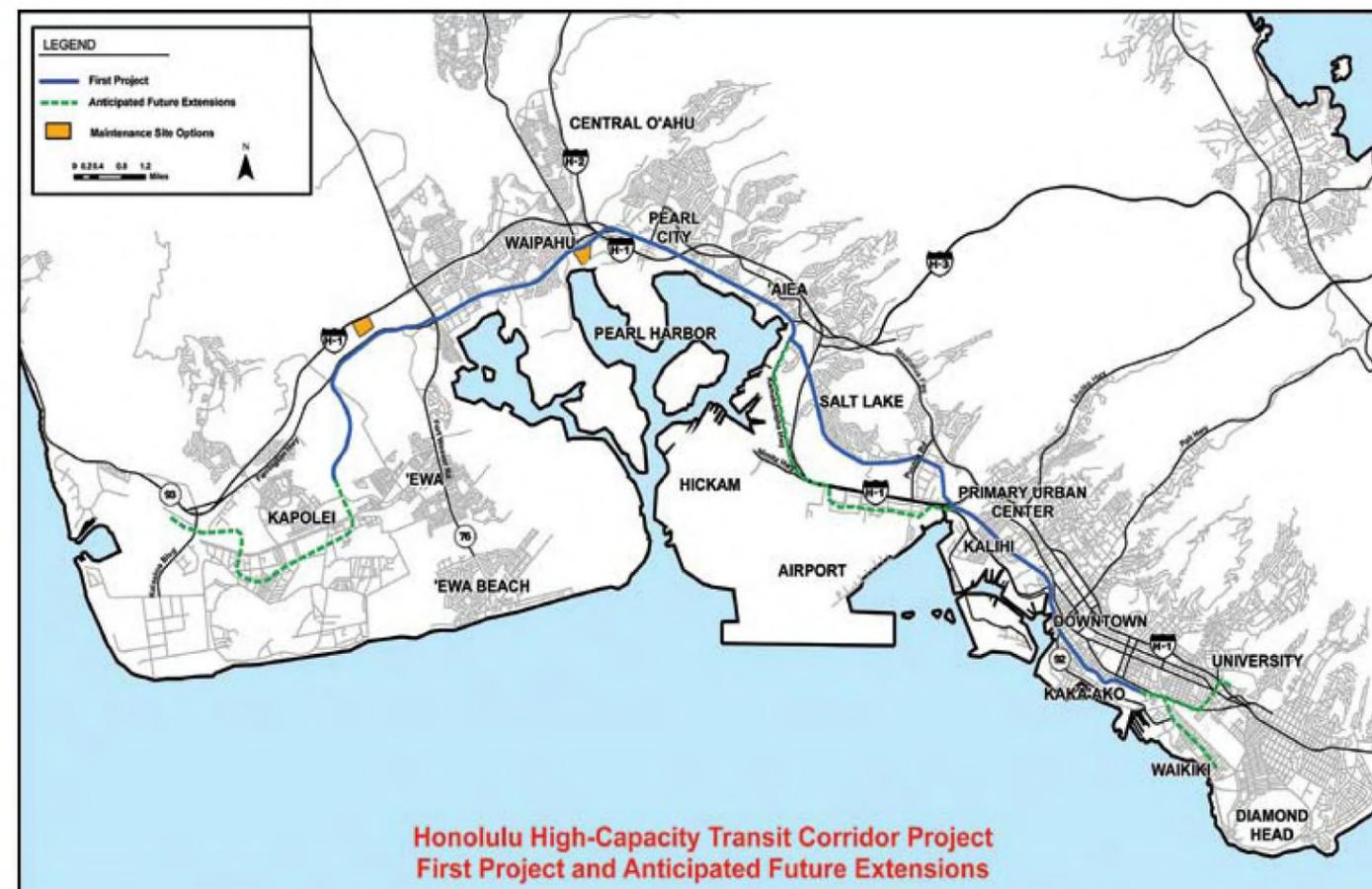
The next steps include beginning work on the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) and Preliminary Engineering (PE). Up to now the transit project has been a locally driven

project, with the City following guidance from the Federal Transit Administration (FTA). As we begin these next steps, FTA becomes a partner in the transit project. That means that at critical project points, we’ll be seeking approvals from the federal government. It also means that work on this project will be conducted following appropriate city, state and federal guidelines, standards and criteria, and reviewed by the FTA.

Two transit routes are proposed for analysis in the EIS. Both alternatives encompass the full transit corridor as described in the LPA, going from West Kapolei to the University of Hawai’i at Mānoa, and Waikiki. Both alternatives also include the First Project, between East Kapolei and Ala Moana Center. One alternative follows Salt Lake Boulevard between Aloha Stadium and Middle Street, while the other alternative includes both Salt Lake Boulevard and Airport alignments.

FTA and the City’s Department of Transportation Services have completed one of the initial steps in the EIS process, by issuing a notice of intent to complete an EIS on the selected alternatives.

The EIS will be prepared to meet both federal and state requirements. On the federal level, the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA) and its



implementing regulations are applicable. On the state level, relevant law is found in Chapter 343 of the Hawai’i Revised Statutes.

Public Involvement in the EIS Process

Next, we’ll be soliciting public and agency input on the purpose of and needs to be addressed by the project, the alternatives to be considered, and the scope of the NEPA EIS for the project, including the environmental and community impacts to be evaluated.

Public scoping meetings will be held at the following locations:

- Kapolei Hale** – 1000 Uluohia Street, Kapolei on March 28, 2007, from 6:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m.
- McKinley High School Cafeteria** – 1039 South King Street on March 29, 2007, from 5:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m.

The public is invited to comment on:

- The purpose of and needs to be addressed by the project;
- The alternatives, including the technologies to be evaluated;
- Alignments (routes) and termination points to be considered; and
- The environmental, social, and economic impacts of the project to be analyzed.

Those individuals who do not attend the scoping meetings, but wish to submit comments, may send written comments to:

**Department of Transportation Services
City and County of Honolulu
650 South King Street, 3rd Floor
Honolulu, HI 96813
Attention: Honolulu High-Capacity Transit
Corridor Project**

You can also submit comments at www.honolulustransit.org. All comments must be received by April 13, 2007.

Scoping activities related to the Hawai’i Revised Statutes Chapter 343 process were completed between December 2005 and January 2006.

EIS Timeframe

We anticipate that it will take about a year to complete the draft EIS. Once that work is done, the draft EIS will be available for public and agency review and comment and as part of that process, we’ll be holding public hearings in communities within the transit corridor.

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