



## Cayetano has no realistic plan to solve West Oahu traffic mess

By Robert Bunda

POSTED: 01:30 a.m. HST, Mar 14, 2012

I've always known former Gov. Ben Cayetano to be at the forefront of controversial issues.

I've never totally agreed with him on many issues, but I have always tried to respect his positions.

Now, I find myself compelled to speak up regarding his opposition to rail, and his lack of a realistic solution to our traffic gridlock.

As a long-time Wahiawa resident who endures the commute into town every day, the traffic congestion more than 15 years ago was exhausting, and today it is unacceptable.

With more people and cars anticipated on this island 15 years from now, the cost of congestion for our children in lost family time alone will be debilitating, if we don't provide an elevated mass transit alternative from the west side.

It was Cayetano as governor who pushed for more development in West Oahu while mass transit was left out of the discussion.

In 1995, Cayetano secured a land exchange with Campbell Estate for the construction of a new campus for UH-West Oahu.

In his 1995 press release, the governor stated: "This land exchange is only the first step towards realizing my vision for West Oahu and the people who live there."

Subsequently, he signed Act 294, giving him the authority to improve and sell other state lands in the Ewa Plain for planned development to provide financing to develop the UH-West Oahu campus in Kapolei.

Cayetano explained that the land exchange would encourage "economic activity in Kapolei where most future development on Oahu will take place."

Massive development did take place, and the population continued shifting at an incredible pace to West Oahu. While much of the area infrastructure built is essential and important in the development of Kapolei, there was no clear vision by the Cayetano administration of any transportation infrastructure to move people from West Oahu to downtown as part of their commutes.

More than 15 years later, it is no surprise then that our freeways and highways are even more congested. With Kapolei, Makakilo, Ewa, and Ewa Beach yet to reach potential growth limits, in all fairness, the area residents sitting in traffic gridlock have a right to wonder when transportation infrastructure will be built to support the existing development Cayetano spoke of so many years ago.

Perhaps because I and others have lived with these conditions, I have always been a proponent of rail transit from the west side.

In my 2003 opening-day speech as Senate president, I asked my colleagues to consider the possibility of a rail transit system for Oahu.

In 2006, the House and Senate passed the half-percentage point GET surcharge to pay for the local share of constructing rail.

Today, we have already collected more than 25 percent of the expected GET revenue needed for the project. Construction for the rail guideway is set to begin, and by 2019 we ought to have a fully operational line from Kapolei to Ala Moana Center.

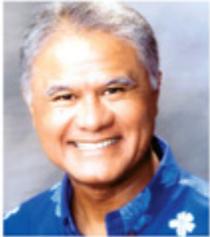
Meanwhile, Cayetano's campaign website states that he supports dedicated freeway bus lanes and more buses, but there is no detail, no funding in place for that, and no guarantees of anything other than wasting more time piling on additional impact studies.

Gov. Cayetano did accept the Bus Rapid Transit plan in 2002 as proposed by then-Mayor Jeremy Harris. But the biggest problem with BRT is it takes away freeway and roadway lanes from other vehicles to be used exclusively for buses.

Anyone driving from Leeward Oahu into town in the morning knows the shutdown of even one freeway lane becomes a traffic nightmare.

Following decades of discussion and planning, the city is doing something about our traffic problems by building an elevated rail system.

Serving on the Honolulu Authority for Rapid Transportation board of directors, I am committed to having this rail project delivered on time, and within budget, and I strongly believe that we need to build rail now.



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