



Delaying rail construction would cost more, city official says

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By Kevin Dayton

The interim head of the Honolulu rail project said today it is cheaper to start construction now on support columns for the elevated rail system than it would be to delay construction. That would be true even if the city was forced later to rip the columns down, said Toru Hamayasu, interim executive director of the Honolulu Authority for Rapid Transportation.

Hamayasu told members of the City Council that each month of construction delays adds \$10 million to the cost of the 20-mile rail project.

City Councilmember Ikaika Anderson repeatedly questioned Hamayasu on the timing of the project during a council Budget Committee hearing, asking why the city is starting construction before the federal government has committed to provide \$1.55 billion to help fund the Honolulu rail system.

Hamayasu said an analysis by HART concluded it is cheaper to have contractor Kiewit Infrastructure West Co. build the columns now, even if they have to be torn down later.

The city signed a contract with Kiewit in 2009 to begin construction of the rail system, and has already agreed to pay a \$15 million change order to the company because of project delays.

In Washington, D.C., today, U.S. Department of Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood said President Barack Obama's administration supports the Honolulu rail transit project, and "we will continue to work through whatever issues need to be worked through."

U.S. Sen. Daniel K. Inouye questioned LaHood about the rail project during a hearing of the Senate Committee on Appropriations' Subcommittee on Transportation, Housing and Urban Development in Washington.

LaHood was testifying in support of the Department of Transportation's fiscal year 2013 budget request to Congress, which includes \$250 million for the Honolulu rail project.

Inouye said the \$250 million request is the largest single New Starts request being made by the department this year, and thanked LaHood for seeking funding for the \$5.27 billion Honolulu project.

The city is counting on a total of \$1.55 billion in New Starts funding to help pay for construction of the 20-mile rail project, which will extend from East Kapolei to Ala Moana Center.

Inouye asked LaHood to describe the transportation department's stance on the project, and LaHood replied that "We've talked about this project. You were kind enough to convene a meeting about this and other projects in Hawaii. I want you to know that we are committed to this project. This is an important project."

"This will deliver people all over the island. It's an important project and at this point, we will continue to work through whatever issues need to be worked through," LaHood testified. "We're committed to this. We're committed to the money; we're committed to the project. And, until we hear differently from others who are intimately involved in this, I see no reason why we won't go forward."

Former Gov. Ben Cayetano this week publicly released internal Federal Transit Administration emails raising concerns about some city actions in connection with the project, but LaHood said those emails were written before he became secretary.

Cayetano is running for Honolulu mayor, and has said he will stop the rail project if elected. Cayetano is also part of a group of rail opponents who are suing in federal court to try to block the rail project.

Honolulu Authority for Rapid Transportation board Chairwoman Carrie Okinaga and Hamayasu issued a joint statement that LaHood's stance "reinforces the federal commitment to seeing the project through. This latest assurance shows that city and federal officials continue to work closely together in moving this project forward."