

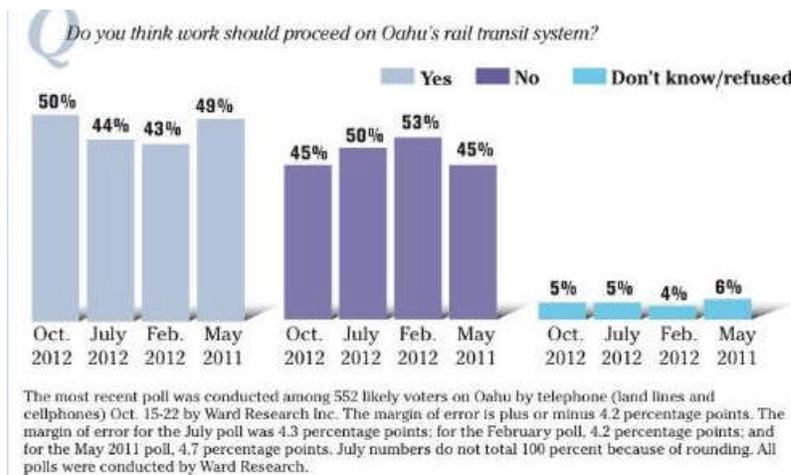
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Rail pulls back into favor among voters

By Kevin Dayton / kdayton@staradvertiser.com

Public opinion on the city's \$5.26 billion rail project appears to be shifting again, and timing is everything.

With a critical mayoral election just ahead that will decide the fate of the rail project, voters apparently are now leaning slightly in favor of rail, according to the new Hawaii Poll.



The latest shift in public support for rail appears to have come almost entirely from Filipino-Americans and working-age voters, with both groups now showing significantly greater support for rail than they did in July.

Three months ago, only 44 percent of Oahu voters polled said work on the rail project should continue, and a bare majority of 50 percent said work should stop.

This month those numbers have flipped, with 50 percent now saying that work on rail should continue, and 45 percent saying it should not. Another 5 percent of those polled said they didn't know or would not answer the question.

The rail question was asked of 552 likely Oahu voters in the upcoming general election. The poll was conducted Oct. 15-22 by Ward Research Inc. of Honolulu for the Star-Advertiser and Hawaii News Now, and has a margin of error of 4.2 percentage points.

About half of those polled were contacted via cellular telephones, and half by land line telephones.

The 20-mile rail line from East Kapolei to Ala Moana Center has been the focus of this year's mayor's race and the subject of heated debate and a flood of political advertising.

Former Gov. Ben Cayetano is running for mayor, and promises to stop the project if elected. His campaign has emphasized the drawbacks of the project, warning that it will be ugly, and that other city services and projects will suffer if the train system is built.

Former city Managing Director Kirk Caldwell supports rail, arguing it is needed to ease congestion on Oahu roads and give residents an alternative to driving.

The shift in support in favor of rail is most obvious in Oahu's Filipino-American community. In July, only 37 percent of Filipino-American voters said they believed work on the rail project should continue, but this month that support has grown to 51 percent.

Voters between 35 and 54 years old also appear to be tilting in favor of the rail project. In July only 48 percent of those voters said work should continue, but that increased to 58 percent in October.

The poll also suggests support for rail has been building among people who said they consider themselves political independents or said they usually vote with Republicans.

Kalu Wolfe, 35, said his views on rail have evolved. Initially he opposed the project because he felt the Leeward residents who will ride the rail line ought to be the ones who pay for it.

But Wolfe said he reconsidered, in part because he recalled road projects, such as the Kalaniana'ole Highway widening, that were built with funding provided by other communities.

"I live on the Windward side and I don't have a problem with paying for something for other people," he said. "I realize we all live on an island and we're a big family."

Still, Wolfe, who is a firefighter, has doubts about the rail line. He said he wonders if large numbers of Oahu residents will be willing to drive to a rail station, get out of their cars and ride the train. He also wonders about the cost of operating and maintaining the system after it is built.

On balance, he decided to support the project.

"My general feeling about it from everything I've heard is there does need to be a solution, rail seems like a viable solution, but the way that they're going about it, I don't know how efficient it is," he said.

Others, like Kailua resident Steve Jones, remain adamantly opposed.

"It is a gigantic waste of money for no reduction in traffic, and if that wasn't bad enough it's going to be a financial drain on the community forever because it will never be self-sufficient," said

POLLS DO NOT FORECAST ELECTION'S WINNER

Every poll is a snapshot in time, taking the pulse of respondents on one particular day and projecting their responses onto a larger population with measurable certainty.

Election polls do not and cannot forecast who will win an election. They cannot foresee, for example, a change in momentum, a candidate's slip of the tongue, a good or bad debate performance, an unexpected announcement or a game-changing ad between the time a poll is released and the election is held.

Polls give a good look at opinions on the day the questions were asked, but nothing beyond that.

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Jones, 45. "It will never be able to generate enough money from the fares to pay for their yearly operations."

"It's just insane. It's just politicians being politicians, and government employees trying to get money out of the public," he said.

The Hawaii Poll confirms that whether voters support rail or oppose it, they expect to pay dearly for it.

A total of 87 percent of the voters strongly agreed or somewhat agreed with the statement: "The rail project will end up costing a lot more than is currently estimated." That is slightly higher than the percentage that agreed with that statement in July.

As for the impact of the rail project on traffic congestion, 47 percent of the voters strongly agreed or somewhat agreed with the statement: "The rail system will result in a noticeable reduction in traffic." About the same percentage disagreed with that statement.

City officials acknowledge Oahu's traffic congestion will increase even with rail as the population grows, but say the congestion would be worse without rail.

Do you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree or strongly disagree that the rail project will end up costing a lot more than is currently estimated?

	OCT. 2012	JULY 2012	MAY 2011
Strongly agree	62%	62%	66%
Somewhat agree	25%	22%	22%
Somewhat disagree	6%	7%	7%
Strongly disagree	4%	6%	4%
Don't know/refused	3%	3%	2%

Do you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree or strongly disagree that the jobs created will boost the economy so much that the cost of the project will be worth it?

	OCT. 2012	JULY 2012	MAY 2011
Strongly agree	19%	17%	16%
Somewhat agree	28%	26%	28%
Somewhat disagree	18%	19%	21%
Strongly disagree	32%	35%	28%
Don't know/refused	3%	4%	6%

Do you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree or strongly disagree that the rail system will result in a noticeable reduction in traffic?

	OCT. 2012	JULY 2012
Strongly agree	20%	18%
Somewhat agree	27%	26%
Somewhat disagree	15%	14%
Strongly disagree	33%	40%
Don't know/refused	5%	3%

Do you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree or strongly disagree that something needs to be done about traffic, but an enhanced bus system is a better choice than rail?

	OCT. 2012	JULY 2012
Strongly agree	32%	36%
Somewhat agree	18%	23%
Somewhat disagree	23%	16%
Strongly disagree	22%	23%
Don't know/refused	6%	3%

The most recent poll was conducted among 552 likely voters on Oahu by telephone (land lines and cellphones) Oct. 15-22 by Ward Research Inc. The margin of error is plus or minus 4.2 percentage points. The margin of error for the July poll was 4.3 percentage points; and for the May 2011 poll, 4.7 percentage points. Some