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Testimony Re: Honolulu Transit Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS)

The Outdoor Circle is deeply concerned that the FEIS lacks substantive responses to many issues raised in our February 2009 comments on the Draft EIS (DEIS).

Concerns about View Planes and Community Intrusion

The FEIS acknowledges most of our concerns:

- The project will change the character of rural and heavily urbanized areas through which it will be built.
- The project will block some protected mauka-makai views resulting in substantial visual effect.
- View obstructions and changes to views of prominent landmarks will be unavoidable and substantial.

But instead of providing concrete solutions or tangible and measurable mitigation as we believe it should, the FEIS says these negative visual effects will be mitigated through application of design guidelines, intergovernmental cooperation, consulting with communities and through landscaping and tree planting.

Street Trees

The City claims in the FEIS that it will fully mitigate the project's impacts to Honolulu's street trees—500 of which will be removed and 300 transplanted. Unfortunately the FEIS does not specify locations for transplants or new trees. Instead that will be decided later based upon need. There is no mention of how the City will deal with unsuccessful transplants, which likely will be significant. But even using the City's numbers there is still a deficit...a net tree loss of hundreds of trees. The City claims additional trees will be added during final landscaping, but the lack of detail in the FEIS makes it impossible to determine whether these measures will be adequate.

Landscaping Plans

The city claims it will implement measures to minimize negative visual effects of the project with essentially the same promises as it lists in how to mitigate view plane damage—through unspecified design guidelines, intergovernmental cooperation,

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consulting with communities and through landscape and streetscape improvements. With literally no specific information upon which to base a conclusion, it is virtually impossible to determine what the effectiveness of the mitigation might be.

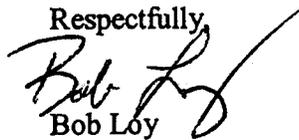
Conclusions

By now it should be clear to most residents that the Honolulu transit system will be a permanent, physical and visual barrier that separates hundreds of thousands of people from the oceanfront. It will create huge, monolithic structures that will forever change the character and livability of many communities through which it will pass. Whatever good it might bring to the city and its people will be at the expense of the beauty of this island and the degradation of the communities and neighborhoods it is supposed to serve.

At the end of the day...and sadly at the end of the Final Environmental Impact Statement process The Outdoor Circle must again rely on the same words that began our comments on the Draft EIS 18 months ago:

The Honolulu Transit Project is destined to become the most visually dominant and intrusive construction project in the history of Hawai'i. While its ability to ease traffic problems on O'ahu has been the subject of lengthy debate, its negative impact on the visual environment of this island cannot be denied and is still, somehow, virtually immeasurable.

Respectfully,



Bob Loy

Director of Environmental Programs