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May 21, 2010 RT10/09-336976

Mr. Mike Uechi
98-111 Kaahele Place
Aiea, Hawaii 96701

Dear Mr. Uechi:

Subject: Honolulu High-Capacity Transit Corridor Project
Comments Received on the Draft Environmental Impact Statement

The U.S. Department of Transportation Federal Transit Administration (FTA) and the City and County of Honolulu Department of Transportation Services (DTS) issued a Draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the Honolulu High-Capacity Transit Corridor Project. This letter is in response to substantive comments received on the Draft EIS during the comment period, which concluded on February 6, 2009. The Final EIS identifies the Airport Alternative as the Project and is the focus of this document. The selection of the Airport Alternative as the Preferred Alternative was made by the City to comply with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) regulations that state that the Final EIS shall identify the Preferred Alternative (23 CFR § 771.125 (a)(1)). This selection was based on consideration of the benefits of each alternative studied in the Draft EIS, public and agency comments on the Draft EIS, and City Council action under Resolution 08-261 identifying the Airport Alternative as the Project to be the focus of the Final EIS. The selection is described in Chapter 2 of the Final EIS. The Final EIS also includes additional information and analyses, as well as minor revisions to the Project that were made to address comments received from agencies and the public on the Draft EIS. The following paragraphs address comments regarding the above-referenced submittal:

The impacts on future traffic conditions of building or not building the Project are described in Chapter 3 of the Final EIS. The project alternatives were developed to address the purpose and need for the project and evaluated based on how well they addressed the identified needs. According to the Alternatives Analysis phase of the Project, regardless of which solution is selected for implementation, conditions will be worse in 2030 than now. Among all the options evaluated in the Alternatives Analysis, however, the fixed guideway substantially outperformed the others based on measures of mobility, reliability, support of planned growth areas, environmental impacts, cost-effectiveness, feasibility, and fairness. As shown in Chapter 3 of

Comment [TH1]: Mention how P&N fed into the Alternative Analysis selection and elimination.

the Final EIS, the Project will reduce delay by 18 percent in 2030. No other alternative was found to accomplish such an improvement.

The capital plan that analyzes capital expenditures for the Project is presented in Section 6.3 of the Final EIS, including a description of the amount of funding anticipated from various sources. Capital costs of the Project, including finance charges, are expected to be fully paid for by a combination of FTA Section 5309 New Starts Funds and FTA Section 5307 Funds from the Federal government and revenues from the County General Excise and Use Tax (GET) surcharge levied from 2007 through 2022. The FTA New Starts Program requires a series of successively more detailed steps to be taken that show refinement in design and financing and are subject to FTA approval. In general, local funds must represent at least 50 percent of the project budget to realistically qualify for FTA funding. The Project provides 70% of the cost of the project. As noted above, Chapter 6 also discusses other options for raising revenue should it be necessary to find additional funds. As noted above, ~~To be eligible for FTA New Starts Funds, local funds must constitute at least 50 percent of the project budget.~~ Section 6.6 of the Final EIS describes risks and uncertainties associated with these funding assumptions, including receipt of Federal Funds through a Full Funding Grant Agreement with FTA. The City has submitted the application to enter Preliminary Engineering and qualify for Federal New Starts Funds.

Comment [TH2]: Mention in order to qualify for funding under New Starts, a local match of 50% is required.

The capital plan accounts for the effects of the economic downturn and continues to be balanced. Ordinance 07-001 which approved the GET surcharge on Oahu for use in constructing a fixed guideway project does not authorize the use of property taxes to fund the Project construction.

The FTA and DTS appreciate your interest in the Project. The Final EIS, a copy of which is included in the enclosed DVD, has been issued in conjunction with the distribution of this letter. Issuance of the Record of Decision under NEPA and acceptance of the Final EIS by the Governor of the State of Hawaii are the next anticipated actions ~~and will conclude the environmental review process for this Project~~.

Very truly yours,

WAYNE Y. YOSHIOKA
Director

Enclosure