DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION SERVICES

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May 21, 2010 RT10/09-335799

Ms. Michelle Spalding Matson
3931 Gail Street
Honolulu, Hawaii 96815

Dear Ms. Matson:

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 island's unique visual character and scenic beauty were considered in the visual and aesthetic analysis presented in the Draft and Final EISs. The Project will be set in an urban context where visual change is expected and differences in scales of structures are typical. The visual effects on Honolulu's Downtown, including the Aloha Tower, Irwin Park, and Dillingham Transportation Building, are discussed under the Kalihi to Ala Moana Center Landscape Unit heading in Section 4.8.3 of the Final EIS. The Project will comply with Section 106 of the*

*National Historic Preservation Act and Section 4(f) of the Department of Transportation Act.*

*The Embarcadero Freeway in San Francisco was an elevated highway, not rail, and thus is hard to compare. The following measures will be included with the Project to minimize negative visual effects and enhance the visual and aesthetic opportunities that it creates:*

- *Develop and apply design guidelines that will establish a consistent design framework for the Project with consideration of local context.*
- *Coordinate the project design with the City's transit-oriented development program within the Department of Planning and Permitting.*
- *Consult with the communities surrounding each station for input on station design elements.*
- *Consider specific sites for landscaping and trees during Final Design when plans for new plantings will be prepared by a landscape architect. Landscape and streetscape improvements will serve to mitigate potential visual impacts.*

*The Project will provide users, including tourists, with expansive views from several portions of the corridor by elevating riders above highway traffic, street trees, and low structures adjacent to the alignment. In Section 4.8.3 of the Final EIS, specific environmental, architecture, and landscape design criteria are listed that will help minimize visual effects of the Project.*

*The visual effects on Honolulu's Downtown, including Mother Waldron Neighborhood Park and the Kakaako neighborhood, are discussed under the "Kalihi to Ala Moana Center Landscape Unit" in Section 4.8.3 of the Final EIS. To minimize negative visual effects and enhance visual and aesthetic opportunities, RTD will consult with the Kakaako community for input on station design elements. In addition, design guidelines that establish a consistent design framework for the Project with consideration of local context will be developed and applied.*

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