From: Nutakor, Chris (FTA)
To: Ryan, James (FTA); Nguyen, Kim (FTA)
Sent: 3/30/2010 3:15:36 AM
Subject: RE: FTA article: Honolulu knew the FAA EIS problem in 2006

Thanks Jim.

From: Ryan, James (FTA)
Sent: Tuesday, March 30, 2010 9:08 AM
To: Nguyen, Kim (FTA); Nutakor, Chris (FTA)
Subject: RE: FTA article: Honolulu knew the FAA EIS problem in 2006

Well now. As with all things Honolulu, there is more to the story.

The 2006 letter from HDOT to the City is an interesting piece. Yes, it says that the City needs to be "aware of height restrictions, especially at the area near Lagoon Drive which is in the runway approach area for Runway 4L and 4R." But, a few paragraphs earlier, the letter says "we prefer the alignment with the transit guideway passing through HNL along Aolele Street with one station near the airport overseas parking garage and the other at the intersection of Aolele Street and Lagoon Drive."

So HDOT preferred the Aolele alignment. That's the City's preferred alignment -- the one that was discovered (in June 2009 by FTA's PMOC) to intrude within the runway clearance zone. The article portrays the letter as conveying HDOT's concerns about the aiport alignment. Actually, the letter conveys HDOT's preference for the alignment that turned out to have problems.

(This "reporting" by Sean Hao ranks up there with his article a few months ago on the relative safety of at-grade rail compared to elevated rail. He simply passed on the gross distortion concocted by the Honolulu AIA that used elevated peoplemovers (Miami, Detroit, etc.) rather than heavy rail (DC Metro, BART, etc.) to represent elevated rail. An honest assessment would have shown that at-grade rail has an accident rate that is several times higher than grade-separated rail -- a reality that would be obvious to anyone who spent two seconds thinking about it.)

The fundamental cause of the rail project's intrusion in the runway protection zone (RPZ) at the airport is that the airport layout plan (ALP) was never updated to show the expanded RPZ that resulted from the 1994(!!) change in FAA standards. So when the City's contractors consulted the ALP for information on clearance requirements, they found that the Aolele Street alignment would be OK. At the big meeting of FAA and FTA staff in our TRO-9 office a few weeks ago, the FAA guys said that the City "used the wrong drawings." I didn't have sufficient chutzpah to ask "do any correct drawings exist?" Maybe they do, but they are not in the ALP -- the official airport document -- that is the responsibility of the Airports Division of HDOT.

Attached is an ad that placed in the Advertiser by the City's rail contractors. They are hardly unbiased, of course, but it's a reminder that there are two sides to every story. So, actually reading the correspondence is the only way to get clarity on who said what to whom and when.

Pretty interesting, huh?

From: Nguyen, Kim (FTA)
Sent: Mon 3/29/2010 4:39 PM
To: Nutakor, Chris (FTA); Ryan, James (FTA)
Subject: FW: FTA article: Honolulu knew the FAA EIS problem in 2006

FYI. See the below correspondences between HDOT and the City of Honolulu. Apparently, the City was made aware of the airport issue back in 2006.

From: Luu, Catherine (FTA)
Sent: Friday, March 26, 2010 11:10 AM
To: Tsiforas, Bill (RTC NV); Mantych, Timothy; Nguyen, Kim (FTA)
Subject: FW: FTA article: Honolulu knew the FAA EIS problem in 2006

Honolulu rail planners knew of airport issues in 2006, state says

DOT releases letters showing city has known of airport route encroachment issue since 2006

PDF: Aug. 9, 2006 letter from state Airports Division to city DTS
PDF: Feb 27, 2008 meeting notes, Airports Division Coordination Meeting
PDF: Jan. 29, 2009 memo, state DOT to city DTS
PDF: Jun. 25, 2009: Correspondence, HDOT To City DTS
PDF: Jul. 20, 2009: Correspondence, HDOT To City DTS
PDF: Aug. 20, 2009: Correspondence, HDOT To City DTS
PDF: Nov. 3, 2009: Correspondence, HDOT To FTA

By Sean Hao
Advertiser
3/26/10

The city's proposed rail-transit project needs to be conducted with "a higher level of transparency," the state Department of Transportation said yesterday as it made public all its correspondence on the issue.

"There is a lot of misinformation out there about the Honolulu rail-transit project and the public deserves to know all the facts," said Brennon Morioka, state DOT director.

The state's release of five letters to the city and two other documents was partially driven by statements from city officials that the rail line's encroachment on airspace at the Honolulu International Airport was not brought to the attention of the city until mid-2009, Morioka said.

The airport encroachment issue must be resolved before the start of construction on the $5.3 billion, 20-mile elevated rail line from East Kapolei to Ala Moana. The issue with the airport could have been addressed by the city sooner, Morioka said.

"In 2006, our first letter indicated that they should be aware of runway issues in the Lagoon Drive area, so we have continually offered our assistance and willingness to meet with the city on numerous occasions ," he said. "There has been more than ample time for these issues to be addressed in the timeframe that the city had hoped to go out to bid and start construction.

"To date, the (project's environmental impact statement) ... has not addressed those concerns."

Under current plans, the elevated train track and a station near the intersection of Aolele Street and Lagoon Drive would be at least four stories tall and about 1,300 feet from airport runways, Morioka said. That encroaches on a runway airspace buffer designed to keep buildings and other obstructions from affecting airplane operations.

City director of transportation services Wayne Yoshioka said yesterday, "The city appreciates the posting of seven letters regarding the Honolulu rail-transit project by the state DOT. As director Morioka correctly points out, the letters show the collaboration and cooperation that has existed for several years now between the city and the state regarding this all-important, voter-approved project. The city has worked to address the state's concerns."

Yoshioka said in a written statement that at a meeting last week the state, federal officials and city discussed "technical issues" that need to be resolved regarding the airport.

"Since that meeting, several discussions have taken place between the city and the (Federal Transit Administration) ... about the plan that should help resolve the runway protection zone issue expeditiously," he said.

'Please be aware'

City Council members have criticized city transportation officials for not disclosing the extent of the airport problem sooner, and for not allowing council representatives to attend last week's meeting.

The city recently said the airspace concerns arose last summer and were the result of changes in federal aviation rules. The FAA has said there were no rule changes affecting the project.

The documents released by the state yesterday show that the airport runway concerns were first raised in an Aug. 9, 2006, letter, when then-DOT director Rodney Haraga told the city that the agency supported plans to build a station near Aolele Street and Lagoon Drive.

"In addition, please be aware of height restrictions, especially at the area near Lagoon Drive which is the runway approach area for runway 4R and 4L," Haraga wrote in a letter to the city Department of Transportation Services.

Another letter to the city dated July 20 of last year warned that the city's draft of its final environmental impact statement for the train did not resolve the airport concerns.

"There are several operational and engineering issues that still have not been addressed," Morioka wrote in a letter to Yoshioka.

Cost unclear

In a letter to The Advertiser this week, Yoshioka said the city conducted an airspace analysis of the route, which was given to the state Department of Transportation in May 2008 and the Federal Aviation Administration in mid-2009.

However, Morioka said the state has not been provided with such a study. According to the state DOT, the city based its initial analysis of the impacts of rail on an outdated airport layout plan. That plan was drafted in the mid-1990s and had not been updated to reflect a 1994 change in runway protection zones.

The airport issue could be resolved by moving the train route farther from the airport or moving two runways. The city has said it prefers that the runways be moved. The city would be responsible for paying the costs of relocating the runways. Just how much that could cost has not been disclosed.