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U.S. Department
Of Transportation
**Federal Transit
Administration**

Headquarters

1200 New Jersey Ave., SE
Washington, D.C. 20590

JUN 26 2007

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Mr. Melvin N. Kaku
Director, Department of Transportation Services
City and County of Honolulu
650 South King Street, 3rd Floor
Honolulu, HI 96813

Dear Mr. Kaku:

Thank you for your letter of May 30, 2007, in which you request clarification of the position of the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) regarding a busway as a possible option for the Fixed Guideway Alternative selected by the City and County of Honolulu. Specifically, you ask whether the definition of a fixed guideway might include a busway that relies on conventional buses using on- and off-ramps for access to and from the facility.

Your question occurs in the context of the request that the City is preparing for FTA to advance the Fixed Guideway Alternative into preliminary engineering (PE), a substantial step towards the award of federal funds through the FTA Major Capital Investment Program (often called the "New Starts" program). Congress requires FTA to evaluate projects proposed for PE against a specific set of criteria that rely directly on the cost, performance, and impacts of the proposed project. To comply with this requirement, FTA must be able to evaluate a clearly defined project proposal in terms of its specific cost estimates, ridership forecasts, and other performance measures.

FTA's understanding of the fixed guideway alternatives evaluated in detail in the November 1, 2006, Alternatives Analysis Report for the High-Capacity Transit Corridor is that they assumed a largely elevated guideway for trains or articulated vehicles of 175 to 200 feet in length, using electric power, limiting passenger access to on-guideway stations, and providing a peak capacity of at least 6,000 passengers per hour in each direction. These key elements of the guideway definition were, in our understanding, the basis for predictions of capital costs, operating and maintenance costs, transit service impacts and ridership gains, and impacts on the surrounding environment. Various guideway technologies are consistent with this guideway definition – including options that use different kinds of vehicles, power distribution, train control, and guideway cross-sections.

The busway option that you describe in your letter would appear to be quite different from the Fixed Guideway Alternative in both its key defining elements and in its costs, performance, and impacts. Consequently, FTA would face substantial ambiguities in the task of evaluating a proposed project if the Fixed Guideway Alternative were defined so broadly as to include the busway option that you describe. Those ambiguities would likely prevent FTA from evaluating the Fixed Guideway Alternative and would probably lead to an FTA request that the City choose a specific definition – either the fixed guideway considered in the Alternatives Analysis or a busway option – and to provide information that corresponds to that definition. The choice is, of course, entirely a local decision. FTA asks only that the decision produce a project proposal that is sufficiently well defined to permit the FTA evaluation under the required New Starts criteria.

Please do not hesitate to contact me or Leslie Rogers, FTA's Region IX Administrator, if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Ron Fisher

Ron Fisher
Director, Office of Project Planning