Mr. Secretary:

It has been a couple of months since I sent you a (written) copy of the general and detailed comments I made on the draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for Honolulu's rail transit project. Since I received no acknowledgement, I have no idea if it ever reached you—or was "intercepted" by aides. In my comments I expressed my concerns about the manipulated process in Honolulu that has been directed toward the goal of limiting competition to only steel wheel on steel rail (SWSR) system suppliers—despite the city's receipt of responses to its initial request for information from suppliers of three other qualified fixed-rail technologies. I believe that we have an ideal environment for an urban magnetic levitation system (including no existing track network to preserve and build upon) and had been looking forward to seeing the Japanese HSST compete for the project. Based on information in the supplier's presentation to the Honolulu City Council and data in the draft EIS, I have testified that the city can save $570 million on construction of the 20-mile guideway and almost another $1 billion over 30 years of (mag-lev) operations and maintenance. None of the mayor's four backers on the (nine-member) council have ever disputed my figures because they know the numbers are based on real data.

Since the comments went in on the EIS, the city issued a request for proposals for construction of the first (six-mile) segment of the guideway and has already received replies. Based on the wording in the RFP, I am sure that no construction firm wanting to win proposed anything other than (what will amount to) a 28-32 foot wide pre-cast concrete "bridge." Once the contract is awarded, the cost advantages of both the mag-lev and a conventional monorail system are lost. The only hope remaining for a fair and open competition appears to be direction from the FTA to re-accomplish the EIS to cover the other rail systems and for rescission of the current design-build contract in favor of a design-build-operate-maintain contract that enables construction firms to team with system suppliers and bid on the full 20-mile alignment.

Honolulu Mayor Mufi Hannemann has praised the transit project for its potential for jobs creation and transit-oriented development. These may be nice-to-have corollary aspects; however, the project is supposed to be about commuting. Our taxpayers and commuters should receive the best system at the best price. Aside from its favorable cost aspects, the HSST, vis-à-vis SWSR systems, also is faster, much quieter, smoother running, more reliable, and safer. I have asked the mayor and council members the following question a number of times: "If SWSR systems are best, why will they not allow the other rail technologies to compete?" I am still waiting for an answer.

I also would like to hear from you, Mr. Secretary. Perhaps $1.5 billion does not amount to much in the midst of trillions being discussed at the national level, but it certainly matters to the limited number of taxpayers on Oahu, particularly in these difficult economic times. Please "revisit" my submitted comments on the EIS and, perhaps, ask the FTA Region IX Administrator, Leslie Rogers, what his office plans as a response to the Honolulu Department of Transportation Services.

Respectfully,

Frank Genadio