

## INFORMATION MEMORANDUM TO THE ADMINISTRATOR

From: Stephen Fong, Communications and  
Congressional Affairs, 61215

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Re: Meeting with Governor of Hawaii, Linda Lingle, TBD,  
Review Transportation Improvement Recommendations

On October 27, 2003, the Blue Ribbon Transportation Talk Force convened by Hawaii Governor Linda Lingle unveiled a proposal to build a \$2.6 billion light-rail transit system and a \$200 million elevated highway flyover to help solve Oahu's traffic congestion. The Island of Oahu is faced with severe daily transportation congestion since existing transportation capacity is limited by natural conditions and existing high-density development all the while constraining additional road construction. Additional road construction would cause significant environmental impacts resulting in residential and business displacements.

The proposed light rail system is to begin on the west side of Oahu at Kapolei and travel along the Farrington and Kamehameha Highways connecting with the proposed elevated highway and end at Pacific Street and Nimitz Highway. The Honolulu Department of Transportation (DTS) is expected to be the project sponsor of the 22-mile light rail system which will be in exclusive right-of-way keeping the system at grade when possible. The light rail project is proposed as a design/build project with a completion date of 2018.

The Nimitz Highway flyover, to be constructed by the Hawaii Department of Transportation (HDOT), project is estimated to cost \$200 million and will take six years to construct. The one-mile project will be two elevated high-occupancy vehicle (HOV) contra-flow lanes that will travel east in the morning and west in the afternoon. The flyover will eventually be converted to light rail only. The flyover will then be extended one-half-mile to Iwilei, the beginning of the proposed initial operating segment (IOS) of the bus rapid transit project. The IOS will continue through the central business district and on to Waikiki.

Governor Lingle stated that the projects would mean higher taxes. The state legislature and the transportation committee of the Honolulu City Council are looking at a large variety of sources for local funding. Possible increases under consideration include: state vehicle registration fees, fuel tax revenues, vehicle weight tax revenues, rental

vehicles and tour vehicle surcharge revenues and general excise tax revenues. Other funding considerations include: Federal Highway Funds, GARVEE bonds debt service for Oahu, revenue bonds debt service for Oahu, impact fees and FTA *New Starts* funds.

## **BACKGROUND**

Region IX is skeptical of local willingness and capacity to fund a major project. FTA's history with Honolulu reflects that in 1989, a light rail project was developed in a similar corridor for about \$2 billion. FTA had already issued a Full Funding Grant Agreement (FFGA) when the Honolulu City Council defeated an excise tax needed for the local share by a surprise 5-4 vote in 1992. There had been other projects proposed before this project, so after 30 plus years of false starts, including a lack of funding for the Primary Corridor Transportation Project (PCTP), Region IX would recommend extreme caution on any proposal that is not supported by a local funding source.

In 1998, the City and County of Honolulu began working on a bus rapid transit project (BRT) known as the Primary Corridor Transportation Project. The "Regional" BRT element included a continuous H-1 BRT Corridor from Kapolei to Downtown using a.m. and p.m. zipper lanes and new express lanes. The "In-Town" BRT component was comprised of a high capacity transit spine from Middle Street to Downtown, a University Branch from Downtown to UH-Manoa, and a Downtown to Waikiki Branch via Kakaako Mauka. The project entered preliminary engineering on August 15, 2001. FTA issued a supplemental draft environmental statement on March 22, 2002.

In December 2002, Linda Lingle became the first Republican Governor of Hawaii in nearly 40 years. She is also the first female Governor of Hawaii. During her campaign, she stated her opposition to the BRT project as then proposed. In January, Governor Lingle appointed a new director of the State of Hawaii Department of Transportation (HDOT), Rodney H. Haraga. In December 2002, Honolulu elected a new city council and several of the new members have publicly stated that they are against the BRT project. Thus, there was not local consensus supporting the entire 30-mile bus rapid transit project. The Mayor of Honolulu, Jeremy Harris, then indicated that he would like to construct a 6-mile interim-operating segment (IOS) of the BRT project within the City of Honolulu, from Waikiki to Iwilei.

A final environmental impact statement (FEIS) was issued on the project on July 25, 2003. The FEIS covered the entire BRT project and a 5.6-mile IOS from Iwilei to Waikiki. The Record of Decision for the IOS was issued on October 23, 2003.

## **CURRENT STATUS**

The Task Force's recommendations come on the heels of efforts by the City and County of Honolulu to advance its in-town bus rapid transit project known as the Primary Corridor Transportation Project. As the local consensus supporting the initially proposed 30-mile bus rapid transit project has waned, Honolulu Mayor Jeremy Harris has pushed for a scaled down 5.6-mile Interim Operating Segment (IOS) from Iwilei to Waikiki. Region IX issued the record of Decision for the IOS on October 23, 2003. The Honolulu

City Council has currently committed \$31 million for the IOS and there are two unobligated Section 5309 earmarks for about \$20 million. The local funds will expire on December 31, 2003 unless the city has secured a ROD and encumbered a construction contract. The IOS project must still enter final design and receive a grant award for the funds or a letter of no prejudice. However, currently the project is not in the State Transportation Improvement Program. The Governor has indicated that this project is consistent with the new proposal.

O/briefing paper/Honolulu Proposed LRT Project Information 10-30-03