GRASSroot
Institute of Hawaii

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Mr. Wayne Y. Yoshioka
Department of Transportation Services
City and County of Honolulu
650 South King Street, 3rd Floor
Honolulu, HI 96813

Mr. Ted Matley
FTA Region IX
201 Mission Street, Suite 1650
San Francisco, CA 94105

Mr. Yoshioka and Mr. Matley,

I am writing this letter out of concern regarding the proposed Honolulu rail transit system and the related Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS).

Throughout 2008, the City and County of Honolulu made a number of claims, many of which are included in the DEIS, which cannot be substantiated by existing data. Our policy report, *Debunking Myths of Honolulu Rail Transit*, refutes many of these claims in detail. Below are just a few of these claims, along with brief explanations of the facts.

Claim: *Public transit ridership will increase with the addition of rail transit.*
Truth: Since 1960, Denver is the only city that has held onto a slight percentage increase in transit ridership after building rail. In metropolitan areas with high public transportation usage (Boston, Chicago, New York, and San Francisco), percentage of public transportation usage has decreased in all the cities following the implementation of rail systems. The same pattern is occurring for metropolitan areas with second tier public transportation usage (Detroit, Houston, Los Angeles, Phoenix, Portland, Sacramento, San Juan, San Diego), contrary to what the city's radio and TV ads would have one believe. (Decennial Census 1960-2000 and American Community Survey for 2007. US Census Bureau. http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/DatasetMainPageServlet?_lang=en&_ts=240267317805&_ds_name=ACS_2006_EST_G00_&_program)

Claim: *Rail systems in cities such as Vancouver, Salt Lake City, Portland, and Washington, DC have been vital in reducing traffic.*
Truth: According to the Texas Transportation Institute's 2007 Urban Mobility Report, none of these cities have experienced a reduction in traffic, and traveling times for commuters have increased even in spite of rail. (http://mobility.tamu.edu/ums/congestion_data/tables/national/table_4.pdf)

Claim: *Rail uses less energy than automobiles or other commute options.*
Truth: According to the US Department of Energy, energy use per passenger mile (Btu) is 3,512 for cars, 4,235 for buses, and 2,784 for rail. Motorcycles clock in much lower at 1,855, while the Toyota Prius clocks in at only 1,659 (Transportation Data Book, Chapter 2, Table 2.12 Passenger Travel and Energy Use. 2006. US Department of Energy. www-cta.ornl.gov/data/chapter2.shtml; Greenhouse Gas Emissions per Passenger Mile. Public Transport & Personal Mobility in USA in 2005. www.demographia.com/db-ghg-carstr.pdf). Given rail transit's declining ridership and permanent dependence on fuel, the increasing popularity of fuel-efficient cars such as the Prius and newer models mean that energy efficiency is increasing for cars while it decreases for rail. Furthermore, the energy necessary to build a rail system offsets any estimated energy savings. Portland's environmental impact statements estimates the system would need 172 years of savings—moving commuters from cars to rail—in order to make up for construction.

Claim: *Rail reduces carbon emissions.*
Truth: The CO2 output of the light and heavy rail, buses and the average car are presently very nearly the same. With the advent of hybrid and other more efficient cars and the high turnover of cars, the average car will soon surpass all other commute options, including heavy rail. This argues for transit systems that allow for large numbers of increasingly energy efficient cars—not fixed rail systems that will soon become a thing of the past.

Claim: *A $6.5 billion train is cost-effective.*
Truth: According to the DEIS, the proposed rail system with both Airport and Salt Lake routes will cost $6.5 billion in capital costs alone, or more than $6,000 per Oahu resident. These numbers are excessively large, especially when more cost-effective traffic solutions exist. For example, the construction of HOT Lanes would cost just $0.9 billion, while shaving 40 minutes off of the commute time from Kapolei to Downtown as compared to rail. ("Transportation Alternatives Analysis for Mitigating Traffic Congestions between Leeward Oahu and Honolulu" directed by Professor Panos D. Prevedouros, of the University of Hawaii at Manoa.)

Thank you so much for taking the time to understand these concerns as expressed by the Grassroot Institute of Hawaii. Please don't hesitate to contact me if you need any further information.

Sincerely,

Jamie Story
President
Grassroot Institute of Hawaii
1314 S. King St. Suite 1163
Honolulu, Hawaii 96814
(808) 591-9193
www.grassrootinstitute.org