

This responds to your inquiry; “Shouldn’t the City and County of Honolulu include an analysis of both rail and bus fixed guideway in their EIS for the Honolulu High-Capacity Corridor Project?”

Based on the Notice of Intent to Prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) that was published in the March 15, 2007 Federal Register, we believe the EIS document the City and County of Honolulu is in the process of preparing will include a range of fixed guideway technologies sufficient to address the benefits and impacts of different wheel technologies regardless of the material that forms the wheel.

Your letter suggests that there seems to be serious confusion regarding the terms “bus fixed guideway” and “rubber-tired fixed guideway”. A system that uses bus vehicles with vehicular access ramps is substantially different from a system that has rubber-tired vehicles operating exclusively on guideways. The FTA understands that the City Council had selected the fixed guideway as the Locally Preferred Alternative (LPA), as defined in the Alternative Analysis (AA) report.

As we wrote to Director Kaku in a June 26, 2007 letter, the LPA fixed guideway alternative to be evaluated in detail has certain physical, performance, and service characteristics. A busway or bus fixed guideway that includes access ramps to and from the surface street to the guideway would be quite different from the LPA fixed guideway in its key elements and its costs, performance, and impacts. Such an alternative was in fact analyzed in detail as the Managed Lane Alternative in the AA. On the other hand, rubber-tired vehicles operating as defined in detail in the AA and not requiring the use of access ramps should be viewed as being consistent with the LPA fixed guideway.

The FTA believes that the City and County of Honolulu adequately addressed the public suggestion to include a bus fixed guideway alternative in the AA. Again, as we indicated in the letter to Director Kaku, the FTA would not be able to proceed with the evaluation of the project with substantial ambiguities in the definition of the LPA so broad as to include a busway or a bus fixed guideway that includes access ramps.