



SIERRA CLUB-OAHU GROUP

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July 14, 2010

Hannah Miyamoto
Sierra Club-Oahu Group
c/o Sociology Dept.
Saunders Hall 247
2424 Maile Way
Honolulu, HI

Re: Honolulu rail transit system Final EIS; Knowns and Givens

Honorable Council members,

Originally founded in 1892, the Sierra Club now has 1.3 million members, many of whom volunteer their time to influence conservation policies. Sierra Club is a *conservation* group that urges people to do their best to not deplete Earth of resources.

Although the Club commented on the rail transit system Draft EIS in 2008, and there are relevant Oahu Group, Hawai'i Chapter, and national Sierra Club policies on transportation, the Club's response to the Final EIS is currently under review. Although I cannot, therefore, express a final opinion about the Final EIS, I can set forth known facts and givens that the Club will consider most relevant, and that you should focus upon.

The Club's first expressed its interest in urban life was it adopted a policy on "settled areas" in 1966. In 1994, the national Sierra Club Transportation Committee adopted a policy, that states in relevant part, that the Club "supports transportation policy and systems" that:

- Minimizes land, air, water and resource impacts, including fuel, pollution, and noise.
- Provides pedestrians, bicyclists and transit riders with "adequate access to jobs, shopping, services, and recreation."
- Encourages land use patterns that minimize travel requirements.
- Strengthens local communities, promotes equal opportunity, and encourages effective public participation in transportation planning.

By reducing future *island-wide* vehicle use about 3.7% from what they will be if the rail system is not built, and by cutting future *island-wide* traffic delay 18%, the Honolulu rail transit system will reduce future air pollution from transportation, *island-wide*, in 2030 by 3.9-4.6%, and also lower Hawaii's production of climate-altering carbon dioxide in 2030 by 171 metric tons a day. The 3.7% reduction in *island-wide* automobile use in 2030 will also reduce water pollution from engine fluids, brake and tire dust, and other sources, thus helping to protect our precious coral reefs, and also help reduce the pressure to develop agricultural land outside current growth boundaries.

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The rail transit will greatly improve access by walkers, cyclists, and transit riders to "jobs, shopping, services, and recreation," by cutting some travel times over 65%. By allowing employment, shopping, and recreation centers, e.g., Aloha Stadium, to attract more people without increasing demand for parking, the proposed elevated rail transit system will encourage land use patterns that minimize travel requirements, while strengthening local communities.

These island-wide predictions pale when compared to the results from transportation models of the number of people that will choose to use transit if the rail system is built than if it is not. Currently, bus transit does not attract more than 21% of all peak-hour morning trips in the Kapolei-Waikiki corridor, except for the 36% transit share between downtown and Ala Moana. Between Waipahu and Waikiki, only 5% use transit now.

If the rail system is not built, because bus service will continue to slow due to street congestion, transit modal share will either about level or even decline from current conditions. This will continue a steady deterioration in scheduled service speed and reliability that has been marked since at least 1984, declines that constantly encourage and even force Honolulu residents to give up transit and instead, buy and use automobiles.

However, if an (98% elevated) exclusive right-of-way rail system is built, transit will attract about 35-62% of all travel in the Kapolei-Waikiki corridor. For example, 60% of travelers between Kapolei and downtown will choose transit, almost triple the current level. Even travelers from Waipahu to Waikiki, although forced to transfer to buses at Ala Moana, will choose transit seven times more often than currently than they do now.

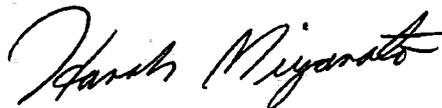
As indicated above, environmental impacts from the proposed elevated rail transit system must not be evaluated in isolation, but in comparison to what will happen if Honolulu remains largely dependent on automobiles and buses sharing the same streets, or if only the portion between Pearl City and Kalihi is elevated, as proposed by the consultant hired by the local American Institute of Architects chapter.

Building a light rail transit system running on existing city streets in Waipahu and from Kalihi to Ala Moana would provide no significant speed improvement over the *existing* bus service, as the Architects' consultant stated in his own report. Therefore, an at-grade rail line would attract few additional riders than the existing bus service, it would have no effect on traffic congestion (and actually causing quite a bit) or pollution reduction. Consequently, an at-grade rail line is very unlikely to receive significant federal funds, making it *less* economically feasible than the elevated rail system under consideration now.

Perhaps even more importantly, because relocating utilities for an at-grade rail line would disturb far more of the earth's surface than elevated traffic, choosing an at-grade alternative would disturb, displace, and damage many more *iwi* and prehistoric artifacts than using elevated trackage, especially through Kakaako. Finally, due to the huge demand for transit between Kapolei and Ala Moana, at-grade trains would create a virtual barrier to pedestrian, bicycle, and even motor traffic through the neighborhood its passes. This would be especially important in Chinatown, where the Architects' consultant proposed to run a double track line along Hotel Street mall, essentially severing the thriving market areas between Nuuanu and River streets during the a.m. peak hours. An at-grade light rail line would also be much noisier around certain unavoidably-sharp curves.

For these reasons, any careful environmental analysis must conclude that the visual impact from the proposed elevated rail transit line is outweighed by the many comparative advantages of choosing the elevated rail line over doing nothing or stopping the planning process and beginning a new process of designing an at-grade rail line.

Sincerely,



Hannah Miyamoto
Sierra Club-Oahu Group
Transportation and Energy Chair