



September 18, 2016

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## It's not too late to make right call on rail

By Panos Prevedouros and Randall Roth

September 18, 2016 The Federal Transit Administration says it will demand its money back if rail does not reach Ala Moana Center.

Both mayoral candidates now say the city has no choice but to do what the Federal Transit Administration says.

Fortunately, neither the FTA nor the winner of the mayoral election will decide rail's fate. Legislators and City Councilmembers will decide whether to raise taxes enough to cover the cost.

These decision-makers should address four questions:

- >> How much more money is needed to finish rail?
- >> Where will that money come from?
- >> What will be accomplished?
- >> What could be accomplished if the same amount of money is spent on something else?

We believe that they will reach the following conclusions:

>> Another \$5.75 billion, over and above the non-recoverable \$3.5 billion already spent, will be needed to reach Ala Moana Center (i.e., total construction costs of \$10.8 billion, less \$3.5 billion already spent or irretrievably committed, less \$1.55 billion federal money yields \$5.75 billion).

>> The chances of getting an additional federal grant are virtually nil.

>> The private sector will not provide more than an insignificant portion of the needed money.

>> The bulk of the new money will have to come from local residents, who will pay an average of \$200 per person (\$800 for each family of four) every year until construction ends.

>> The rest — roughly 15 percent of \$5.75 billion — will come from tourists or other nonresidents.

>> After construction ends, each family of four will continue to pay an average of \$800 per year, to operate and maintain the rail system.

>> Traffic congestion will be much worse when rail becomes fully operational than it is now.

Those who question this last statement should see the final environmental impact study where the city admits, “traffic congestion will be worse in the future with rail than what it is today without rail.”

Other ways to spend the money: Working together, the city and state could reduce traffic congestion, for example, by aggressively adding new traffic lanes to existing roads, as has already been done on the central part of H-1 Freeway; by installing flyovers and bypasses in chokepoint areas like the Middle Street merge; and by adding new contra-flow and bus-on-shoulder options. Each is a proven strategy that, unlike rail, would benefit all commuters.

The city could also afford to greatly improve its award-winning bus system. This might include increasing the number of express buses that go where commuters want to go, rather than eliminating most of them as is part of the rail plan.

All of the above could be done for less than half of the money saved by pulling the plug on rail now. The Legislature and City Council could spend the rest on other areas of need, such as a comprehensive homeless plan, improvements for our schools, sewer and road repairs — or simply leave it in the pockets of island residents.

The existing guideway could be modified for walking, biking and other community activities, and provide unique views. New York City’s High Line is a wildly popular public park built on an abandoned rail line. While no one would set out to spend \$3.5 billion for a High Line trail/park in Hawaii, it could become a tourist attraction.

Twenty years from now, traditional mass transit will be functionally obsolete for cities like Honolulu thanks to autonomous vehicles and ride-hailing apps.

Who's the future of urban transportation: Apple, Google and Uber, or Kirk Caldwell, the FTA and the Honolulu Authority for Rapid Transportation?

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**Panos Prevedouros is a civil engineering professor at the University of Hawaii at Manoa. Randall Roth is a law professor at UH-Manoa.**

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## COMMENTS (as of 9:30 a.m., Sept. 18):

- **MalcolmK** says:  
[September 18, 2016 at 12:51 am](#)

There's no graceful exit from this mess.

"The existing guideway could be modified for walking, biking and other community activities, and provide unique views."

100 year lease to Zoroastrians for use in sky burials. DLNR would have to approve introduction of vultures.

Speaking of vultures: ... Construction contractors, unions, crooked politicians, and stupid journalists produced this fiasco. Fire Caldwell.

- **allie** says:

[September 18, 2016 at 7:10 am](#)

Randy Roth and Panos have been right from the start of this fiasco. The truth is that Mufi never told the truth about the union-driven project that was passed during the Great Recession. This was sold as a make-work project. Sadly, more jobs would have been created if we had done what Roth says: we could have done a massive infrastructure rebuilding. Now we don't have a viable rail and we still have to rebuild the infrastructure. The dishonesty of our monopoly party and secrets made this bad project pass. Horrible work and the time when the monopoly party can continue to hurt the public is growing short.

- **FrankGenadio** says:  
[September 18, 2016 at 1:53 am](#)

The city has another option, conversion from steel wheels to urban magnetic levitation (maglev). The HART Chair has mentioned a peer review by transit experts; those experts must include a maglev engineering team. Maglev that uses American technology can meet (and even exceed) the terms of the 2012 Full Funding Grant Agreement with the available funding options and within the timelines. With the billions already spent, why not spend a few thousand to determine whether or not maglev can be implemented here? Critics state that no U.S. city has maglev. That

fact primarily points to the sad state of the nation's rail infrastructure compared to, for example, Asia where urban maglevs operate in Japan, China, and Korea.

The move toward maglev overseas has much to do with operations and maintenance costs. We can save billions in O&M with maglev over 30 years vis-à-vis steel wheels. If the city administration, the mayoral candidates, and HART ignore maglev, it will be up to the City Council to do something constructive for a change after abrogating its responsibility to select the rail technology eight years ago. This is no time for taxpayer complacency as steel wheels costs continue to escalate. Why not implement 21st Century maglev and regain public confidence in the rail project.

- **ukuleleblue** says:  
[September 18, 2016 at 2:42 am](#)

Obviously traffic congestion will be worse in the future than it is today due to projected population increase and our traditional car-centric mentality. However traffic conditions will be better with rail than without rail. Rail will provide an alternative for those who don't wish to drive and suffer in the traffic congestion. Our urban community deserves to have the same transportation options including rail rapid transit as do other major cities all over the world. The future benefits of rail definitely justify the cost.

- **Kalaheo1** says:  
[September 18, 2016 at 3:49 am](#)

This is all you have?

Did it occur to you to actually address any of the points they made instead of lazily pasting in the same vague nonsense. These guys have been proven right again and again, while your self serving rail cheerleader lies keep getting exposed.

Are you ever going to reveal where it is on the mainland that you live and what your connection is to this mess of a rail project?

- **Keolu** says:  
[September 18, 2016 at 7:07 am](#)

Even if rail relieves some traffic, it won't be worth 16 billion to build rail from owhere to Ala Moana.

- **enoughisenough** says:  
[September 18, 2016 at 8:45 am](#)

Ukuleleblue says, “traffic conditions will be better with rail than without rail.” That’s not necessarily true. As Prevedouros and Roth point out, a portion of the money saved by not building rail could be used to relieve traffic congestion. The simple truth is that there isn’t enough money to both build rail and relieve traffic congestion.

• **Ken\_Conklin** says:

[September 18, 2016 at 4:26 am](#)

Thanks to Panos Prevedouros and Randall Roth for this reality check. They have consistently opposed this boondoggle from before it began; and they have every right to say “I told you so” even if they exhibit the “Hawaiian value” of ha’aha’a by refraining.

• **Wazdat** says:

[September 18, 2016 at 6:33 am](#)

AGREE

However we have too many S T U P I D voters and elected officials who seem to have ZERO common sense.

Its hard to even listen to the Pro-Rail B\$ anymore, so glad we moved from Mililani to the east side.

Let all the F O O L S who want rail and live on the west side ENJOY THIER GRIDLOCK



TRAFFIC. We told you so

• **Kalaheo1** says:

[September 18, 2016 at 6:47 am](#)

Thank you Panos Prevedouros and Randall Roth!!

I hope this editorial isn’t this well hidden in the print edition.