

HUNDREDS ATTEND TOWN HALL MEETING ON RAIL IN EWA BY TOM BERG, HONOLULU CITY COUNCILMAN DISTRICT ONE

In the five months thus far that I have had the honor to advance the interests of Council District One on Honolulu's City Council, we have conducted three town hall meetings in the district with a fourth meeting scheduled for July 12 at Makaha Elementary School.

At the most recent meeting where rail was examined, accusations that I "stacked the deck" for the event to be an anti-rail rally were levied against me. I was even called "a disgrace" by the president of one of the pro-rail groups in attendance and instructed that funds to conduct the meeting should come out of my own pocket.

What the critics left out was that invitations were sent to rail experts Wayne Yoshioka and Toru Hamayasu, Mayor Peter Carlisle, and area elected officials such as Senator Will Espero, and Representatives Rida Cabanilla and Kymberly Pine, all of which are advocates for the rail. None of them showed up nor confirmed their attendance in order for me to include them on the agenda.

Our office held the meeting on rail because I believe the public has not had an adequate forum to sound off on the project's blunders. We have the very first contract for rail going to the State Legislature of which has used the rail endeavor as a profiteering scheme- pocketing over \$16 million a year off of the GET rail surcharge for administering the tax when they only need roughly \$700,000. A total of \$71 million thus far has been fleeced away from rail and advocates for rail still argue that we must proceed anyway and just ignore the graft that is taking place.

When my resolution was heard at the Council to request the State Legislature cease and desists its scheme to make money off of the rail tax, not one person from the pro-rail camp came to testify to support it.

Then a \$1.4 billion award to build, operate and maintain the rail cars went to a company that plans on creating jobs in California of which is where the rail cars are to be built. The losing bidder, who could perform the contract for \$250 million less and was to build the rail cars here on Oahu and foster 150 local hires, was blackballed.

I introduced a resolution to request the procurement process start over on the rail car award so we can save \$250 million and ignite 150 jobs for us on Oahu. The measure is not getting heard.

And finally, the Honolulu Authority on Rapid Transportation- HART, is lacking members with expertise in the transportation arena. With the Council passing Bill 40, the go ahead for borrowing money we do not have will be in the hands of HART

of which funds to pay back the bonds with interest may be insufficient and some would argue, non-existent until the feds cough up some real dough.

I nominated Dr. Panos Prevedouros, a world renown expert on transportation who teaches at UH Manoa to sit on HART and fight for rail to be done right, but his name was omitted from the resolution to approve HART appointees before any public hearing could take place. And we thought we were taking the politics out of rail, just the opposite transpired.

We were fortunate to have Dr. Prevedouros give a presentation at our town hall meeting and the presentation is available for review on my legislative website in addition to the informative packet I provided to attendees that includes a rebuttal to rail critics authored by Department of Transportation Services Director Wayne Yoshioka – www.councilmanberg.com

At the commencement of my town hall meeting on rail, I explained that if we sit still and do nothing to abate our differences, the lawyers will continue to have a feast at the public trough and litigation adversely affect the will of the people. Therefore, it was a constructive meeting to hear why there is opposition to rail and what can we do as citizens to possibly mitigate objections to the project ourselves before the lawyers suck us dry.