



CITY COUNCIL

CITY AND COUNTY OF HONOLULU

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OFFICIAL STATEMENT FROM CITY COUNCILMAN TOM BERG:
COUNCILMAN BERG HIGHLY CRITICAL OF
MAYOR AND COUNCIL LEADERSHIP
FOR PUTTING CRONYISM AHEAD OF EXPERTISE
WITH RAIL AUTHORITY (HART) NOMINEES

Honolulu, Hawaii - "Just two weeks ago on April 18th, the mayor and our transportation committee chair announced with great pride at a press conference that “highly qualified individuals” were being appointed to the new rail transit authority known as HART. Unless you believe that hiring a plumber to fix your DVD recorder is a smart idea, then you already know that these people who have been nominated are anything but highly qualified. There is not one single transportation expert, not one single transit expert, not one person who has ever been a recognized leader in the field.

These six rail authority nominations make no sense if you think they should be picking transportation experts . . . that is until you force yourself to comprehend that the rail project is not about traffic relief or about transportation or about transit. It’s actually about development. Once you do that, it all makes perfect sense. Look at their backgrounds: a banker, a lawyer, a developer, a building trade activist, a mayor’s political appointee, and a union leader from the IBEW, which just happens to be part of the same union representing those striking HECO workers who walked off the job while many communities in my district were in the middle of a power outage just a few weeks ago.

And speaking of my district, it is an affront to those who care about the problem of traffic congestion that West Oahu is NOT officially represented on this committee. Serving as members are representatives of communities who do NOT make the drive from Waianae to town each day, from Kapolei and Makakilo to town each day, from Ewa Beach to town each day. The precise victims of poor City planning who sit in artificially created traffic jams each and every day, each and every morning and afternoon, have been consciously and purposely left off this committee which decides how billions will be spent on what used to be a traffic relief project, but has been reduced to a jobs for people with friends in high places project.

21 mini cities will be built around each rail station through the loosening of zoning and building codes using a methodology known to some as Transit Oriented Development, but is really Developer Oriented Transit.

That's why rail is a developer's dream. That's why this project has virtually nothing to do with transportation. And that's why there are no transportation experts on this authority to oversee this massive, expensive project. Instead, we have a banker, a lawyer, a developer, a building trade activist, a mayor's political appointee, and a union leader rather than a transportation expert.

To call these people highly qualified defies any and all logic, unless you like the sleazy way that our city and state government operate. We're already paying six figure salaries to rail project publicists and propagandists who work out of a fancy office on Alakea Street. Who is going to oversee these people? Does the story of the fox and the hen house have any meaning anymore?

This is supposed to be a transportation project which provides traffic relief at an affordable price. This is supposed to be about transit and about making the daily rush hour more bearable for motorists and public transportation riders alike . . . and NOT about well-connected political appointees doing the bidding of the establishment.

The willingness of the mayor and council leadership to politicize the transit authority by stuffing it with cronies rather than instilling it with transportation expertise speaks volumes about the twisted priorities at City Hall. While I, the lone representative on this Council from West Oahu, the area affected by the specific traffic congestion which was exploited to justify this project, is prohibited from voting on this committee, you can count on me to vote "no" to every name on this list.

As many of you know, I submitted the name of renowned transportation and transit expert Dr. Panos Prevedouros to serve on HART. Few of you probably know that Dr. Prevedouros is PRO-RAIL. While he opposed the City's rail project as inappropriate and unaffordable and ineffective for our small city, he routinely advocates heavy and light rail projects around the world when and where these are appropriate. Who better for the transit authority than someone who will ask questions, who will keep things honest, who knows what he's talking about, who is a recognized transportation and transit expert?

Panos Prevedouros holds a Ph.D. in transportation engineering, a degree in land surveying engineering, is a professor of civil engineering at the University of Hawaii, served as a member of the technical advisory committee of OMPO, served as a member of the Council's 7-member transit advisory task force, and served on the 5-member expert panel on transit in 2008 which brought us to this point.

Apparently, neither the mayor nor my council leadership want transportation experts overseeing a transportation project. Clearly, they want inexperienced 'yes men' to do the bidding of the rail consortium and developers rather than truly qualified experts who'll keep an eye on how taxpayer funds are expended with Hawaii's largest and most expensive public works project ever.

Perhaps because Mayor Carlisle has now said over and over and over that the rail project is about jobs more than anything else. To that, you can add that it's about development more than anything else. The numbers bear this out. Traffic congestion will be 60% worse on H-1 with rail, and a mere 1% are expected to get out of their cars to become public transportation riders. With transportation benefits of rail so incredibly tiny, the only possible justification for diverting 95% of our transportation spending away from the 95% who drive to and from work each day is jobs for the well-connected and development opportunities for the even more well connected

Finally, let me say this. Brennon Morioka just finished years of service as the State's director of the Dept. of Transportation. He has been instrumental in pushing for both highway solutions and the rail project. Guess who his professor was at UH? Naturally, it was the eminently qualified Dr. Panos Prevedouros. This, my friends, is an outrage which makes the usual cronyism around City Hall pale by comparison."

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