

From: Martin Stone, Ph.D., AICP
Director of Planning
Tampa-Hillsborough County Expressway Authority

To: The Honolulu Advertiser and other interested citizens of Honolulu

Recent comments in the Honolulu Advertiser by the chief planner of Honolulu call into question the objectivity of the City and its consultants in their performance of a very expensive transportation alternatives evaluation being paid for mostly by the federal government.

As the professional staff person responsible for planning Tampa's elevated Reversible Express Lanes project, I am astonished that a Hawaiian public official would intentionally misrepresent the facts associated with the cost and operation of our project – and how a similar managed lane project might provide true congestion relief for Honolulu at an affordable price.

Two weeks ago, three Honolulu City Council members visited Tampa to see our project and learn the truth. Not only did they view the project close up but they also had the opportunity to meet the people who conceived, financed, designed, and constructed the project. Chairman Donovan Del Cruz and Councilmen Todd Apo and Charles Djou all had a chance to see first-hand the realities of our project.

First, it is false to suggest that our project costs “skyrocketed” to \$420 million from the original \$300 million estimate. The truth is that a design error by an engineer resulted in the construction of 155 bridge foundations smaller than they should have been. It cost \$120 million extra to reinforce those foundations properly. Had the professionally licensed engineer who designed the foundations not made that error, the additional concrete and steel required during the initial construction would have cost only a few million more than the original contract price. But, to ensure that we are open and honest about our project, we always include the additional \$120 million and the reasons for it when we show people our price tag.

The original cost of the elevated portion of our project (5.5 miles long) was less than \$120 million of the total project. So, even with the foundation reinforcements, the entire elevated part of our express lanes only cost about \$240 million – less than \$14 million per lane mile for 27.5 lane miles of the elevated segmental bridge portion of the express lanes.

Your city's chief planner knows this. But it seems he does not want you to know.

It is also wrong to claim that our elevated express lanes are only handling 4,000 trips a day. The project is actually handling more than three times that much even though we are not in full operation because we are still finishing the final construction punch-list. After only four months of partial operation, the reversible express lanes are now handling over 14,000 vehicles per weekday - 1,500 more per day than the original estimates of 12,500 average daily users forecast for the end of our first year of operation in our project's traffic and revenue studies. And, we made sure to build plenty of additional capacity to accommodate future growth (it would have been irresponsible for us not to plan sufficient capacity for the future too).

Your city's chief planner knows this too. He just does not want you to know.

And, by the way, the more than 14,000 vehicles a day that are using the express lanes means we are ahead of our financial goals for this portion of the expressway. In simple terms, to say that our project is not meeting its financial obligations and we are being “heavily subsidized by revenues from other toll roads” is a misrepresentation.

The Tampa Hillsborough County Expressway Authority owns only one road – and our elevated Reversible Express Lanes are part of that road. Our agency is completely self-funded. We operate with no tax dollars. All of our funding comes from revenue bonds and loans retired by the tolls we collect from our customers.

Last year (our 30th year of operation), the Lee Roy Selmon Crosstown Expressway handled more than 34 million trips with annual revenues of approximately \$32 million. Within the past six years, the Authority refinanced all of the expressway debt with two new series of revenue bonds to expand our facilities by adding the Reversible Express Lanes project. Wall Street bond underwriters and sellers will not handle a \$400 million bond issue for an organization that cannot pay its debt. While our express lanes were forecast to pay their fair share of that debt, they are already doing even better than that because many new customers have embraced the congestion-free travel provided by the lanes.

Anyone taking the time to query our General Engineering Consultant for a copy of our traffic and revenue reports knows this. Under Florida's Sunshine Law, all of this financial information is available to anyone who asks.

Apparently, your chief planner did not do his homework or is intentionally misleading you.

Actually, it is worse than that. The intentional distortion of the financial condition of our toll road is indicative of someone who desperately wants to manipulate public opinion in favor of a preordained outcome.

This type of dishonesty is not permitted by the canon of ethics of the American Institute of Certified Planners, but, since your chief planner is not a registered AICP member, he is not required to meet any professional planning standards of objectivity in the public interest. However, he is a member of the American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE) and they have a well-defined Code of Ethics for their member's activities. ASCE Fundamental Principle #2 calls for engineers to uphold the integrity, honor, and dignity of the profession by "being honest and impartial and serving with fidelity the public..." Canon #3 says, "Engineers shall issue public statements only in an objective and truthful manner ... and shall not participate in the dissemination of untrue, unfair or exaggerated statements regarding engineering."

The statements presented by the chief planner of the City of Honolulu about our project are all virtually untrue or grossly exaggerated.

However, the biggest dishonesty of all is the claim by your chief planner and his hired guns that our elevated project was used as the model for the managed lane alternative they are using as a comparison to the fixed rail system in your alternatives analysis. It is completely dishonest to say the elevated HOT lane in your transit alternatives analysis is similar to our elevated reversible lanes. And, it is this dishonesty that results in your HOT lanes costing \$2.6 billion instead of the less than \$1 billion that a true copy of our project would cost.

Remember, anyone wanting to control the outcome of the alternatives analysis to favor the train would most certainly want to find a way to boost the cost of the elevated road concept.

Other than both being elevated, there is virtually nothing the same in the design of the two projects. Our bridge has three travel lanes. The Honolulu version is only two lanes wide and carries far less traffic (which, of course, makes it far less competitive with the train). Because our project design uses simple, low-cost slip ramps for access, it does not require any interchanges. Your managed lane alternative has a number of unnecessary and expensive interchanges. And, the cost estimates for design and construction management are five times more than the amount required for a concrete segmental bridge project. That alone adds \$400 million dollars to the grossly overestimated cost of the managed lane alternative.

And, the cost estimate to reproduce our elevated reversible lanes project in Honolulu was not done on the back of an envelope. Our most recent project estimate (September, 2006) to determine the insurance replacement cost for our bridge was computed by our Authority's Chief Financial Officer, a man with a total of 30 years experience financing transportation — 22 of which were as the financial advisor to Florida's Governor and CFO for the Florida Department of Transportation Central Office. His estimate to build our 5.5 miles of bridge with today's high material and labor costs is \$175 million. Extending that to

14 miles in length for the Honolulu HOT lanes alternative would bring the cost to \$450 million. You can add any percentage you wish to compensate for higher construction costs in Hawaii, but it is easy to see why this project should not cost you more than \$1 billion.

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Something else he does not want you to know: All of the cars that would use the HOT lanes to get to downtown are not new additional trips into the City. They represent a redistribution of the same trips you would have coming into downtown based on your population and employment. The HOT lanes will not produce new trips. They simply would divert trips away from your existing congested highways thus making the entire system work more efficiently. Growth in population, employment, and commercial development creates more trips. Nor do the HOT lanes create more parking problems in downtown Honolulu because they are the same cars that would be parking no matter which roadway they use to get to the City.

But, yes, anyone designing a new HOT lane will have to solve how traffic can best move in and out of the City. This would not be accomplished by dumping the traffic into only one location (as stated by your chief planner), but likely would involve multiple entrances and solutions that would address other traffic problems as already suggested by the University of Hawaii Civil Engineering department. These new gateway entrances into Honolulu would also provide opportunities for new private investment within your downtown as well as improve existing traffic flow.

Prior to opening our express lanes, the average 10-mile trip in the morning peak-hour took over thirty minutes. Since we opened for interim operations, we have achieved a 50% split in the peak-hours between our new Reversible Express Lanes and our existing expressway lanes. This has resulted in a complete balancing of our traffic between our upper and lower lanes with no congestion for any of our customers and an average trip time of 10 minutes for the 10 miles for everyone. The express lanes are already handling enough traffic volume in our morning peak hours to equal having an extra lane constructed on our Interstate into downtown Tampa (about 2,000 per lane per hour).

In addition, the elevated reversible expressway has been so successful that it is attracting 2,000 additional daily trips away from other non-tolled parallel roads. City of Tampa traffic managers report that all three parallel non-tolled roads are operating better in the peak hour because of diversions to our new express lanes. We could not be more pleased with the project — it is doing exactly what we thought it would — providing a safe, reliable, convenient, stress-free trip for people driving into and out of our city every day during what used to be terrible traffic congestion within our corridor.

And, our local transit agency is reporting a 20% increase in ridership on the express bus routes on our facility within less than three months.

Oh, by the way, the toll is presently \$1.00 for the entire trip on the express lanes. However, we will be raising tolls next year to \$1.50. Now, about the toll increase: Our agency normally raises its tolls about once every 8-10 years to keep up with the rising costs associated with inflation. Our last increase raised our tolls from \$.75 to \$1.00 for electronic toll customers in 1999. Our finance plan, identified next year's toll rate to go to \$1.50 as a part of our standard toll rate policy — we did move it forward to help pay for the engineering error on our project. By the way, we are suing the engineering firm for \$120 million and expect to recover a substantial amount of the money their error cost us.

Are we using the tolls to pay the debt service for our expressway, which includes this project, as well as our operating cost? Of course we are. That is how toll roads work. We build the road today for our needs today and tomorrow with money that we borrow and then pay back over time, just like the mortgage on your house. We get an asset with a useful life of 75-100 years, we get to use that asset immediately to address our problems today and in the future, and we pay for it as we use it. And, when we reach positive cash flow on a project, we typically use that money to finance even more transportation projects. That is a financial

approach long ago adopted by the State of Florida. In fact, toll agencies have built every new highway in Florida during the past 15 years, because, just like Hawaii, virtually all of our fuel taxes are dedicated to maintaining or improving the existing road system.

Thousands of people vote with their pocketbooks every day to use our road. If these customers do not want to pay for using our tollway, they do not have to. The key is they get to choose, unlike projects that many people do not want – projects that benefit only a few but all pay for through some general tax scheme. Toll roads are not forced on anyone. They serve those willing to pay. But, the entire community benefits, including those who do not use the road, because we improve traffic congestion by diverting traffic away from non-tolled highways and streets.

If you were to build HOT lanes in Honolulu, your public and private transit providers and high occupancy users would have a facility that will allow them to guarantee their arrival schedules. Transit riders would receive reliable, efficient service and automobile drivers would be able to take advantage of that capacity for a very reasonable price — at their discretion. Those who decide not to pay to use the HOT lanes would also benefit from the reduced congestion in the non-tolled lanes. The elimination from non-tolled highways of traffic comprised of buses, taxis, vanpools and carpools along with those auto drivers who decide to pay, will make things better for everyone.

We think that is pretty terrific; our customers think so too. And, if anyone on the City staff tells you a different story, they are either sadly misinformed or they are intentionally falsifying the facts to achieve a specific end.