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The following is Shapiro's column interspersed with our comments in bold face.

David Shapiro's Volcanic Ash

With federal funds in limbo, public may pay more for rail

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Mayor Peter Carlisle says he'd build the \$5.27 billion Oahu rail project even if \$1.55 billion in federal funding falls through, using additional local resources if necessary.

That means another \$1.5 billion for taxpayers to swallow plus the \$250 million in bus funding.

This has clearly been the policy in the push to start heavy construction this month without a final federal commitment, but nobody told the public so until Carlisle's spokeswoman was asked for a direct statement of his intentions.

On whether he'd press ahead without federal funds, press secretary Louise Kim McCoy said, "Yes, because after decades of planning, there is no viable alternative to address Oahu's traffic congestion that will only get worse without rail."

But she said the train might not extend all the way from East Kapolei to Ala Moana Center.

"The project may have to be scaled back dramatically to make sure we avoid unacceptable debt," she said. "There are currently four phases of the project, and we could delay building the latter phases until there are sufficient funds."

So we are going to have a "viable alternative to address O'ahu's traffic congestion" that starts in the farm fields of Ho'opili and stops where? Aloha Stadium? As we youngsters say, LOL!

Asked what local funds would make up the difference, McCoy said, "If the \$1.55 billion in federal funds does not come through or is decreased, the HART financial plan lists several backup options, such as other federal funding opportunities, lease financing arrangements for rail vehicles, value capture financing and extending the (general excise tax) surcharge," she said.

Read between the lines here and substitute taxpayers for every item.

She said the Honolulu Authority for Rapid Transportation can't legally tap property taxes.

But the City Council can and if past performance is any indication, they will.

McCoy said the administration doesn't expect to face the problem after U.S. Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood said last week, "We're committed to the money; we're committed to the project."

LaHood acknowledged, however, that federal money could be affected by "others who are intimately involved in this," presumably meaning budget-cutting House Republicans who disdain federal New Starts rail transit funding.

LaHood doesn't have the money; Congress has the money and given the current in-fighting over whether government should spend more or less — less looks like winning.

Former Gov. Ben Cayetano, who's opposing Carlisle on a promise to stop rail, said building without federal funds would certainly mean extending the half-cent GET surcharge or raising property taxes.

He said a truncated system that starts in a Kapolei field and doesn't extend to the urban Honolulu destination of most commuters would be little used and "a financial disaster of epic proportions."

"This is why critics have dubbed the project as 'the train to nowhere,'" Cayetano said.

Former acting Mayor Kirk Caldwell, running as a pro-rail alternative to Carlisle, said he's confident of federal funding and supports starting construction before a final agreement, but alleges Carlisle "dropped the ball" in not getting federal money nailed down by now.

That is an idiotic statement. If Dan Inouye can't "nail it down," how the hell could Carlisle.

Caldwell said he favors building rail even without federal support but would ask whether Oahu voters agree.

"It is too big a commitment not to take the question back to the people, just as we did in 2008," he said. "Give them the options, discuss the consequences and let the people decide."

And we assume in the process spend another \$2,500,000, as you did last time, smothering the voters in pure BS. However, this time it won't work. They know there are going to be cost overruns, they know rail is going to do nothing about reducing traffic congestion from today's levels, and they want off the train at the very next stop.