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## Cayetano candidacy would open deeper debate on rail

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The city's rail project has Ben Cayetano so unsettled that he says he might make a run for Mayor Peter Carlisle's job to stop the transit juggernaut.

For the former governor to emerge from a decade of retirement to jump with both feet into the political fray once again would fortify his position that rail is a huge mistake for Oahu, Hawaii's economic and population nucleus, if not for the whole state.

The move would open a new front in the battle over rail, underpinning the lawsuit he and other opponents have filed in federal court.

Cayetano, of course, has never really retired. Though he withdrew from the brightest spotlights, he has remained a participant in the political dialogue and hasn't shied away from reiterating his ideas about tourism development and the pressures that uncontrolled growth places on the islands' natural environment and resources.

A Cayetano campaign, even with a late start, would be a big deal, a distinct benefit for city residents because a major challenger would oblige the current mayor to become more engaged with the public.

Since his election last year, Carlisle has tendered few initiatives, bold or otherwise. His administration has seemed to be more reactive than enterprising, allowing the City Council to take the lead on many of the city's persistent problems, such as homelessness, a new landfill site and property taxes. Though these issues have been farmed out to commissions and advisory groups, Carlisle's hands-off role seems too distant, too detached for an executive who will eventually have to make some of the tough calls.

Part of this may be perception. His predecessor's vast appetite for publicity would overshadow anyone who followed, and Carlisle's mayoral style since leaving the prosecutor's office, where he big-shouldered high-profile criminal cases, hasn't been very aggressive.

It is curious that his crime-fighter persona hasn't been revived by the questionable activities of a city employee who was compelled to resign last month because of ethics violations. If for nothing else than to serve as warning to other government employees, Carlisle should be taking a hard look at the situation, how it evolved and how to prevent similar conduct. This would also reassure the public and businesses that want to work with the city that cronyism has no place in his administration.

The mayor has supported the rail project vigorously and clearly he believes it will be good for Oahu.

Cayetano sees rail as sucking all the air from the city's lungs. Its unpredictable cost, he says, could jeopardize city finances for years, if not decades, which in turn could slow badly needed work on outmoded sewer and water systems the city can barely keep operative.

Rail's concrete and noise, its inflexibility, would greatly alter the character of the city, and he is not convinced it would be for the better.

If Cayetano decides to challenge Carlisle, his candidacy would open a deeper debate about the merits of rail, one that has been largely suppressed through sham public hearings.

Even without a victory, he would be providing a good public service.