

Who will ride Honolulu's Train?

By Dennis Callan

The city claims that more than 60% of Oahu residents, some 600,000 people, live along the rail route, but in reality less than 6% of Oahu's population resides within walking distance of the proposed train stations. Such misleading inflated numbers from our city government are part of their ongoing propaganda campaign, which has distorted most aspects of the rail system in their attempt to sell it to the public with rosy projections. They would like you to think the rail is very accessible and useful, but it is not.

For a heavy rail transit system to be successful and attract riders, it needs to have many people living near the stations in medium and high density apartments so they can walk to the stations. However when we count the current population in walking distance, half-mile radius from the proposed stations, we find less than 60,000 people (not counting those people currently living downtown who are not likely users of the train). Only 7% of them can be expected to use the rail system (4,200 people), and yet the city is projecting about 100,000 daily trips. Where are these riders going to come from?

Examining the rail route, we see the first three proposed stations in Kapolei are in the middle of empty fields -- nobody living there. Of course the city assumes there will be a lot of future housing constructed in these farm fields, which is questionable at best, and even if built the plans call for typical low-density suburban sprawl, about 10 housing units per acre, which is the basic housing pattern of Oahu and a prime reason why rail would fail.

Waipahu would have two stations, each with about 10,000 people currently residing within walking distance (1/2 mile) primarily in low density single-family homes.

The next station, at Leeward Community College, has nobody living within a half-mile of campus. Pearl City and Aiea's stations each have 5,000 people living nearby, while at Aloha Stadium there are just over 3000 residents in low-rise apartments and houses.

Rail's next three stations have no residents nearby -- Pearl Harbor (no civilians), airport and Lagoon Drive. The next three proposed stations in town are Middle Street, Kalihi and Kapalama with total nearby population of 14,000 in a mixed district of commercial, light industrial, single-family houses and walk-up apartments.

The final six stations are in the heart of urban Honolulu, at Iwilei, Chinatown, downtown, Civic Center, Kaka'ako and Ala Moana. While there are thousands of people living in this urban core, it is unlikely they are going to be taking the train because they walk to work. Therefore, these residents are not included in our tally of residents near train stations.

Because of the lack of residents near stations, the city is planning that Leeward commuters will ride a bus to the train, but there are many obstacles to that scenario. Just imagine how many individual segments such a daily round-trip would involve: 1. Walk from your home to the bus stop. 2. Wait for the bus. 3. Ride the bus to the train station. 4. Walk to the train. 5. Wait for the train. 6. Ride the train. 7. Walk from train to work. Now do everything in reverse to get home. Fourteen round-trip segments involving a lot of walking, waiting and transferring. If you have to take a bus from the end station to your workplace, add several more segments. Not many people will be willing to make such a complicated journey.

This analysis proves that very few people would use rail, bankrupting the system and leaving us with horribly increased traffic congestion on our roads.