

Callan sounds off on the Sierra Club position

Dear Sierra Club,

I was just reading the Anthony Alto and Rick Barboza's Sierra Club statement in this week's Honolulu Weekly about mass transit, urban growth and the mayoral election. I found it riddled with contradictions. Their statements are in italics.

Like you, I am pro-urban growth, but I am also anti-rail. I want to see our city built up like European cities I have enjoyed in my 65 trips to Europe -- right now I am in Stockholm, one of the great examples. I am knowledgeable in how cities can function, how they can include urban housing (I live in a Makiki highrise).

Here are some problems with Alto/Barboza's, and apparently the Sierra Club's, attitude:

"we are firmly committed to a future where development is concentrated in the urban core"

Rail to Kapolei is not in the urban core, DUH!!!!

"we should be promoting modern, livable, walkable cities."

TOD is not going to create that in Waipahu, Aiea or Pearl City and certainly not in the farmlands of Kapolei, DUH!!!!

"BRT would require dedicated lanes and dozens of buses running for every train equivalent"

This is really disturbing to hear, and so incorrect. You have no idea what you are talking about. An articulated bus can easily carry 100 people, their train, maybe 250. How does that equate to 24 ("dozens") buses? This is the basis of your analysis? This is nothing but pathetic -- to think you are so unaware of the realities of mass transit and yet presume, you pretend, to be protecting our environment. This is really shameful. Two buses will do the work of one train, not 24 buses. A BRT system does not require dedicated lanes throughout the route -- that can come a bit later as it evolves. We just need more buses now, with certain priorities, certain new lanes, no parking allowed on certain routes, signal priority, make room for buses on our existing streets, lets get going with the bus program.

"we're troubled by the lack of detail in his mass transit alternative"

The city has spent hundreds of millions for many years on their deficient plan -- give us a break. We have the concept firmly in mind -- BRT. Now let's spend some city money and plan a workable system. You think we can't do that? You think we are stupid? BRT is a no-brainer, if you would only open your eyes.

"candidates can and should commit to concentrating all major new housing projects in the existing urban core. Places like Moiliili and Kalihi are prime for revitalization."

How would a train to the suburbs possibly contribute to such a vision? I do share your goal, build up our city, in the urban core. Come on, let's get together with a new mayor who is smart and really cares, not controlled by construction unions and downtown banks, and build a great city. We can do it, and we can protect our precious farmlands. Rail would do the opposite.

If the Hawaii Sierra Club wishes to continue in business, stay out of this issue right now. My preceding comments demonstrate you are obviously incompetent to make any kind of informed statement. Announce that you have no position, or better yet, wake up, and come out for Ben and for smart growth.

Dennis Callan

(what follows is the Sierra Club message I am responding to)

Beyond Rail

The big issue is urban sprawl

BY RICK BARBOZA AND ANTHONY AALTO | JUL 18, 2012

In the past few weeks, the Sierra Club's rail position has gained incredible, and somewhat perplexing, attention from both the media and advocates on both sides of the rail issue.

So what is the Club's position? Who are we endorsing? The Sierra Club, and its members and supporters, have consistently advocated for smart growth on Oahu. We are one of the interveners in the battle to stop the development project called Ho`opili, which would gobble up some of the best remaining farmland on the Ewa plain.

And yet the Sierra Club does not oppose all development. A no growth position is not realistic. We cannot build fences around the state and legally stop people from moving here. We cannot stop people from having children and we want them to be able to live here. We have one of the highest homelessness problems in the country. We have to be realistic about having enough homes for the future.

But we are firmly committed to a future where development is concentrated in the urban core, and we mass transit as a critical component of that. As a state, we should be promoting modern, livable, walkable cities. Portland did this in the 1970s, when it built a mass transit system in conjunction with a strict, regulated urban growth boundary that encouraged infill and limited outward expansion beyond the city's borders.

But the current leading mayoral candidates don't seem to hold this view. Cayetano deserves much praise for his willingness to step out and oppose the Ho`opili and Koa Ridge development projects. He understands the short-term gain from building more sprawling suburbs is not worth the long-term impacts on Honolulu's traffic problems and food security. He's committed to investing in our city's infrastructure. And yet we're troubled by the lack of detail in his mass transit alternative. To truly work, BRT would require dedicated lanes and dozens of buses running for every train equivalent. This would likely mean a double-decker highway to Kapolei. We're not aware of any major city with Honolulu's level of traffic congestion that has successfully relied on a BRT system.

Both Caldwell and Carlisle deserve praise for supporting mass transit and advocating for livable, walkable communities. But neither candidate, to our knowledge, has publicly committed to realistic steps that would keep the country, country. These candidates can and should commit to concentrating all major new housing projects in the existing urban core. Places like Moiliili and Kalihi are prime for revitalization. Let's see bike lanes, mass transit, outdoor restaurants, and affordable housing. Let's see a public statement supporting this type of growth, while opposing more suburban sprawl at Laie, Koa Ridge, and Ho`opili.

For the time being, the Sierra Club is not endorsing a Honolulu mayoral candidate. Instead, we will push for a more sensible dialogue and try to cool some of the heated rhetoric. We'll push the candidates to commit to keeping the country, country. And we're willing to work with everyone to make this vision a reality.

Rick Barboza is Vice-Chair of the Sierra Club, Hawaii Chapter; Anthony Aalto is Chair of the Sierra Club, Oahu Group.