

Managed lanes offer many advantages in solving traffic problems

By John Brizdle, Feb 13, 2012.

Hidden in the rail debate is a potential alternative for Oahu that is superior to rail in almost every category: managed lanes.

The city claims it studied managed lanes and found the concept less favorable than rail, but rail critics have clearly pointed out that the city's analysis of managed lanes was not objective nor thorough. Here are the benefits of managed lanes:

» Managed lanes on Oahu would be elevated high-occupancy lanes, which could go from Waipahu to downtown Honolulu. Our current buses would travel on these lanes at approximately 55 miles per hour.

» For transit commuters, express buses on managed lanes would be superior to rail in every category. Express buses would travel at approximately 55 miles per hour; rail's top speed would be 55 mph but average about 27 miles per hour. Express buses could enter and exit these lanes without forcing the riders to transfer. Express buses provide the majority of riders with a seat. Rail provides 20 percent of riders with a seat. You can carry more riders with express buses than rail.

» Local workers can build and maintain an express bus system; not so with rail.

» Express buses have a driver, therefore providing a level of security that the driverless rail cars do not provide.

» Express buses in Honolulu would use less fuel to move one passenger one mile than rail.

» Here's the really interesting part: The city can decide which other vehicles besides express buses can use the managed lanes. The city can allow other high-occupancy vehicles, like school buses and carpools, to use the lanes.

How about emergency vehicles? There will still be lots of empty space.

» As the manager, the city can close the lanes to all traffic in order to allow for the presidential motorcade and leave the H-1 freeway open (rail cannot do that). As the manager, the city can open the managed lanes to all traffic when there is an accident on H-1 (rail cannot do that).

» At this point, many communities consider offering the remaining space to cars and commercial vehicles for a toll. The technology exists for vehicles to enter these lanes and pay a toll automatically.



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Would local drivers be willing to pay? Commercial vehicles would have the option to make this decision on a day-by-day basis; rail offers no benefit to our commercial companies that use our public highways other than to pay higher taxes and experience more traffic.

Would you be willing to pay a toll to be guaranteed a ride at 55 miles per hour during rush hour if you were late for work? How about if you were late to pick up a child and the school has a late fee?

» Managed lanes have the capacity to carry more than 1,000 cars per hour — cars that used to be on H-1 — on the pay-as-you-go basis. The choice to use managed lanes for a toll is always completely optional.

If the community does not want to use the extra space on the managed lanes as a toll way, it can choose alternatives like offering the extra space to vehicles that get 40 miles a gallon, or perhaps all hybrid vehicles.

There are 20 cities on the mainland working on this managed-lanes concept. If the courts decide that Hono-lulu did not examine all the transportation alternatives as required by law, we will be back to square one. Then we will be able to investigate this concept properly to address Honolulu's traffic problems.