

**Statement of
Congressman Neil Abercrombie
To The
City Council
Committee on Transportation
Regarding
Council Bill 79
November 2, 2006**

Chairman Cachola and Transportation Committee Members, thank you for the opportunity to testify on Bill 79.

I am here to encourage the Council to move forward as expeditiously as possible on a rail transit legislative package.

I would suggest that Council Resolution 05-377, CD1 passed unanimously last year should continue to guide Council proceedings. That resolution urged the completion of the alternatives analysis by November 1, 2006 so the Council could select the Locally Preferred Alternative (LPA) by December 31. I believe the resolution's unanimous intention to "Keep Rail on Track" is wise and prudent.

Our ability to obtain federal funding is absolutely dependent on decisive City Council action. The sooner the City and County of Honolulu submit the considered vision of a locally preferred alternative to the Federal Transit Administration, the greater the possibilities for our drawing down the necessary federal funding.

Why is prompt action so important to federal funding? For the current fiscal year, funds have been already been designated in the House and Senate for Honolulu's mass transit project. Of the 366 mass transit project new starts authorized by Congress in 2005, **only ten** were funded by the House this year. Honolulu is one of them.

Congress will reconvene on November 13 to address the balance of the 2007 appropriations measures. The Department of Transportation appropriation, which includes the Honolulu funding, has yet to be approved by the full Senate and then reconciled in a joint House and Senate conference committee. That funding is predicated on the successful completion of the first phase of federal mass transit project funding – the Alternatives Analysis. This means before any of the pending 2007 funding can be released to the City and County of Honolulu, the locally preferred alternative (LPA) must be submitted and approved by the FTA.

As we know, the LPA must satisfy three criteria: it must fully evaluate the impact, costs, and benefits associated with the mode and route or alignment selected. And, it is my understanding that the alignment submitted to the FTA should include transit stops so that their impacts and benefits can be fully documented. Is that possible? It is and it must be. But time is of the essence.

Even before the new Members of Congress are sworn in, the sprint for FY2008 funding will have begun. If our project does not have an approved LPA, and the Preliminary Engineering phase has not begun, the Members of Hawaii's Congressional Delegation are put at a competitive disadvantage. We run the risk of missing out on an entire year of federal funding. You can understand the difficulty in conveying to Members of the Appropriations Committee how serious and committed we are to our mass transit project if the previous year's federal funding has not been utilized.

We simply cannot afford to jeopardize our frontrunner status as one of ten projects funded out of the 366 projects authorized. We risk of falling behind many of the 365 other projects for future funding, and we could be left out of New Starts funding completely for the remaining three years of the current transportation authorization.

The competition for these dollars is fierce. We are already up against priority projects like New York City's \$10 billion East Side Access and the Los Angeles Gold Line Expansion. We have momentum. We should not risk losing it. We need to seize the opportunity before us today.

I'm counting on the Council to move a thorough LPA forward today. Decisive action will solidify federal support, encourage private partners and inspire the public that Honolulu will become the first modern, people friendly city of the 21st century.

Rail transit can be a catalyst for transit-oriented developments that include affordable housing, promote successful, locally-owned small businesses, integrate local commuters more smoothly with visitors, and encourage walkable communities.

Honolulu's rail transit may well become one of the greatest public works projects in Hawaii's history, generating good jobs and improving the quality of life for years to come.

I support a vision of our future in which we choose the kind of community we bequeath to our children. However, that future begins today. Let Congress and the FTA that Honolulu is Keeping Rail on Track.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify before you today.