Dear Interim Director Hamayasu,

I am also glad that my constituents are hearing the radio spots H.A.R.T has been airing because that is how I was made aware of such advertisements.

Nevertheless, the radio spots heard by my constituents were different from the spot you provided details on in your response letter. Specifically, the radio spots of interest were aired weeks before the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) approved H.A.R.T’s request to begin construction of the foundation and pillars that will support the fixed guideway, and certainly did not advise caution to motorists. Therefore, I must again ask what is the basis behind the radio advertisements aired prior to FTA’s approval.

Additionally, as you are no doubt aware, prior to the 2008 Honolulu general elections, the City spent over $5 million on a public information campaign for the project. The advertisements and printed material paid for by the City, pro-transit groups, or Hannemann’s 2008 mayoral campaign, did not provide information on the project’s estimated cost. Instead, advertisements were focused on promoting rail as the best option to alleviate Oahu’s traffic congestion. Other television and radio advertisements were aimed to counter the efforts of anti-rail groups to stop the project. Hardly any of those advertisements provided information related to the 2008 Draft Environmental Impact Statement.

Further, media reports prior to the general election and a 2008 poll measured by the Hawaii Poll indicated that voters were indeed under the impression that the rail project was to cost only $3.7 billion. According to the 2008 poll, 510 residents were asked “Do Oahu residents support the city’s plan to build a $3.7 billion commuter rail?” While the poll found that 76% of Oahu’s voters wanted the rail question to be on the November 2008 ballot, the results clearly showed that months before the election a
majority of local residents supported a $3.7 billion project, not the minimum operable segment (MOS) with an estimated cost of $5.1 million.

On March 24, 2008, the Honolulu Advertiser wrote an article entitled “Rail May Cost more than budgeted $3.7 billion”. In the article, you were quoted to say that the “$3.7 billion estimate includes a 29 percent, or $1 billion, buffer, which accounts for possible design, construction and professional services and other cost overruns...” This again indicates that the cost of the project was at $3.7 billion and that the City was already taking action to prevent any concerns of cost overruns to that price tag.

Lastly, I stand by my previous statement that the 2008 vote was still based on the original minimum operable segment (MOS), which included a route along Salt Lake Boulevard. As approximately 50,000 residents reside in Salt Lake, many voters from the area voted in favor of the charter amendment believing that rail would provide an alternative mode of transportation and much needed traffic relief. Although the Council did vote to amend the MOS to replace the Salt Lake Route with a route serving Pearl Harbor and the Airport, the previous City Administration still heavily supported the change even though the Airport Route was estimated to cost approximately $200 million more than the Salt Lake Route.

If you have any question, please do not hesitate to contact me at 768-5005.

Sincerely,

Ann H. Kobayashi
Councilmember, District V