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Advocates For Consumer Rights

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Working for Hawaii's consumers since 1994

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Sunday, May 17, 2009

CITY COUNCIL
CITY AND COUNTY OF HONOLULU
HONOLULU, HAWAII 96813-3077
Testimony Faxed to: 768-3827

MONDAY, MAY 18, 2009, 9:00 A.M.
SPECIAL MEETING
COMMITTEE MEETING ROOM

OPPOSE ONE PORTION OF BILL 16 (2009), CD1 – EXECUTIVE CAPITAL BUDGET AND PROGRAM. "Approving the Executive Capital Budget and Program for the Fiscal Year July 1, 2009 to June 30, 2010".

Aloha Honorable Council members,

Advocates For Consumer Rights is a Honolulu-based organization of informed consumers with an active communication database of some 25,000 statewide members of all political persuasions. In order to remain impartial and nonpartisan on the many important public-policy issues with which we have worked during the past 15 years, we raise no money and are all volunteers.

We take no position on the many other items on this budget now before you, but **we strongly oppose the proposed \$1,077,232,000, budget item for the "Honolulu High Capacity Transit Project"**. We have taken this position for several reasons:

While we do support mass transit, we believe that the current transit plan as proposed is far-too expensive, far-too visually intrusive, and out of proportion to the existing scale of Honolulu's buildings and view plane. We believe there are other alternatives being proposed that are worthy of your consideration -- before locking the taxpayers on Honolulu County into a literal bottomless pit of debt service, and operations & maintenance costs. Please do the math; the per-person cost going forward. We sincerely believe that given the current international economic situation, a decision to proceed with such an extravagant project holds the great potential to literally

bankrupt the County. While such a scenario might take several years to manifest, unless one is planning to move off island, the ramifications for your supporting vote today could come back to haunt us all

All concerned must surely know that the current Environmental Impact Statement has been rushed through the process and will likely be challenged in court before one shovel has been lifted. Surely you recall the recent SuperFerry debacle, which will likely wind up in another costly court fight before it is all pau. To begin to hire staff and solicit construction bids for this massive project at this point is folly. *The approval of the EIS must come first, before you fund construction or hire costly staff.*

It is also clear that the City's real-property taxpayers will be funding rail by paying the interest on the \$1 billion in General Obligation bonds and the real-property taxpayers will no-doubt be called upon to make up any shortfalls in the GET collection simply because there is no other source of revenue for such an enormous project. At best, Honolulu's taxpayers will have to somehow fund as much as 60% of the project's total construction costs – plus the operation and maintenance after the fact. Is this the gamble that you are willing to take with your future; our futures?

We do support the partially-at-grade system now being presented by the American Institute of Architects-Honolulu and would strongly suggest that the plan be considered before you commit Honolulu's taxpayers to an irrevokable course of action fraught with the possibility of court challenges, such massive constructions costs, and all the rest. While the AIA proposal could eventually cost as much, it would serve far-more communities on the island, be less environmentally damaging, and have a more acceptable visual impact than the now-proposed all-elevated rail system. **The very idea of concrete bunker-like stations one-half the length of a football field and three stories high seems ludicrous for Honolulu with all of its lovely view planes and scenic wonders. It's important to remember that it was the massive, out-of-scale footprint that killed rail transit the last time and this occurred once the general public came to understand the sheer mass and size of the project.** *Please do not let this happen again.* Slow this project down until we can arrive at a compromise that does not destroy one of the remaining reasons that so many visitors come to Honolulu in the first place.

Sincerely,
George Fox
Scott Foster