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Helping to keep Hawai'i  
clean, green, beautiful,  
livable and sustainable  
since 1912

June 1, 2022

TO: Honolulu City Council members

FROM: Scott R Wilson, President, The Outdoor Circle

RE: RES22-127 and The Outdoor Circle Opposition to Revised Recovery Plan

Dear Council Members,

The Outdoor Circle, Hawaii's oldest environmental organization (founded 1912), **strongly urges the Honolulu City Council to withhold approval of HART's Revised Recovery Plan at this time.** The Revised Recovery Plan in its current form does not acknowledge key environmental and operational factors, including sea level rise, ridership objectives, loss of urban tree canopy and public revenue shortfalls that have arisen since the original rail route was planned. These new factors must be incorporated into the Revised Recovery Plan if the project is to be of sound use and value to the people of Honolulu.

### Background

When The Outdoor Circle first opposed the rail project (Honolulu Star-Advertiser, November 23, 2011), it stressed the "visual damage to this island as well as the degradation to neighborhoods" along the rail route. However, with construction beginning at the western terminus in agricultural land, these impacts have been relatively limited. Now that the construction has reached the urban core at Middle Street, neighborhood degradation and visual damage are greatly heightened. The final 4 miles of the project route will be by far the most expensive and controversial portion of the route and alternative routes and mass transit technology must be considered.

### Key Factors Not Examined: Sea Level Rise, Ridership Objectives, Loss of Urban Tree Canopy and Allocation of Public Revenues

Since 2017, several scientific studies have concluded that seven of the proposed rail stations between Middle Street and Ala Moana Center will experience daily flooding as a result of **sea level rise** as early as 2040, 10 years from planned completion (2030). With the forced pause of construction on Dillingham Boulevard, now is the time to consider a shift to higher ground to avoid future flooding in low-lying coastal areas.

The current Recovery Plan route, with its emphasis on Ala Moana Center as an eventual terminus, ignores **basic ridership needs**. The primary ridership need is between the west side of Oahu and Downtown, not to Kakaako. Additional ridership needs are to the University of Hawaii Manoa and Waikiki, neither of which are addressed by the Revised Recovery Plan.

In the last 15 years, the overall percentage of **tree canopy area** for urban Honolulu has decreased from 32% to 25%. While several factors contributed to this, the removal of mature street trees for rail construction is a concern of The Outdoor Circle. The Revised Recovery Plan does not address the option of using express buses from a transit hub at Middle Street, which would allow the preservation of mature shade trees along the currently proposed route.

The purpose of the Revised Recovery Plan is to procure the balance of federal (FTA) funds (\$745M) promised for the original project. With the enormous increase in the cost to the rail project since the FTA agreement, the FTA funds have become less and less significant. For the final segment of the project (Middle Street to Civic Center), the Revised Recovery Plan calls for spending an additional \$2.9B in order to receive \$745M, a net burden on local taxpayers of \$2.2B. Given the financial strain the City and County is under to pay for basic public services, **more financially conservative alternatives** for completion of the rail project must be examined.

Thank you for your consideration on this matter.

Sincerely,

Scott Wilson, President  
The Outdoor Circle