

Transitway plan won't work

In his May 4 Second Opinion column, Cliff Slater argues for an elevated reversible vehicular transitway instead of a rail system. There are several common-sense reasons why this scheme would not work as well as a rail/subway system (aboveground out of town, underground in town).

Mr. Slater's proposed transitway would only run to Iwilei. While a significant number of people do work in Iwilei, many more work in the downtown area or farther diamondhead. How are these transitway users to get to downtown or beyond?

A chemical reaction can only move as fast as its slowest step (the rate-determining step). Even if you race along the transitway, a tremendous traffic jam would meet you at the end as thousands of vehicles poured into Iwilei with only the street-level traffic grid there to handle the influx.

If you get to the end of the transitway in 20 minutes and then it takes half an hour to get from Iwilei into your parking garage five blocks away on Bishop Street, have you really gained anything? The rate-determining step is the street-level traffic, not the transitway.

The governor's proposed light-rail system also terminates in Iwilei, and because of that it shares many problems with Mr. Slater's proposed transitway. We need a downtown subway with stops within walking distance of people's destinations, and we need intra-island ferry service that docks at Aloha Tower. Both of these solutions would allow commuters to avoid downtown street-level traffic completely.

Because traffic is such a mess downtown during rush hour, there is every reason to believe that the buses, vans and cars Mr. Slater envisions using the transitway would not be able to drive 50 mph. In the morning, it is likely that traffic would back up from the Iwilei terminus miles down the transitway, which apparently would have only the one exit on the town end. If it gets backed up, there would be no side street to turn off on, no alternative to sitting and waiting.

Mr. Slater states, correctly, that a train system would require transfers between modes of transportation or a walk on either end. What he does not say is that his transitway system would require exactly the same thing. A commuter would have to get to the buses or vans that Mr. Slater envisions as primary users of the transitway. This would require a transfer or a walk. For many commuters, driving to the transitway entrance would actually waste time. If you live between Waikele and Iwilei, you would have to drive away from your destination to reach the only 'Ewa entrance to the transitway.

If Mr. Slater's financial estimates are correct, the transitway would cost \$1.2 billion, nearly as much as the H-3 cost (\$1.5 billion in inflation-adjusted 2004 dollars). If it works at all, it would only help those who live beyond Waikele who are commuting to Iwilei.

Thus, it would be a partial solution at best.

While the integrated system we need will be a combination of partial solutions, i.e. car, ferry, bus and rail, a rail/subway system will still be necessary even if we build the transitway and will serve many, many more people than Mr. Slater's proposal. Our traffic problems are too severe to hope to solve them with half-a-loaf solutions.

*Rep. Marilyn B. Lee
House majority floor leader*