

BRT: Pattern of deception?

There has been so much misrepresentation lately in the city's promotion of its Bus/Rapid Transit project that one can only concur with the former chair of the Hanauma Bay Community Task Force who said the city "raises the practice of spin to the level of outright deception."[\[i\]](#)

For example, when opponents of the In-Town Bus/Rapid Transit charge that the project will remove general traffic lanes from Ala Moana Boulevard; the city responds that they are not taking lanes from Ala Moana Boulevard east of the Ala Wai bridge. When challenged, the city is forced to reveal that while they will not be taking lanes next year,[\[ii\]](#) they will be taking them three years from now in 2007. When opponents say that narrowing lanes to just ten feet will exacerbate traffic congestion since 10 foot 4 inch wide tour buses are wider than the lane, the city responds that the opponents are wrong, the maximum allowable width of tour buses is only 8 feet 6 inches.[\[iii\]](#) But that is only the maximum body width, not the mirror-to-mirror width.[\[iv\]](#) Is the city indulging in spin? Or deception?

You will have heard the City say frequently that there will be a ten-minute timesavings using BRT from Downtown

to Waikiki. But that is only if you compare the BRT's 25-30 minute time with a regular #19 bus along the same circuitous route the BRT takes. [\[v\]](#) A more direct bus route would be Route B, which takes only 22 minutes. [\[vi\]](#) Spin? Or deception? [\[vii\]](#)

Many people now think that the city has decided to cut back on most of the exclusive lanes it once planned for BRT. In fact, three years from now, the In-Town BRT will have all the exclusive lanes it had originally planned and announced. [\[viii\]](#) Is this public misunderstanding the result of spin? Or deception?

Have you been led to believe that BRT will help reduce traffic congestion? Think about this: For the afternoon commute from Downtown going in the Diamond Head direction, commuters will find that two of the lanes on King Street, two lanes on Kapiolani and one lane on Ala Moana Boulevard, have been taken over by the BRT and cannot be used by regular traffic. Help reduce congestion?

In its efforts to mislead voters on BRT, the city has one major advantage: At City Council hearings, the City Administration can present for as long as two hours, the opponents are allowed just one minute to rebut — no matter how qualified or how knowledgeable.

For example, Dr. Prevedouros, UH traffic expert, who has conducted computerized simulations of BRT's traffic congestion effects, was told he could speak at council hearings after City transit officials had made their presentation — but for only one minute. He obviously could not make any contribution of value in a minute and

stayed away. In his absence, city officials characterized his work as “simplistic.”

Dr. Prevedouros, as you can quickly determine from his record^[ix], does not do “simplistic” work and characterizing his work as such is not spin; it is deception, pure and simple.

For my one minute at the most recent City Council Transportation Committee hearing on BRT, I could only begin to testify on a list of the deceptive statements the city had just made in their presentation before my time ran out.

To be fair, it is not just Honolulu that practices deception in transit projects. Many academics have written on deception in the promotion of transit projects as being the norm nationally and internationally.^[x]

Last year, Aalborg University in Denmark published a study of 258 transportation infrastructure project costs in 20 countries.^[xi] They found that cost overruns for transit projects averaged 50% and that transit officials’ lying about their projects was usually the problem.

There needs to be some way — possibly formal debate — to allow Hawaii voters to hear from legitimate opposition by responsible community organizations that have studied city projects, such as the BRT, and found them wanting.

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Footnotes:

[i] [Mayor, director caused added Hanauma cost](#)
Letter from Richard W. Barker.

Excerpt: "... both Managing Director Ben Lee and Mayor Jeremy Harris claimed that a major element of the cost overruns on this project resulted from efforts by the city to accommodate the wishes of the community. The mayor said that the community had "insisted" on moving the education facility from the originally proposed location. This pitch raises -- actually lowers -- the practice of spin to the level of outright deception. The facts are: etc,"

[ii] Even this is not exactly true since they will be taking the curb lane on Ala Moana from the Prince Hotel to Kalia Road for the initial operating segment in 2005 and 2006.

[iii] [Special Joint Neighborhood Board Minutes, Ala Wai Golf Course Clubhouse held August 20, 2003, page 2.](#) Remarks of Toru Hamayasu, DTS Chief Planner.

[iv] [The width of a tour bus.](#)

[v] [Federal FEIS, IOS Chapter](#), page IOS-8.

[vi] [Route B Country Express schedule](#) between stops at King/Beretania and Kapahulu Avenue.

[vii] Waikiki Improvement Association staff fortunately recorded this instance of city deception: Our group, the Alliance for Traffic Improvement, concluded our presentation to the WIA Board by saying that the sole benefit of the BRT was the City's claim of a 1.5 minute saving on a 25-minute bus ride from Downtown to Waikiki — we asked, where's the beef?

Once finished, we were asked to leave the meeting. Ms. Cheryl Soon, the city transportation director, then came into the meeting and she was asked about this. Quoting from [WIA's report of the meeting](#), she said,

"The BRT is a limited stop service which should save 10 minutes. Originally in the supplemental EIS they did list a 1.5 minute savings but there was an alignment change to the Kakaako segment and BRTs will be equipped with sensory traffic signal changers that could hold the green light as the BRT

approaches the intersection.”

What utter nonsense. In writing ([federal FEIS, page S-34](#)) the City currently forecasts that the difference in travel times for the No-Build (existing bus system) and LPA (fully built BRT system) alternatives will be 1.3 minutes from Downtown-Waikiki and 1.8 minutes from Downtown to UH. Further, [on page 4-15](#), the Downtown-Waikiki travel time savings is shown as 1.9 minutes and 1.8 minutes for Downtown to UH. The city often uses 10 minutes time savings from Downtown to Waikiki in verbal presentations. However, that is the time savings only if one travels the same circuitous route taken by the BRT.

[\[viii\]](#) The engineering drawings for the In-Town part of the BRT (see below to download) in the federal FEIS of August 2003 are, all but two, the same as, and dated prior to, those shown in the state FEIS of November 2002. The two that were changed were for technical reasons having nothing to do with lane changes. According to the federal FEIS, all exclusive lanes will be in place by 2007. The following are just two of the many references to the completion of the In-Town BRT in 2007.

“The remainder of the In-Town BRT will be started shortly after the IOS, with concurrent implementation of the Kalihi Segment (2004 – 2006), Downtown – University segment (2005 – 2007) and Kakaako Mauka segment (2005 – 2006).” [Federal FEIS, page 2-53.](#)

“The fiscal years selected are FY 2007, at completion of In-Town BRT System’s fixed facilities.” [Federal FEIS, page 6-6.](#)

[IOS drawings, Downtown to Kakaako, file 1, 1.7 megs](#)

[IOS drawings, Downtown to Kakaako, file 2, 1.1 megs](#)

[IOS drawings, Kakaako Makai, 1.2 megs](#)

[IOS drawings, Waikiki, 3.4 megs](#)

[Full 2007 LPA drawings, In-Town BRT only, 24.2 megs](#)

[\[ix\]](#) [Dr. Prevedouros’ curriculum vitae](#). See also his [comments](#) on this matter to FTA.

[\[x\]](#) [John F. Kain \[former Chair, Harvard’s Economics Dept.\]](#), *"Deception in Dallas: Strategic Misrepresentation in Rail Transit Promotion and Evaluation,"* [Journal of American Planning Association](#), 56 pp. 184-196.

John F. Kain, "*The Use of Straw Men in the Economic Evaluation of Rail Transport Economics*," *American Economic Review*, Vol. 82 n 2, May 1992.

Wachs, Martin. [Director of the Institute of Transportation Studies, UC Berkeley], *Technique vs. Advocacy in Forecasting: A Study of Rail Rapid Transit*. *Urban Resources* 4, no. 1. Fall 1986.

Pickrell, Don H. [Chief Economist, U.S. DOT's Volpe Center], *Urban Rail Transit Projects: Forecast Versus Actual Ridership and Costs*. U.S. Dept. of Transportation. October 1990.

Semmens, John. A Critique of "*Dollars and Sense: The Economic Case for Public Transportation in America*." Policy Study No. 243. Reason Public Policy Institute. August 1998.

[xi] [Bent Flyvbjerg, Mette Skamris Holm, and Søren Buhl. *Underestimating Costs in Public Works Projects: Error or Lie?* *APA Journal*, Summer 2002 Vol. 68, No. 3 p. 279.](#)