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COUNCILMAN BERG WANTS TO DISCUSS BUS FUNDING THAT COULD SAVE MONEY ON PROPERTY ACQUISITION FOR RAIL

"Because it is imperative that transparency and clarity be made available to all taxpayers in the City & County of Honolulu and this has always been a contentious issue, I may have been a bit more animated than I should have and it was not my intention yesterday to irritate any city council members during a committee meeting. When I insisted upon some honest discussion and answers about how the iwi situation will be handled and why the costs for land acquisitions have gone up three times- from \$90 million to nearly \$300 million, it was misconstrued as being disruptive.

The federal government has recently offered us the ability to put buses on the fixed guideway instead of rail and they will pay up to 80% of the costs – in contrast to rail at roughly 20%. Please see attached article.

When it comes to property acquisition for the huge rail stations and route for the fixed guide way, costs have about tripled just on property purchases alone and the city has yet to complete the archaeological inventory survey where property is the most expensive for accommodating the rail.

With the federal government redefining fixed guide ways to included bus technology, which is less expensive to build, maintain, and provides superior service to rail, it simply rubs me wrong that the city won't even entertain that new deal being offered to save our taxpayers a massive amount of money.

I was not threatening anyone during yesterday's committee meeting. I apologize if it appeared that way. I think there are major important issues now at stake and we need further answers and honest discussion about them right now."

ENCLOSURE: New Starts Transit Grants

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Inside MAP-21: New Starts Transit Grants

By Jason Jordan

APA Director of Policy and Government Affairs

APA is taking a closer look at the new federal surface transportation bill, MAP-21, with daily posts detailing the changes and new provisions of a key program or section. The bill provides a 27-month, \$118 billion authorization and has been signed into law by President Obama. The new provisions of the law will take effect October 1, 2012.

NEW STARTS The New Starts program, also known as the Fixed Guideway Capital Investment Grant program, had its funding cut slightly by about \$50 million to \$1.907 billion for each of the fiscal years 2013 and 2014.

New Starts is the primary federal program providing funding for major new transit projects. The program is left intact overall but includes eligibility modifications and reforms designed to streamline the approval process.

In addition to funding new fixed guideway capital projects and small starts, the bill creates a new program category for Core Capacity Improvement Projects. These projects are defined as those that provide substantial investment while increasing the capacity of a corridor by 10 percent or more. This should increase flexibility for transit agencies to use funding to maintain their existing capital assets if they can generate at least a 10 percent increase in capacity as a result of the investment. (Funding is not to be used simply to maintain a state of good repair.)

As requested by the House, the bill modifies the definition of Bus Rapid Transit projects to broaden the use of the program. BRT projects will now be classified and funded as either Corridor-Based or Fixed Guideway. Corridor-Based BRT projects lack a separate right-of-way but include defined features that emulate rail service and are considered a small start. Fixed Guideway BRT projects include all the same features as the former category, but the majority of the project operates in a separate right-of-way dedicated to public transportation during peak periods.

A provision in the bill allows three Fixed Guideway BRT projects to receive at least 80 percent federal funding share each fiscal year. These provisions provide a significant opportunity for communities seeking to invest in BRT, which under SAFETEA-LU, was mostly funding through bus discretionary appropriations.

Lawmakers in both chambers put an emphasis on efforts to streamline project approval for all programs. New Starts evaluation criteria are simplified and duplicative project development steps are removed in an effort to enable FTA to review proposals more quickly. The bill specifically includes the Senate's provision to expedite review for fixed guideway projects with a New Starts funding share of less than \$100 million or less than 50 percent of the total project costs. The technical capacity review process would also be expedited for transit agencies that have already completed a similar project that achieved or surpassed budget, cost and ridership projections.

The bill also establishes a Pilot Program for Expedited Project Delivery, which is essentially a category for demonstration projects that require less than 50 percent federal funding share. Only three projects will be eligible, one of which must request more than \$100 million and one less than \$100 million in federal financial assistance.

Coming Monday: NEPA and Project Streamlining

<http://blogs.planning.org/policy/2012/07/13/inside-map-21-new-starts-transit-grants/>