

How AIA Honolulu Transit Policy Was Shaped

Compiled by Amy Blagriff, Executive Vice President, AIA Honolulu, September 14, 2009

Background on AIA Advocacy Efforts

Advocacy is one of the three pillars of the AIA Honolulu Mission/Plan. As *Architects Together*, we give voice to our shared values in order to influence the shape of our neighborhoods, to ensure the future health of our profession, and ensure the health, safety and well-being of those we serve.

One of the roles of the Board of Directors is to provide shape and direction to the programs and services provided by AIA Honolulu. In the area of advocacy, Board decisions are grounded in a set of board-approved public policies that define the organization's stance on issues that impact the profession. These public policies help ensure that advocacy decisions are rooted in broadly accepted and well-developed principles. As a chartered member of the American Institute of Architects, it is also essential that the positions taken by AIA Honolulu be in accord with formal, public policies adopted by the AIA national component.

A review of public policies is typically undertaken in coordination with the AIA national review process, and on an as-determined basis as key advocacy issues in our local communities—related to the built environment—emerge as topics of board discussion.

Many of the members of the AIA Honolulu have long been interested in how transit could interface with our island community and expressed interest in participating in the planning and design of the proposed transit system and Transit Oriented Development. Past testimony based on AIA policies dating back to 2005, is posted on our transit page, available to members and the public at www.aiahonolulu.org/transit.

2005- 2007: AIA Honolulu provided testimony on the proposed Honolulu High Capacity Corridor Project on multiple occasions to Honolulu City Council and via direct correspondence with City Administration. Issue areas specifically referenced in testimony included AIA Honolulu public policies on Transportation and Regional/Urban Design, drawn from AIA Honolulu public policies ratified on May 26, 2005. AIA testimony gave support to the concept of rail transit as part of a multi-modal solution for Oahu and lobbied for approval of a transit tax to fund a proposed rail system as part of Oahu's long-term urban planning efforts. AIA concern was repeatedly voiced about urban design issues, including overhead and at-grade options as well as appropriate station design and impacts on surrounding communities. (See testimony online – [AIA Honolulu.org/transit](http://AIAHonolulu.org/transit))

2008 Summary

Based on increasing participation in discussions with the City and public officials about the Honolulu rail transit project, the AIA Honolulu board of directors decided to undertake a review of AIA Honolulu's transit and urban design policies—to allow AIA Honolulu a stronger voice on emerging issues related to transit and its impact our built environment. Following are some of the highlights of planned activities and meetings that shaped board decision-making which resulted in an updated (2008) AIA Honolulu Transportation Policy and Position Statement on Transit by year-end. Details follow:

January 2008: President Sid Char, AIA, and Government Affairs Chair, Paul Louie, AIA meet with Assistant managing director Trudy Saito, AIA to discuss how AIA could work more closely with the City to help shape the transit project in the coming year(s).

February 26, 2008: Board of Directors meeting included special presentation by Toru Hamayasu and Wayne Yoshioka, of the City Department of Transportation Services, to receive update on Honolulu Rapid Transit project and opportunities for AIA Honolulu involvement.

March 17, 2008: Follow-up letter sent by President Sid Char, AIA, to Mayor Hannemann as summary of Board's February meeting with transit officials (See AIA member meetings w/City –posted on AIA Honolulu web site).

April 8, 2008: E-news Flash reminder to all AIA Honolulu members to attend special town hall meeting on transit.

April 11, 2008: AIA Member town hall meeting on Honolulu's proposed High-Capacity Corridor Project was held on April 11, 2008 at AIA Honolulu office. The agenda noted: "In an effort to further strengthen communications between AIA Honolulu and the City our Board requested this town hall so that we might engage you (AIA members) in an open discussion on this proposed system. Please plan to attend learn more and have your voice heard on this pivotal project."

May 27, 2008: AIA Honolulu Board of Directors meeting approved Director David Akinaka, AIA, to Chair newly created transit task force. Task force charge was to prepare updated draft policy on transportation for board approval, based on member survey and additional findings of task force.

June 2008 – Ongoing: Task force meetings began in June 2008, based on an open call to interested members to participate in this special topic area. Meetings are conducted at the AIA Honolulu offices, and remain open to all AIA members; scheduled monthly or more regularly as determined by Chair.

June 11, 2008: AIA Honolulu conducted an online poll of its membership regarding the proposed elevated transit system in the downtown urban (Honolulu) core. The survey invitation was sent via email on June 11, 2008, and survey responses were collected until the deadline of 5:00pm, June 18, 2008. A total of 90/144 member responses (62.5%) favored either at-grade or below grade through the downtown urban core. A total of 41/144 members (28.4 %) indicated their preference for elevated rail through the urban core. This feedback, plus Board consideration of AIA national policy, local AIA urban design policies, and the principles outlined in the City's Primary Urban Center Development Plan ([PUDC](#)), led the AIA Honolulu Board of Directors to adopt an updated Transportation Policy and accompanying Position Statement in favor of a **flexible** rail system for Honolulu--one capable of running elevated, at grade or below grade as warranted by the specific conditions of each community. See board action timeline below.

June 24, 2008: E-News Flash inviting all interested members to attend AIA Government Affairs meeting to help monitor local city advocacy efforts on behalf of AIA Honolulu. Call for members to get involved in issues affecting profession and AIA.

July 7, 2009: E-News Flash sent to all AIA Honolulu members announcing results of member poll on transit considerations through urban core. Members reminded that AIA Honolulu Board of Directors would be finalizing updated policy on transportation based on survey and other policy considerations. All members were invited to attend meeting on transit task force on July 10, 2008.

July 18, 2008: David Akinaka presented draft transportation policy to AIA Honolulu Board of Directors at July Board meeting. The item was referred to August 26 Board agenda for final approval, following the opportunity for member comment on draft policy prior to final board vote.

August 11, 2008: Action Alert sent to all members of AIA Honolulu seeking member comment on proposed revised policy on transportation, noting that the Board of Directors would be making their final vote on this new AIA Honolulu public policy on transportation at their August 26 meeting.

August 26, 2008: Following Board discussion and review of member feedback received, the AIA Honolulu board of directors approved the **Public Policy on Transportation, adopted August 26, 2008**.

September 17, 2008: Letter to Wayne Yoshioka, Director, Transportation Services in response to request for input on Section 106 Coordination (historic resources impact) for the Honolulu High Capacity Corridor Project.

September 23, 2008, September Board meeting: Board agreed to consider adoption of a Position Statement on Transit, to supplement newly adopted policy on transportation. A report from Transit task force noted that a board-approved position statement would allow a more thorough AIA response to draft Environmental Impact Statement, the scope of which was noted to be in the 100s of pages. Draft position statement was agreed to be distributed for review and comment prior to October Board meeting, when a vote would be taken.

October 20, 2008: AIA Honolulu membership meeting held with Mayor Hannemann at his campaign headquarters, (See AIA member meetings w/City –posted on AIA Honolulu web site for agenda).

October 23, 2008: Letter from President Sid Char, AIA to Mayor Hannemann as follow-up to membership presentation. (See AIA member meetings w/City –posted on AIA Honolulu web site).

October 24, 2008: Board approved draft AIA Honolulu Position Statement on Transit.

October 24, 2008: E-News Flash to all members announcing Board approval of updated Position Statement on Transit. Full text of position statement included to all members. E-news blast also included follow-up invitation for interested members to participate in ongoing transit task force meetings.

November 18, 2008: November Board of Directors meeting: Transit Task Force report updated board of directors on ongoing task force meetings and research being done in preparation for AIA response/testimony to Draft EIS.

December 8, 2008: President Sid Char, AIA, presents oral testimony in response to DEIS at Blaisdell Center public hearing. (See Dec. 8 testimony- posted on AIA Honolulu web site)

December 16, 2008: Board of Directors meeting: Transit task force report includes notice that David Akinaka will be stepping down as Chair for family considerations. Scott Wilson, AIA approved as new chair of Transit Task force for 2009. Board of Director's advised of ongoing transit research by transit task force.

Summary of 2009 actions: The focus of AIA Honolulu Transit efforts under the direction of 2009 AIA Honolulu President, Jeffrey Nishi, AIA has been to continue to promote AIA's position on the project in accordance with the board-approved transportation policy and position statement. This year (2009) has been notable for the production and distribution of a board-approved research report by the AIA Transit Task Force. Transit Task Force meetings have continued during the year, as announced online in AIA Honolulu Island Architect Weekly, and via email notice to task force members. The Board of Directors continued to be engaged and informed via monthly updates on Transit Task Force activities— as part of President's monthly report.

Other notables include the development of visual materials to highlight AIA's position including video, power point presentation and photo simulations of flexible, light rail options. Transit Task force members have worked closely during the year with members of AIA National Government Affairs staff, and in consultation with a national transportation consultant, Phil Craig, a New Jersey railway system designer and transportation consultant since 1955. Ongoing AIA efforts have also included outreach to public officials, allied organizations and members of the public to offer our suggestions, expertise, and alternatives to insure a viable fixed rail transit system for the people of Honolulu and its visitors. A concerted effort to keep members and the public has been made as seen through daily/weekly posting to our transit page on our web site. See www.aiahonolulu.org/transit

January 29, 2009, Board of Directors Meeting: Transit Task force presented draft #7 of AIA Honolulu Transit Task Force Report, followed by lengthy discussion and suggested edits by Board. The Board voted to approve and release report as edited to Mayor Hannemann and City Council. (See report posted on AIA Honolulu web site).

February 2, 2009: Letters sent to Council Chair Todd Apo and Mayor Hannemann, signed by President Jeff Nishi, with copies of AIA Honolulu Report on Transit

February 11, 2009: E-News Flash to invite all AIA Honolulu members to attend Transit Task Force update and discussion of recently released board-approved AIA report on transit. "This is an excellent time for all members to learn about the Chapter's advocacy efforts in this important area that will impact all Hawaii residents, and it is a time for members to ask questions and to voice your feedback to the members of the Transit Task Force and our Board of Directors."

February 18, 2009, Town Hall meeting on Transit to learn about AIA's ongoing work on transit. As written in February 17 reminder notice to all AIA Honolulu members: "Members are invited to attend the first MEMBER'S TOWN HALL of 2009 to learn about AIA Honolulu's ongoing work on the issues of Transit and Transit-oriented development in Honolulu. Learn more about AIA's responses to the Draft EIS to the Honolulu High-Capacity Transit Corridor Project, including an overview of our recently completed alternatives study prepared by our AIA Transit Task Force. (PDF of transit task force included in email to all members).

March – ongoing 2009: AIA meetings scheduled with members of Honolulu City Council/State Legislators to discuss AIA's transit position. AIA representatives included: 2009 President Jeff Nishi, AIA, Past President Sid Char, AIA, Government Affairs Chair, Paul Louie, AIA and EVP Amy Blagriff

April 2009: AIA Honolulu web site launched updated/enhanced transit page for all members and public to access information on AIA Honolulu work on transit.

April 13, 2009: AIA Honolulu Transit Task Force report presented to Honolulu City Council Budget Committee hearing to illuminate potential cost savings with proposed light rail solution.

April 18, 2009: AIA Honolulu launched Video/power point presentation of Transit Task Force results on You-Tube – linked to AIA Honolulu Transit page.

April 21, 2009: As part of widely promoted Architecture Month, AIA Forum on Transit options was presented to all interested members and the public; including showing Transit Video and panel discussion including representatives from AIA, City Transportation Services and allied planning and engineering organizations. Over 180 people attended this lively presentation and q&a.

May 4, 2009: Presentation by members of AIA Transit Task Force to Honolulu Board of Realtors. Power point presentation posted online at aiahonolulu.org/transit

May/June 2009: Follow-up testimony by Jeff Nishi, Sid Char and Amy Blagriff representing AIA Honolulu position on transit advocating flexible light rail solution – to City Council transit hearings. Testimony posted on AIA Honolulu web site.

June 26, 2009: AIA National article features AIA Honolulu transit efforts to date; published in *AIArchitect*, written by Russell Boniface, Associate Editor. (See media updates at www.aiahonolulu.org/transit).

July 14, 2009: Public outreach presentation by members of AIA Transit Task Force to Honolulu Chamber of Commerce Land Use Committee

July 30, 2009: One page ad printed in Honolulu Advertiser as public service announcement to promote AIA position on flexible light rail, funded by Hawaii Architectural Foundation.

August 17, 2009: Public Outreach presentation by members of AIA Transit Task Force to Sunrise Rotary of Honolulu.

August 26, 2009: Representatives of AIA Honolulu invited by Hawaii Public Radio to participate in transit discussion on Bytemarks Café, 89.3 FM (one hour live program). All AIA members encouraged to call in with questions/comments to on-air show via email blast to all members.

Visit www.aiahonolulu.org/transit for ongoing updates on AIA Honolulu advocacy efforts on this important issue.

