


CITY COUNCIL
CITY AND COUNTY OF HONOLULU
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November 10, 2010

Memorandum

TO: Council Chair Nestor Garcia, Honolulu City Council
Clayton Wong, Fiscal Officer, Honolulu City Council

FROM: Councilmember Romy M. Cachola 

SUBJECT: Rail-Volution 2010
Portland, Oregon
October 18 – 21, 2010

I attended the Rail-Volution 2010 conference in Portland, Oregon from October 18-21, 2010. Ever since the Rail-Volution helped open the Westside MAX in 1998, the Portland region has celebrated a total of eight new rail openings or extensions. Because of Portland's commitment to "livable communities" over the past few decades, the area has seen tremendous improvements.

Rail-Volution is, first and foremost, a conference for passionate practitioners—people from all perspectives who believe strongly in the role of land use and transit as equal partners in the quest for greater livability and greater communities. The conference included three plenary sessions, 75 workshop sessions, 21 mobile workshops, 3 charrettes, special events and a trade show that were aimed at discussing nearly every aspect of building livable communities, as well as specific hands-on strategies that can be used and applied to most every community.

As a member of the City Council's Transportation Committee, a member of the National Association of Counties (NACO)'s Transportation Steering Committee and a member of the Oahu Metropolitan Transportation Organization's (OMPO) Policy Committee, it was important for me to participate in the conference and tap into the expertise of the many planners, business leaders, elected officials, planning commissioners, community leaders, funders and transportation advocates from more than 300 communities in 30 states that were in attendance.

Day 1 of Rail~Volution 2010

On Monday, October 18, 2010, I attended a roundtable discussion entitled “Transit Agency and MPO Peer-to-Peer Exchange.” from 12:30 a.m. – 2:30 p.m. This roundtable discussion focused on partnerships between public transit agencies, metropolitan planning organizations, elected officials and affected stakeholders, which are essential to sustainable long-range plans and short-range programs.

Here are some of the barriers and challenges that all stakeholders typically face:

- Territorialism/multiple jurisdictions
- Multiple and conflicting goals/plans
- Miscommunication
- Lack of communication
- Confused implementation
- Complacency
- Loss of focus
- Politics
- Funding
- The current economic recession

The discussion also included institutional arrangements, transit-oriented development (TOD), street design, economic development, urban circulators and financing that all support livable communities and other sustainable outcomes.

Day 2 of Rail~Volution 2010

On Tuesday, October 19, I attended several workshops, the first of which was entitled “Charrette Toolbox.” The NCI Charrette System, which has been taught at Harvard and worldwide, is a proven, collaborative integrated design process involving context-sensitive design in a public workshop setting. It gets people involved in helping to unlock problems. The NCI Charrette System is a design-based, accelerated, collaborative project management system that spans the entire pre-construction period. It is a proven, flexible, three-step framework that can be customized for any project.

The NCI Charrette System has been used by public and private planners, designers, architects and developers for:

- Sustainable community and building design
- Regional and comprehensive planning
- Master planning
- Transportation/infrastructure planning
- Code/policy writing
- Development projects

Later in the day, I attended a second workshop entitled “AIA, ASLA and APA—Together at the Center.” This event discussed as well as celebrated collaboration across disciplines. Representatives from three professional organizations at the center of the livability movement—the American Institute of Architects, the American Society of Landscape Architects and the American Planning Association—discussed the challenges of defining, creating and enlivening livable cities from their respective organizations’ perspectives.

My final workshop for the day was entitled “**Mega Programs.**” Attendees were updated on how large transit capital investment programs are dealing with the current recession. Despite the economic downturn, there are ways for municipalities/counties to deal with funding challenges, including:

- more public-private partnerships
- bridge loans
- increasing the sales tax (or the payroll tax in Portland’s case)
- tax increment financing.

Two other keys to solving funding challenges are transparency and openness. The speakers at this workshop emphasized that in a down economy, municipalities/counties must be very cautious about borrowing since they might end up reducing flexibility and/or create a false impression that everything is okay without increasing taxes. The impacts of a down economy have resulted in many municipalities/counties having to either:

- (1) Reduce their services or
- (2) Close down rail lines.

For Portland’s TriMet, the problem was reduced funding levels. Its construction and operational budgets were complicated because its source, the payroll tax, translated to \$60 million less due to the recession. The result was large reductions in service for Portland’s bus and rail lines.

During the workshop, there was some discussion about the five mile long New Jersey-New York tunnel. New Jersey Chris Christie announced that he would be pulling the plug on the project due to estimated cost overruns between \$2 billion to \$5 billion. Under the project’s funding agreement, \$3 billion was to be paid by the feds, \$3 billion by the Port Authority of New York and \$2.7 billion by the state of New Jersey, with a caveat that all cost overruns would be borne by New Jersey. Because of New Jersey’s experience, it was emphasized that any municipalities/counties with rail projects should be very cautious and diligent about financial estimates and that contracts should be reviewed to the extent that it is “air tight.”

I also learned how these large transit capital investment programs are driving livability discussions in various regions and strategies leaders are using to avoid significant schedule delays and scope reductions. We heard the experiences of transit officials from Denver, Los Angeles, Dallas and Seattle who are currently working on major transit expansion programs with multiple transit corridor investments.

Day 3 of Rail~Volution 2010

On Wednesday, October 20, I attended “Leading Up: Help Elected and Agency Officials Help Your Project!” This workshop educated attendees on what decision-makers need to know to expedite transit investments without compromising community values. It was designed to help a wide range of rail visionaries such as elected officials, board members, agency leaders, community advocates and others to communicate more effectively and receive the right information.

Later I attended “Financing the Public Realm.” I learned that as long as there is a return on their investment, the private sector will underwrite transit oriented development. But first, public action is needed for assembling land, building infrastructure like roads and utilities, creating placemaking elements such as public gathering places, providing access for all transportation modes and replacing surface commuter parking with garages. This session provided insight from the public sector in terms of examining what funding sources exist, how the public sector has been able to secure these funds and what hurdles have been overcome.

In the afternoon, I attended “TOD Marketplace.” The workshop featured a panel of national and local developers and investors who critiqued plans for three real-world projects. Attendees were later given an opportunity to meet with the panelists in small breakout sessions to get input on their respective projects. The panelists provided information on pre-development funding challenges, equity financing sources, how to make property offerings more attractive, public financing and strategies for preserving affordability.

In the late afternoon, I attended “Partnerships are Hard Work (But Worth It).” The speakers informed the audience that collaboration often trumps competition when it comes to successfully implementing transit projects. Multi-jurisdictional, multi-agency and multi-modal projects are much more common as municipalities nationwide are doing more with less. Also, public-private partnerships are all the rage. The HUD-DOT-EPA partnership means more opportunities at the federal, state, regional and local levels.

Day 4 of Rail~Volution 2010

On Thursday, October 21, I attended a morning workshop entitled “Introduction to Financing Livable Communities.” This workshop provided an overview of trends in public and private financing techniques for transit and transit-friendly development, as what I already discussed earlier in this report.

Next up was another workshop entitled “Value Capture in Today’s Economy.” I learned that in today’s challenging economic environment, capturing value from property development is considered an important tool to help fund transit-oriented development, transit projects and in some cases, transit operations. The speakers emphasized that the actual practice of value capture is extremely difficult and complex. It ranges from establishing community financing

districts to maintain development, to corridor-wide programs such as the Dulles Corridor Metro Rail Project.

The third workshop of the day was entitled “Who Pays? Federal Financing Options for Interagency Plans.” The speakers told attendees that today’s big transportation ideas pose even bigger questions. Reauthorization of the Federal Transportation Bill, a federal infrastructure bank, regional coordination around housing and transportation — so much is being discussed. Municipalities/counties are considering how to pay for it all when resources are constrained. The panel of speakers shared current thinking about financing transportation, affordable housing and other key elements that are essential for making our regions and neighborhoods healthy.

Conclusion

For myself, the Rail-Volution conference was very helpful, particularly when it comes to TOD, livable communities and financing. Transit can and should be an effective catalyst for creating livable communities. The majority of the sessions and workshops that I attended dealt with the financial side of rail. After attending the Rail-Volution Conference, I have more insight into how we can possibly look at ways of generating more funds for Oahu’s own rail project and without overburdening our taxpayers.

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City Council
City and County of Honolulu

CLAIM FOR TRAVEL REIMBURSEMENT

Date: November 15, 2010

Traveler: Romeo M. Cachola

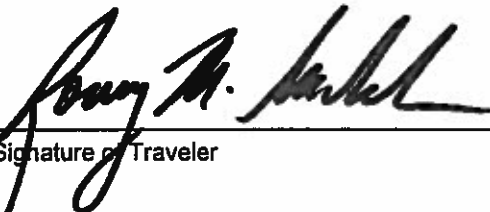
Event: 2010 Rail-Volution Annual Conference

Location: Portland, Oregon

Dates: From October 18, 2010 To October 21, 2010

Description	Amount	Notes:
1. Registration Fee	475	Online registration confirmation attached
2. Airfare	461	Dep:10/17/10 2:15pm. Ret:10/22/10 1:05pm conf attchd
3. Hotel	1006.90	Hilton Portland & Executive Tower receipt attached
4. Meals	116.25	Receipts attached
5. Ground Transportation	45	Receipt attached
6. Tips	30	Receipt and spreadsheet attached
7. Other		
Other		
Other		
8. Adjustment		
TOTAL REIMBURSEMENT	2134.15	

This is to certify that the above data, based upon receipts submitted to Council Administrative Support Services via a CCLTRVL02 form, is accurate. Further, I am claiming reimbursement for expenses associated with a trip in which City business was conducted and personal funds were used to advance payment:



Signature of Traveler

NOV 19 2010

Date