

Testimony of
Bob Loy
Director of Environmental Programs
The Outdoor Circle

Subject: Strong Support for Resolution 11-111 Relating to
Relocation of Trees affected by the Honolulu High-capacity Transit Corridor Project

Honolulu City Council
Committee on Parks and Human Services
Tuesday May 3, 2011
10:30 AM

The Outdoor Circle (TOC) strongly supports Resolution 11-111 which calls for greater accountability on the part of the City's Rapid Transit Division regarding the disposition of trees affected by the transit project.

The project's Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) requires the City, now in the form of the Rapid Transit Division (RTD), to cooperate with The Outdoor Circle regarding the disposition of trees affected by transit. Recently TOC and RTD have had several meetings to discuss issues such as tree removals, relocations, tree protection, technical specifications, timetables for tree actions and many others. We appreciate their time and efforts.

One of the ways TOC works toward its mission of keeping Hawaii clean, green and beautiful is by planting and protecting trees. This is what our thousands of members and even greater numbers of citizens within our communities expect of the organization. Our involvement in this project is to protect and preserve the approximately 900 trees that will be directly impacted by Transit construction as well as to minimize the visual impacts the loss of these trees will have on our island. The trees are valuable public property that provide extraordinary, calculable benefits to the environment, plus the more difficult to quantify aesthetic benefits they provide to the people.

We take our role as watchdogs seriously. And when it comes to the trees we've already seen why it is necessary.

This is a photograph of a tree in the median of Farrington Highway—essentially downtown Waipahu. The tree is adjacent to a Transit geotechnical drilling project and was slated in the Tree Disposition Plan to be relocated. Industry standards require perimeter fencing six feet away from the tree to protect it from being hit by equipment and to keep heavy objects from compacting the soil around it, killing the roots and damaging the trunk. This picture shows the RTD's contractor has placed around the tree's base a heavy layer of rock and dropped next to its trunk a huge pile of rubble and a double outhouse. Additionally, the contractor has allowed a multi-ton water truck to park almost on top of the tree. As you can see, despite the fact that RTD knows we are watching and the contractor even has an arborist consultant, casualties happen. We believe it is our job to keep this type of activity to a minimum.

While our discussions with the RTD have been somewhat positive several issues have arisen that are causes for concern:

- RTD's failure to produce and disclose tree protection specifications for use throughout the project
- RTD's failure to monitor Transit contractors for actions detrimental to trees along the route
- Incomplete Transit tree relocation plans including failing to identify sites for tree relocations and/or for "banking" trees intended for relocation
- RTD jumping its own timetables for tree removals without providing adequate notice or providing time for TOC to review and respond
- RTD placing obstacles to the timely flow of project information and response to inquiries by requiring the filing of official Hawaii "freedom of information" requests by TOC
- Near total lack of proposed mitigation in communities where hundreds of trees will be replaced by a huge concrete elevated guideway and massive transit stations

The Outdoor Circle appreciates this committee's interest in protecting the trees of our beautiful island from this enormous public works project. We firmly believe that it is possible to professionally deal with the many tree-related issues already identified and yet to emerge, but it will require a greater commitment on the part of the City and its contractors if that is to happen. Mahalo.