

Testimony of
Mary Steiner, CEO
The Outdoor Circle

Subject: Strong Support for Resolution 11-111, CD1 Relating to
Relocation of Trees Affected by the Honolulu High-Capacity Transit Corridor Project

Honolulu City Council
Wednesday May 11, 2011
10:00 AM

The Outdoor Circle (TOC) strongly supports Resolution 11-111, CD1 which calls for accountability on the part of the City's Rapid Transit Division (RTD) regarding trees affected by the transit project.

The project's Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) requires the City, now RTD, to cooperate with TOC regarding trees affected by transit. The Outdoor Circle and RTD have met several times to discuss issues such as removals, relocations, tree protection, technical specifications, timetables and many others. We appreciate their efforts.

One of the ways TOC works toward its mission of keeping Hawai'i 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 now is to protect and preserve the approximately 900 trees that will be directly impacted by Transit construction. The trees are valuable public property that provide calculable benefits to the environment, plus the more difficult to quantify aesthetic benefits to the people.

We take our role as watchdogs seriously. When it comes to the trees we've already seen why our efforts are necessary and we shared our findings with the Council's Parks and Human Services Committee last week. We displayed a photo of a tree in the median of Farrington Highway. The tree is adjacent to a Transit geotechnical drilling site and was slated in the Tree Disposition Plan to be relocated. Industry standards require perimeter fencing at least six feet away from the tree trunk to protect it from being hit by equipment and to keep heavy objects from compacting the soil around it. The picture showed RTD's contractor had placed a heavy layer of rock on the tree's base. In addition a double outhouse had been dropped close to the tree. Additionally, the contractor allowed a multi-ton water truck to park almost on top of the tree. All of this happened even with RTD's knowledge that TOC is watching. We believe it is our job to keep this type of activity to a minimum.

We are in strong support of the Council Draft 1. While our discussions with the RTD have been somewhat positive many 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 which include the failure to identify new locations for trees and/or for "banking" trees intended to be used later on in the project (as stated in the FEIS)
- RTD jumping its own timetables for tree removals without providing adequate notice or time for TOC to review and respond. We do not believe that notifying us on Thursday afternoon that removals will begin Monday AM and then asking us to comment is adequate
- 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 the Council'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 tree-related issues existing and anticipated. However, doing so will require a greater commitment on the part of RTD. Knowing the Council requires accountability will help. Mahalo.