



## ISLAND MATTERS *Mufi Hannemann*

# Seamlessly Integrating TheBus And Rail

What circumnavigates the globe nearly four times a day? The answer might surprise you. It's found right here at home: TheBus. I recently paid a visit to the TheBus' Middle Street facility with the current Pacific Century Fellows class for a tour, and I was impressed again with what we were briefed on by Oahu Transit Services president Roger Morton and his dedicated staff.

According to Morton, TheBus racks up about 95,000 miles every day on Oahu's roads, an amazing figure considering the island's size. But it's a testament to the reach of this mainstay of our public transportation system, which carries an average of 210,000 riders a day all across Oahu.

TheBus is the purview of the City and County of Honolulu. Those of you old enough to remember local history will recall that former Mayor Frank Fasi, frustrated over the privately owned HRT bus system that served Honolulu for many years, decided to have the city

operate a bus system. Thus, TheBus was born after Hizonner returned from a highly celebrated sojourn to Dallas to purchase replacement buses for the City of Honolulu.

My family's experience riding the bus is typical of many households in Honolulu. As a youngster in middle school, it served as my primary source of transportation from Kalihi to Iolani School's Ala Wai campus and back. When my father, Gustav, was a retired Foremost Dairies employee and didn't drive anymore, the bus was his favorite mode of transit to "hoholo" around town, and the friendly bus operators were his "best friends."

As my dad got older, they always were there to assist him get from point A to point B, and never were too busy to answer his questions. In his wallet, his most treasured possessions were a picture of my mom, Faia; his LDS temple recommendation; Social Security card and, of course, his senior citizen bus pass. He definitely never left home without it and always



Roger Morton, president of Oahu Transit System for the past 10 years, briefs the Pacific Century Fellows on the latest with the city's TheBus and Handi-Van services. The author is at left **PHOTO FROM THEBUS AND HANDI-VAN**

would thank Mayor Fasi for it whenever he saw him!

TheBus continues to be operated by Oahu Transit Services, a nonprofit corporation that is an instrumentality of the City and County of Honolulu and an independent contractor for labor purposes, i.e., its employees are not government employees but members of the Teamsters Union Local 996. Given the importance of this essential, need-to-have city operation, I had no problem with our administration prioritizing its needs through the

Department of Transportation Services whenever OTS held contractual discussions and negotiations with the Teamsters.

TheBus's size and scope are remarkable: It has \$400 million in assets. Its annual budget, not including the Handi-Van, is \$200 million a year. It has 13 transit centers and park-and-rides, 4,000 bus stops and 1,500 employees. And with respect to the physically challenged and our kupuna, the Handi-Van is a critically important service for that segment of our population. I also am quite cognizant, from

a visitor-industry perspective, that 15 percent of Oahu bus riders are tourists from all over the world.

Even casual riders of TheBus must have noticed the many technological advancements introduced in recent years. Among them is the adoption of GPS to locate buses and announce bus stops. A new electronic fare system for TheBus is being developed, which will bring to fruition a "smart card," an idea I had encouraged when I was mayor in anticipation of the day when the bus and rail will be would be part of an integrated multimodal system.

Which brings me to the City and County of Honolulu's next big transportation objective: rail. It has always been the city's intention to fully integrate the bus and rail operations into a seamless system with a single fare. Rail will ferry commuters and other passengers between major points from Kapolei to Ala Moana Center. Buses, meanwhile, will deliver riders from other points to the transit centers, and take rail riders to

their destinations elsewhere. Taxis and other forms of public transportation will complement the bus service, much as you'll find in other major cities around the world.

With TheBus's enviable record as the 20th most-utilized system in America, the fifth highest per capital ridership and two-time winner of American Public Transit Association's Best Transit System Award, we are very fortunate that Honolulu has a transportation system that is second-to-none when compared to other cities!

It's always welcome news when an island institution earns recognition on the national or international stage. That certainly holds true for Lex Brodie's Tire, Brake & Service Company, which was honored as the No. 1 Top Shop in North America at the 2016 Tire Industry Awards Ceremony held in October in Las Vegas.

Lex Brodie's, which has been in operation for more than half a century, was selected as

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## Lex Brodie's, Election Musings

the Best of the Best in North America from more than 150 entries. Based in Honolulu with five locations, the company has been widely recognized for its commitment to the community and exceptional level of customer service, building on a foundation established by legendary founder Lex Brodie.

This award was not the first industry recognition for this island institution: The company was a finalist for the Top Shop award in 2008 and 2013. It also received the International BBB Award for Excellence in Customer Care in 2011, was a two-time Hawaii Torch Award winner for trust and ethics in business in 1994 and 2010, received a Tire Business Humanitarian Award in 2011, and has been voted "Hawaii's Best for Tires and Auto Service and Repair" for eight consecutive years.

This recognition validates all our efforts to work to become the best in class," said Brodie's CEO and president David Sands. "We'll use this award as a springboard to continue to improve and innovate. We also hope this will show our customers and potential customers that what we are doing on Oahu is considered the best nationally — thus, no reason to go elsewhere!"

In the inimitable words of founder Lex Brodie, "Thank you ... very much."

In the aftermath of our recent election for the highest office in the land, I couldn't agree more with the observation and assessment of my former professor of American government at Harvard and White House Fellow alumna Doris Kearns Goodwin, who praised President Obama, President-elect Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton for their poi-

gnant and sensitive speeches on the need for our country to set aside its differences and unite as Americans. Having been on both sides of a political campaign, this much I know: You win with grace and you lose with dignity. For the sake of our people, the sooner we set aside our differences, come together and focus on addressing our problems rather than simply engaging in the blame game, the better off we're going to be as a nation.

Finally, on the marquee race locally for Honolulu mayor, Kirk Caldwell was rewarded with a second term in a close contest that surprisingly never had a televised debate in the general.

What is more amazing is that in the most important and challenging project facing the city, neither Caldwell nor challenger Charles Djou ever convincingly articulated a realistic strategy and timetable on how they plan to deal with the financial shortfall of getting rail to Ala Moana.

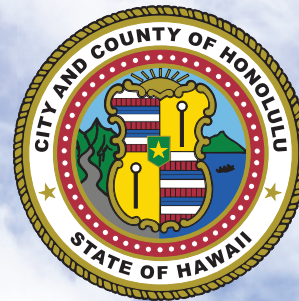
I always have maintained that whether it's rail or anything else, the buck stops on the mayor's desk. The mayor needs to get out in front and lead boldly with the City Council. There are key lawmakers at the state Capitol who remain skeptical of the city's ability to deliver because of previous and current responses they say "lack clarity and substance."

So let's begin with this nagging question that has never been answered in a straightforward and consistent way before rail is built to Middle Street: When and what will it take for the system to be operational to Aloha Stadium?

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# Mahalo



The **Honolulu City Charter Commission** thanks all those who took time to review the 20 proposed charter amendments and voted in the General Election. Your efforts will help the City & County of Honolulu work at its best into the future.

To find out the outcomes and next steps, please visit:  
**[www.honoluluchartercommission.org](http://www.honoluluchartercommission.org)**

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