

State to Dictate a Costly Transit Future

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By Clint Churchill and Ed MacNaughton

Just what Hawaii's beleaguered residents need: a state transportation plan which will be hugely costly, damaging to Hawaii's economy, and which lessens transportation choices -- all in the name of reducing carbon dioxide (CO2) emissions. Here's the background.

In 2018 and 2023, the Legislature passed laws setting targets to achieve "net zero" CO2 emissions from ground, air, and sea transportation in Hawaii by 2045. There was no plan, no cost estimates, nor determination of feasibility.

In 2022, Oregon-based and Hawaii-based lawfare entities filed a lawsuit ("Navahine vs. HDOT") on behalf of 13 Hawaii youth, alleging that the Hawaii Department of Transportation (HDOT) was making insufficient progress on the net zero target. At the time of the lawsuit, two of the children were ages 10 and 13. Some would say great that the keiki were involved, others would say they were exploited.

In 2024, the State entered into an out-of-court Settlement Agreement with the entities. It turns out that Our Children's Trust has filed similar suits in all 50 states; Hawaii is the only state to have caved in. One observer commented, "This is monumentally undemocratic and elected officials had no business settling this suit. What the state agreed to is ludicrous." Indeed, a Montana judge dismissed a virtually similar lawsuit in that state.

In 2025 and as mandated, the HDOT somehow developed a plan strangely titled "Hawaii Energy Security and Waste Reduction Plan." The plan is 258 pages long, essentially drawing emission reduction line graphs for each transportation sector, making sweeping assumptions/mandates. Examples follow. Remarkably, the plan doesn't quantify the economic costs.

The plan calls for the sale of new cars and trucks to reach 80% electric vehicles (EVs) by 2030 and 100% by 2035. Is this even remotely realistic given the current

status of EV sales (12% of total), no doubt declining without the Federal subsidy? The plan is silent on assuming that residents will voluntarily buy much more expensive EVs, but nowhere near those percentages will be achievable without state mandates. One can only imagine the overwhelming statewide repudiation of such dictates.

For air transportation, the plan calls for converting from Jet-A to costly “sustainable aviation fuel” (SAF) for fueling both inter-island and outbound airliners; fuel would be derived from plants, most likely grown in South America or Indonesia. By 2035, 50% of jet fuel uploads must be SAF, and 100% by 2045. By HDOT’s own admission, SAF currently costs three to five times more than Jet-A; the cost will no doubt be passed on to airline customers. Another cost-of-living blow to Hawaii residents.

For the marine sector, the plan targets cruise ships that self-power when in Hawaii ports and during transit, with an exception for homeported ships. A draft of the plan called for reducing cruise ship calls to Hawaii by 50% by 2030 and 75% by 2035. The final plan projects a 95% reduction in CO2 emissions by 2045, apparently achieved in large part by a de facto ban on cruise ships not powered by LNG. Does it make any sense at all to inflict significant damage to local businesses from a tourism source with low impact?

So where does all of this leave us? In a pickle. Before spending taxpayer dollars for such things as \$300 million for bikeways, the Legislature should hit PAUSE, investigate, and hold hearings. The plan states, “For the emission reduction strategy to be supported by the public, approved, and actually implemented, they must not be so economically extreme that they make Hawaii unaffordable for its residents.” We believe many residents are already there, and implementation of this plan will only worsen the problem.

Yes, we should all work to reduce transportation sector emissions to the maximum extent practical. But the plan clearly exposes the net zero laws to be both impractical and imprudent. Leaving the net zero laws on the books, without amendment, would be a huge disservice to Hawaii’s residents.

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