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The H-3 mistake

The latest Advertiser Hawaii Poll tends to confirm what H-3 opponents have been contending — that there is a shift in public attitudes against the controversial planned freeway to Windward Oahu.

The reversal shows that there are more people — and especially more young ones who would have to live longest with such a mistake — who now oppose the project than there are those who favor it.

THAT HAS to be sobering.

Public policy is not usually made on the basis of opinion polls; nor should it be, although more responsiveness to public opinion seems to be needed now at the State Capitol.

Still, this does seem to be another situation where public opinion has moved ahead of the politicians and policy makers stuck with old ideas nobody would propose today.

That's all the more impressive because the anti-H-3 forces have suffered several setbacks in recent months — including a Federal court ruling against them, the Legislature's refusal to change its earlier stand for the freeway, and Governor Ariyoshi's statements that it is "a dead issue" as far as him changing his stand favoring the project.

HOPES OF stopping H-3 construction now seem to center on these possibilities:

- The State Board of Land and Natural Resources could turn down the State Transportation Department's request for a special permit to cut H-3 through 10 miles of conservation land in three valleys (Ha-lawa, Moanalua, Haiku) on both sides of the Koolau Mountains.

- Wisely the board refused a quickie request to act on Kauai last week and deferred action until this month on Oahu.

- A successful appeal of the Federal court ruling remains a possibility, although that is uncertain.

- Ariyoshi's Administration could show more enlightenment and decide, after reconsideration of new as well as old factors, that Oahu's long-range transportation needs are better served by other alternatives.

All of the Federal money involved need not be lost. Some, perhaps most, of it could be transferred to help build the planned rapid transit system faster and longer and to get started on a better mass transit system for Windward Oahu.

THE BASIC points against H-3 remain both simple and telling:

It would be mostly a monument to bureaucratic momentum, a 10-year-old idea whose time has passed. At best it is a short-term and short-sighted construction project being pushed by that industry, labor allies, and some politicians who respond like Pavlov's dog to such lobbying pressure.

Any relief on traffic pressures may soon be overcome by more urban sprawl marring and crowding down the coast of Windward Oahu. In the process, Moanalua Valley, a nature park of vast recreational potential as the last such undeveloped area in the central Honolulu area, would be cut and scarred by six lanes of concrete, noise and pollution.

There is the added irony that the H-3 proposal now conflicts with both the Ariyoshi Administration's proclaimed "slowed growth" concept for Oahu and the City's master plan ideas for keeping most growth on the Honolulu side of the Pali.

ALL THAT SAID, it must be added the odds still favor H-3 being built. That's not for good reason, however. It's because of outdated policy, pressure politics and the fact public opinion is still not strong enough to reach those in power.

Unless there is a change somehow in that equation, H-3 will soon be a mistake whose time has come.

Portugal's revealing vote

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