

Kaua'i Bus Status Report
May 7, 2017

Background

[The Kauai Multimodal Land Transportation Plan](#) (MLTP) was approved by the County Council in 2013. Covering all modes of land transportation (automobile, transit, biking and walking), it provides a blueprint for creating a sustainable land transportation system by 2035. It is the only sustainable land transportation plan in the state.

Presently, over 90% of all trips are by automobile. To create a more sustainable land transportation system, we need to shift from the more environmentally harmful mode (automobiles) to the more environmentally friendly modes: bus, biking and walking. In the MLTP, our goal is to increase transit trips by 900 percent, more than double walking trips and more than triple bike trips. Car lovers will be happy to hear that car trips will still be the predominant mode at 77% of all trips, but for those who like to walk, bike or ride the bus, there will be more and safer options as we implement the MLTP.

Implementing the MLTP will enable us to make great strides on major goals: lowering fossil fuel use and greenhouse gas emissions, increasing physical activity of our residents, lowering the cost of living, taking cars off the road (i.e. less congestion) and making our roads safer. See MLTP Executive Summary, p. ES2.

Expanding Bus Services

Expansion of Kaua'i Bus services is a central component of the MLTP. Since 2013, expansion has happened primarily in the much needed area of bus shelter infrastructure. Thanks to the Transportation Agency, Public Works, the Mayor, the County Council and many community partners, 23 bus shelters have been erected at key bus stops across the island. Thanks to Kaua'i's state legislative team, another 22 shelters will be built by early 2018.

A Short Range Transit Plan and a shuttle study for shuttle services on the South Shore, North Shore and Kapaa-Wailua are being conducted and should be completed by this year. This should give us the basis for implementing shuttles in the three visitor areas and help us improve our paratransit system.

The greatest lag in implementing the MLTP has been our failure to increase the frequency of Kauai Bus services. If we could increase the frequency of mainline services during weekdays to every ½ hour, many more people would be able to use the bus, and ridership would increase. (When we expanded services in 2011, ridership skyrocketed evidencing a pent-up demand. At this point, It is not necessary to convince people to ride the bus. All we need to do is increase services to meet the latent demand).

Increasing mainline bus frequency requires more busses, and that means we must have additional baseyard space because the current one is at capacity.. We will also need a sustained and recurring source of revenues. In 2011, when we extended mainline service from 6 p.m. to 10 p.m. and provided weekend and holiday service, it cost the County an additional \$1,000,000 per year.

Paying for Expansion

It has been clear to me for quite a while that expanding Kaua'i Bus services will require a new source of revenues. That's why in 2015, I lobbied at the State Legislature and helped to secure for neighbor island counties the option of a ½ per cent excise tax surcharge earmarked for public transportation. Unfortunately, when the bill to exercise the option came before the Council in 2016, it failed by one vote (Chock, Kaneshiro and Yukimura voting for, and Hooser, Kagawa, Kualii and Rapozo voting against), and the option expired shortly thereafter on July 1, 2016.

I lobbied this year to have the option reinstated. It is part of SB 1183 which was stalled in a deadlock over rail financing when the Legislature recently adjourned. If said bill does not pass in a specially convened session of the Legislature this year, I will lobby for it again next year.

Some have argued that an excise tax surcharge is not appropriate because it is a regressive tax that hurts lower and moderate income families the most. It is true that the excise tax is a regressive tax. However, when the tax revenues are spent on transit, the negative impacts are alleviated because the bus serves and supports those very groups more than any other group by giving them affordable access to jobs, food, school, doctors and other necessities of life, while achieving many goals for the community at large.

The Expansion that is Possible Now

In talking with bus riders, it seems that the greatest need for increased bus services right now is more frequent services on weekends and extending that weekend service beyond 4:30 p.m. For example, workers at Wilcox Hospital and Garden Isle Healthcare have told me how increased weekend service would allow them to work on weekends. Managers of visitor facilities have said that in this time of full employment when it is so difficult to find employees, more frequent bus service on weekends would make workers more available for weekend shifts. It is clear that the Kauai Bus provides important support for a well functioning economy, affecting the health care and visitor industries, employers as well as employees.

The good news is that the most needed expansion is possible right now. I will be proposing an increase in Saturday services by adding four runs at 5:30 a.m., 6:30 p.m., 8:30 p.m. and 9:30 p.m. We won't need extra buses because the buses used on weekdays will suffice. It will cost \$300,000 more per year. During budget decision-making which will begin on May 11, 2017, I will be proposing where we can get that money.