

BILL054(25)
Testimony

MISC. COMM. 482

*BUDGET (BUD)

***BUDGET (BUD) Meeting**

Meeting Date: Sep 23, 2025 @ 09:00 AM

Support: 0

Oppose: 8

I wish to comment: 1

Name: Micah Munekata	Email: mmunekata@ulupono.com	Zip: 96813
Representing: Ulupono Initiative	Position: I wish to comment	Submitted: Sep 19, 2025 @ 08:22 AM
Name: Abbey Seitz	Email: abbey@hiappleseed.org	Zip: 96816
Representing: Hawaii Appleseed Center for Law and Economic Justice	Position: Oppose	Submitted: Sep 19, 2025 @ 09:51 AM
Name: Bryan Mick	Email: bryan.mick@doh.hawaii.gov	Zip: 96813
Representing: Disability and Communication Access Board	Position: Oppose	Submitted: Sep 19, 2025 @ 04:11 PM
Name: Cheryl Burghardt	Email: burgharc@gmail.com	Zip: 96817
Representing: Self	Position: Oppose	Submitted: Sep 19, 2025 @ 07:22 PM
Testimony: Mahalo for reading this testimony. I am in OPPOSITION of Bill 54 and any attempts to raise the fares on public transport. Budgets are challenging. Finding monies for all the "important" areas almost impossible. As a retired person, living downtown, the Bus makes my life so much easier. In fact, I hope that I will be able to use the Skyline when it eventually reaches town. Raising the fees, to me, is the easy way out. What other paths have you researched. The people who most need the transportation are the ones who will feel the weight of increased fees. There have to be other options rather than raising fees. Have you looked at what other cities do in places other than the US continent? In Montreal, for example, people who live within city limits have certain privileges for transport. This helps everyone by using public transport and less cars. Some cities have special tickets/cards for visitors to use which are a bit higher for the convenience.. Has anyone looked at data to see if there is a difference now with the Holoholo card and the previous method. Has anyone looked into military use of public transportation? With the Skyline going right by them in Pearl City and to Middle Street soon, it seems that they should be encouraged to ride which also takes vehicles off the streets. Have we tried corporate commuter benefits, increasing parking costs (yes, they are already high) to encourage ridership? Lastly, I am not advocating for getting more \$\$ from the Feds. or anyone. There are however other ways to find monies without putting the burden of payment on the people who need the transport the most. TAKE some time to dig deeper and find a solution that works for our place. Again I OPPOSE bill 54 and raising fees.		
Name: Jonathan Huynh	Email: jhweather123@yahoo.com	Zip: 96792
Representing:	Position:	Submitted:

Self	Oppose	Sep 21, 2025 @ 08:00 AM
Testimony: As a daily user of The Bus and Skyline, I urge you to oppose Bill 54. Raising public transit fares is counterproductive because it harms low-income residents, reduces ridership, increases traffic and pollution, and accounts for a very small increase in revenue while disproportionately harming society. Raising fares creates financial hardship for low-income riders. Individuals and families with low incomes rely on affordable public transit to access jobs, healthcare, and other vital services. Fare hikes act as a regressive tax, placing a heavier financial burden on those who can least afford it. Raising fares widens existing inequities. Historically, a lack of investment and accessibility in transportation has disproportionately harmed low-income communities. Fare hikes reinforce these existing inequalities, creating new barriers to economic opportunity. When transit becomes unaffordable, it can lead to social exclusion, isolating people from employment and social and cultural activities. In Hawaii, this may push more locals and Native Hawaiians to the mainland, thus accelerating the migration of natives out of Hawaii. Raising fares leads to decreased ridership and negative economic consequences. When fares increase, transit use declines as people seek cheaper alternatives or stop taking trips altogether. This can trigger a downward spiral of service cuts and further ridership loss. Any increase in revenue would account for a small percentage of the budget while having outsized impacts on those who use public transit. Raising fares undermines broader economic growth. A thriving public transit system contributes to economic growth by connecting people to jobs and businesses. Higher fares restrict this access, stifling economic opportunity. Raising fares contributes to traffic congestion. By pushing people away from public transit, fare hikes will cause more people to drive. Increased driving results in more traffic, which decreases quality of life and increases cost of living. Raising fares increases pollution. Higher fares incentivize the use of personal vehicles, leading to more carbon emissions and pollution. This undermines environmental goals and has public health costs. Raising fares encourages less active lifestyles. Lower fares have been shown to encourage more walking, but higher fares do the opposite, deterring short trips that might otherwise be made by foot or bus. The short-term, perceived gains from the projected small boost in revenue will be substantially offset by the negative, far-reaching, short- and long-term consequences listed above. It is for these reasons that I oppose Bill 54 and urge you to reject Bill 54. Mahalo for your time.		
Name:	Email:	Zip:

Donald Sakamoto	cylonone@aol.com	96744
Representing: Self	Position: Oppose	Submitted: Sep 22, 2025 @ 08:34 AM
Testimony: Oral testimony via video conference only.		
Name: Ross Isokane	Email: isokane@gmail.com	Zip: 96813
Representing: Self	Position: Oppose	Submitted: Sep 22, 2025 @ 09:25 AM
Testimony: I'm a member of the Downtown-Chinatown Neighborhood Board (submitting as an individual) who advocates strongly for improving/maintaining public transportation. I oppose the DTS fare increases. Public transportation is an essential public service that benefits everyone in public as a whole (regardless of whether or not they use TheBus). While there are many benefits to promoting public transportation, the two that are most notable for me is to relieve O'ahu's terrible congestion and to mitigate harms to the environment done by vehicle emissions (especially when there's just a single driver/rider). Our O'ahu Metropolitan Planning Organization continuously promotes a goal of increased ridership. To meet this goal, public transportation must be heavily subsidized and the service must be convenient and reliable to enhance the commuter experience and incentivize more people to become regular riders. Using fares for monthly passes as an illustrative example: + In 2018, the monthly fee increased from \$60 to \$70 + In 2022, the monthly fee increased from \$70 to \$80 + In 2025, the DTS proposal increases the monthly fee from \$80 to \$90 If the DTS proposal is approved by the City Council, these new fares will reflect a 50% increase from pre-2018 fares and a near-30% increase from pre-2022 fares. I understand operating costs for TheBus must be rising (just like cost of living has been for residents), but if we agree with the goals set forth in the O'ahu Metropolitan Planning Organization, then we should all be willing to allocate more of our general fund budget to help offset (i.e., subsidize) operating costs of TheBus. In my opinion, this is what forward-looking metropolitans need to do. To emphasize, for the benefit of O'ahu's future, public transportation is a critical piece. I believe our north star (i.e., our guiding principle above all other factors) should be the quality of the commuter experience. Let's have a "Rider-First		

Mentality"		
Name: ERIC CHANG	Email: ERICCHANG1945@GMAIL.COM	Zip: 96813
Representing: Self	Position: Oppose	Submitted: Sep 22, 2025 @ 10:16 AM
Testimony: STRONGLY OPPOSE Hello All, It is shameful the City keeps increasing bus fares. A certain segment of the population uses the bus and often times these are younger individuals, people with disabilities or unable to drive, elderly, and/or people for whom public transportation is needed. Look at all the money wasted on the Rail. I am certain none of you guys [City Council] ride the Bus. DO NOT INCREASE BUS FARES. THERE IS OTHER WAYS TO RAISE MONEY		
Name: Chachie Abara	Email: macristina.abara@gmail.com	Zip: 96706
Representing: Self	Position: Oppose	Submitted: Sep 23, 2025 @ 07:56 AM
Testimony: Aloha kakou, I'm writing to express my strong concern and opposition to Bill 54, which proposes fare hikes for public transit, including increases in cash fares, monthly passes, and annual passes. As a young professional who depends on public transit to get to and from work every day, I feel these proposed increases will unfairly impact people like me—people who are already struggling to make ends meet. Public transit is essential to so many of us. It's how we get to work, take care of our families, and live our lives. For people like me who don't have access to a car, the bus or train is the lifeline that connects us to everything we need. Raising fares, even by a small amount, may not seem like much to some, but for someone who's barely getting by, those extra dollars add up quickly. The increase in monthly passes and single fares may seem like just a few cents or dollars, but to those of us already budgeting every penny, it makes a real difference.		

I understand the desire to encourage people to switch to Holo cards, but not everyone has that option. Many people, especially low-income families, don't have access to the technology or financial means to make that transition. It feels wrong to penalize those who rely on cash just to get by. And, while it's great that youth fares are being reduced, many young people—especially students—are already under financial pressure. An increase in fares just makes it harder for them to access the opportunities they need.

Instead of burdening those who can least afford it, I believe we need to find ways to make public transit more accessible, not less. There are other ways to fund our transit system, such as looking into taxing the wealthiest individuals or large corporations who are benefiting from the very infrastructure that many of us depend on. The city needs to invest in its people, especially those who are already struggling to make ends meet.

Public transportation should be something that brings us together, not divides us. I truly hope the council will consider the impact these fare hikes will have on everyday people, and rethink the decision to increase fares. I believe we can find a better solution that keeps transit affordable for everyone.

Thank you for your time and for listening to my concerns.



Email: communications@ulupono.com

HONOLULU CITY COUNCIL COMMITTEE ON BUDGET
Tuesday, September 23, 2025 — 9:00 A.M.

Ulupono Initiative offers comments on Bill 54 (25), Relating to Public Transit

Dear Chair Okimoto and Members of the Committee:

My name is Micah Munekata, and I am the Director of Government Affairs at Ulupono Initiative. We are a Hawai'i-focused impact investment firm that strives to improve the quality of life throughout the islands by helping our communities become more resilient and self-sufficient through locally produced food, renewable energy and clean transportation choices, and better management of freshwater resources.

Ulupono offers comments on Bill 54(25), which updates and amends certain sections of Chapter 15B, Revised Ordinances of Honolulu 2021, as they pertain to the fare structure of O'ahu's Multimodal Municipal Transportation System.

Ulupono respectfully requests the Committee to reconsider the proposed fare increases for public transit services. Increasing fares may likely offset ridership gains forthcoming from the opening of Phase 2 of Skyline (both new stations and expanded hours) and increased bus service.

Past reports suggest for every 10% increase in fare, The Bus generally sees [a 3% decline in ridership](#).¹ Absent updated analysis, we remain concerned that, although this aims to simplify the fare structure (one fare policy goal) and address rising costs, it may not support another important fare policy goal of increasing ridership. This could undermine both revenue goals and the broader objectives of expanded public transportation access. It is possible that some of these issues have been explored more recently since the Rate Commission's deliberations, but it is unclear if those have been shared more broadly or could be addressed during this bill's deliberation.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Respectfully,
Micah Munekata
Director, Government Affairs

¹<https://www.civilbeat.org/2022/02/honolulus-plan-to-raise-bus-fares-will-hurt-riders/>



Testimony for Hawai'i Appleseed Center for Law and Economic Justice
Opposition for Bill 54
Honolulu City Council – Committee on Budget
Tuesday, September 23rd at 9:00AM

Aloha Chair Okimoto and Vice Chair Nishimoto,

Mahalo for the opportunity to express **OPPOSITION** to Bill 54, which proposes to raise fares for TheBus and TheHandi-Van riders. Hawai'i Appleseed strongly opposes this measure because it will disproportionately harm low-income families, kūpuna, people with disabilities, and other residents who rely most heavily on public transit.

At a time when our community is already struggling with Hawai'i's high cost of living, raising transit fares will only deepen inequities. If Bill 54 is adopted, families of four on O'ahu (assuming two adults and two youth) will pay \$2,970 in annual transit passes—nearly 29 percent more than 2021 costs. According to national studies, more than half of bus riders live in households earning under \$50,000 a year, and nearly one-third live in households under \$25,000.¹ For these riders, even modest fare increases can mean tough tradeoffs between paying for groceries, rent, or getting to work.

Transit fare hikes don't just hurt individuals—they undermine our city's economic and climate goals. Affordable and reliable public transportation is a lifeline that connects residents to jobs, education, health care, and opportunity. Making transit more expensive will reduce ridership, increase reliance on cars, and add to traffic and carbon emissions.

For example, in 2019, former DTS Director Wes Frysztacki informed the Honolulu Rate Commission that for every 10 percent increase in fare, there is a 3 percent decline in ridership.² Nevertheless, Honolulu's TheBus has increased its fares twice within the last five years, which has likely contributed to its slow post-COVID ridership recovery. The steady increases in transit fares continues a long and unfortunate legacy of regressive taxes that hurt low-income residents the most.

¹ Clark, Hugh, "Who Rides Public Transportation: Passenger Demographics and Travel," American Public Transportation Association, January 2017.
<https://www.apta.com/wp-content/uploads/Resources/resources/reportsandpublications/Documents/APTA-Who-Rides-Public-Transportation-2017.pdf>.

² Honore, Marcel, "Honolulu Traffic Is Terrible. So Why Aren't More People Riding TheBus?" Honolulu Civil Beat, November 18, 2019.
<https://www.civilbeat.org/2019/11/honolulu-traffic-is-terrible-so-why-arent-more-people-riding-thebus/>.

In summary, Hawai'i Appleseed urges the Council to reject Bill 54. Public transportation should be treated as an essential public good, not a luxury. Protecting affordable fares is key to ensuring that all O'ahu residents—especially those with the fewest resources—can continue to rely on transit to meet their daily needs.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Abbey Seitz". The script is cursive and fluid, with the first letters of "Abbey" and "Seitz" being capitalized and prominent.

Abbey Seitz

Hawai'i Appleseed Center for Law and Economic Justice
Director of Transportation Equity



DISABILITY AND COMMUNICATION ACCESS BOARD

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September 23, 2025

The Honorable Val Okimoto
Chairperson, Committee on Budget
and Members of the Committee on Budget
Honolulu City Council
530 South King Street, Room 100
Honolulu, HI 96813

Regarding: Bill 54 (2025) CD1 – Relating to Public Transit

Dear Chair Okimoto and Members of the Honolulu City Council Committee on Budget:

The Disability and Communication Access Board (DCAB) opposes Bill 54 (2025) CD1.

Bill 54 (2025) CD1 eliminates the fare structure table categories of “Medicare Cardholder (Hawaii Resident)” and “Medicare Cardholder (Non-Hawaii Resident).” It establishes a new fare structure table category of “Reduced Fare” but does not list Medicare Cardholders as eligible for this category.

Bill 54 (2025) CD1 also eliminates the existing fare structure table category of “Personal Care Attendant (PCA)” which sets the fare at zero on TheBus or Skyline when a person is serving as a PCA for a rider with a disability. Bill 54 (2025) CD1 retains the existing ordinance “15B-2.1 (k) A personal care attendant accompanying a paratransit eligibility ID holder may not pay a fare when performing the service.” DCAB recommends all persons with a disability should have their PCA’s fare waived, not just those who are a paratransit eligibility ID holder.

Note that there is a Summary of Proposed Committee Draft, Bill 54 (2025), CD1 Relating to Public Transit attached to the Honolulu City Council Proposed Bill 54 (2025) CD2 which would restore Medicare Card holders to the reduced fare eligibility list however it eliminates the fare waiver for PCAs on TheBus or Skyline. The cost for a person with a disability with their PCA who ride TheBus or Skyline will be more expensive ($\$1.75 + \$3.25 = \$5.00$) versus riding the HandiVan ($\$2.50 + \$0.00 = \$2.50$).

The 2017 Department of Transportation Services (DTS) Paratransit Growth Management Study stated that providing a financial incentive to use fixed route instead of paratransit is a key component of demand management strategies.

DCAB supports the 2017 Department of Transportation Services (DTS) Paratransit Growth Management Study findings to reduce the demand on the paratransit system, and therefore opposes the Proposed Bill 54 (2025) CD2.

DCAB urges the Council to amend Bill 54 (2025) CD1 to read:

§ 15B-2.1 Fare structure.

The reduced fare is available to senior citizens, persons with a disability, paratransit eligibility ID holders, Medicare Cardholders, and individuals with extremely low incomes; provided that the discounted fare for the monthly pass and annual pass is limited to persons eligible for a reduced fare who are also residents of Hawaii.

- (k) A personal care attendant accompanying a [~~paratransit eligibility ID holder~~] person with a disability may not pay a fare when performing the service.

Thank you for considering our comments.

Sincerely,



for
KIRBY L. SHAW
Executive Director