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Honolulu City Council OKs HART rail planning to UH Manoa

By [Ian Bauer](#)

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“We cannot even start to plan what is the best route to go from Ala Moana to (UH) without the authorization from City Council, or even further west, or even into Waikiki. Once we have the authorization, and the funding, then we can at least start to look at the proper route, but right now we don’t have that.”

Lori Kahikina

Executive director and CEO, Honolulu Authority for Rapid Transportation

A planning effort for the more than \$10 billion Skyline to go to the University of Hawaii at Manoa rolled forward Wednesday.

The Honolulu City Council voted 8-1, with Council member Augie Tulba dissenting, to finalize adoption of Bill 60, which authorizes the Honolulu Authority for Rapid Transportation to conduct preliminary engineering plans to construct the city's rail line to branch beyond its current terminus in Kakaako, on to UH Manoa's campus as well as to locations near the Leeward Coast.

Bill 60's work for HART includes an extension of the Skyline's fixed guideway system that adheres to the "locally preferred alternative" or LPA — rail's previously planned route that roughly ran between West Kapolei and UH Manoa, with an extension to Waikiki.

The measure also requires planning that could add extensions to the "minimum operable segment," or MOS, along the current planned route from East Kapolei to Ala Moana.

Skyline's construction project features 19 stations along an 18.9-mile corridor. The first 13 stations, from East Kapolei to Middle Street, are operational and have been transferred to the city Department of Transportation Services for passenger service.

Skyline's Segment 3 project — a \$1.66 billion design- build contract with Los Angeles-based Tutor Perini Corp.— is under construction from Middle Street's Kalihi Transit Center to the planned Civic Center Station in Kakaako.

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HART is expected to complete its third phase by 2030.

Before the Council's vote though, Tulba questioned HART Executive Director and CEO Lori Kahikina on whether Bill 60 "authorized funds" for planning and engineering costs. "And is there an estimated cost?" he asked.

Kahikina replied that an adopted Bill 60 authorizes HART to "use funds to get to University of Hawaii or further into Kapolei."

"Currently, there are no additional funds to go there," she added. "If we do obtain additional funds we need the authorization first before we can even spend funds to go beyond."

Tulba then asked, "So in terms of trust and transparency, do you believe this is in the best interest of the public to pass this bill today?"

"Yes, I do," Kahikina replied. "As far as transparency...we need the authorization from (the) City Council; HART does not have the authorization to just go off wherever it wants to."

“We cannot even start to plan what is the best route to go from Ala Moana to (UH) without the authorization from City Council, or even further west, or even into Waikiki,” she said. “Once we have the authorization, and the funding, then we can at least start to look at the proper route, but right now we don’t have that.”

Tulba also asked how Bill 60 would affect rail construction’s current funding.

“The funds that we have right now only takes us ... to 2030,” Kahikina replied. “All of those funds are obligated towards Civic Center.”

She noted that if there are extra funds “we already have authorization to get to Ala Moana, but right now we cannot go beyond that.”

Still, Tulba said he’d vote ‘no’ on Bill 60 due to his lack of confidence in the oversight and accountability over funding to extend Skyline any farther.

“We are talking about a lot of taxpayer money ... paid for by our residents and small businesses,” he added. “With that level of public investment I believe it’s important for this body to review each phase carefully, and provide opportunities for community input.”

Later, Council member Radiant Cordero, who co- sponsored Bill 60, said the measure would still allow the Council to have authority and oversight over the rail as a whole. “And we are not writing a blank check,” she asserted.

Council Vice Chair Andria Tupola — whose Council District 1 includes Kapolei — also asked about the possibility of continuing Skyline farther west, from its East Kapolei Station to the Ka Makana Ali’i shopping mall at 91-5431 Kapolei Parkway, just over a mile away.

Tupola queried if there were any potential partnership opportunities for future segments, which don’t rely on the city “fully operating” Skyline’s new rail extensions.

Saying DTS would still “own and operate” future Skyline segments, Kahikina divulged that HART has had “unsolicited” talks with the state Department of Hawaiian Home Lands. And “they would love for us to go to Ka Makana Ali’i,” she added.

“They even have the property set,” Kahikina said. “But again, we still need to vet that out; is that the proper location?”

In 2014, **DHHL** launched development plans of the 1.4 million-square-foot regional mall, which included a 65-year lease meant to generate more than \$200 million in rent revenue. Those funds, according to **DHHL**, were to support the construction of thousands of new homes for Hawaiian homesteaders, as well as programs benefiting Native Hawaiian interests statewide.

Kahikina said **DHHL** also has “grand plans of interconnecting with the historic rail, and ... they have their own (transit-oriented development) future plans that

they want to discuss.”

“But they want rail to come in right over” to the mall, she said. “But we would have to look at all funding options ... any private investments, we have to look at everything.”

Calling the station-to-mall segment a “doable option,” Tupola replied, “I don’t think we’re going to make it without some very savvy partnerships.”

During public comment, Unite Here Local 5, which represents members of the hotel, health care and food service workers union, backed Bill 60.

“Local 5 is a big believer in public transit,” union representative, Joli Tokusato said, “and we really believe that rail should go to UH. It’s that simple.”

The Oahu Metropolitan Planning Organization, the federally designated group responsible for carrying out a multimodal transportation planning process on the island, also supported Bill 60.

In written testimony, the group, also called OahuMPO, asserted there are three proposed fixed guideway extensions to the existing Skyline, submitted by HART, for inclusion in the 2050 Oahu Regional Transportation Plan, for future funding for design and construction phases.

The three planned extensions include the Civic Center to Ala Moana extension; the East Kapolei to West Kapolei segment; and the Ala Moana to UH Manoa and Waikiki segment, the group said.

“Apart from the Civic Center to Ala Moana extension, the other two extensions have not had any significant planning work conducted to prepare the projects for design and construction,” OahuMPO stated. “For the projects to be ready for design and construction funding, planning and preliminary engineering needs to occur as soon as possible.”

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60 COMMENTS

