

Council rejects proposed bus, van hikes

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**Council chairman
Martin says he will
work on gradual
fare increases**

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Honolulu City Council members Wednesday shot down a plan by Mayor Kirk Caldwell to raise TheBus and TheHandi-Van fares starting Jan. 1.

Bill 66 was defeated 5-3 with Council members Carol Fukunaga, Ann Kobayashi, Trevor Ozawa and Kymberly Pine joining Council Chairman Ernie Martin in opposing it. Council members Ikaika Anderson, Brandon Elefante and Ron Menor voted "yes"

with reservations.

The measure was up for the first of three readings before the full Council. The Council rarely rejects bills at the initial stage, usually opting instead to have them subject to more detailed discussions at the committee level.

Running into the most opposition were those rate categories for which the administration had recommended the highest increases — annual bus passes for seniors and people with disabilities, which would rise to \$110 annually from \$35 annually (a 214 percent increase), and the single-ride fare for TheHandi-Van which would rise to \$2.50 from \$2 (a 25 percent increase).

Monthly bus passes for se-

niors and those with disabilities would jump to \$10 from \$6, an increase of 67 percent.

Annual and monthly bus passes for adults and youths, as well as single-fare and one-day passes, would have gone up between 9 and 20 percent.

Martin told the Honolulu Star-Advertiser that Council members will work with the Department of Transportation Services and the City Charter-mandated Rate Commission on a plan with more gradual price increases. Earlier this summer, the commission had proposed fare increases that were not as high as those proposed by the administration.

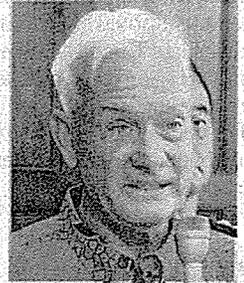
"All of us recognize with regard to TheBus itself, there needs to be some consideration given to raising the

fare," he said. "It's a matter of what's reasonable and how we do it over a period of time as opposed to right up front."

After the meeting, DTS Director Wes Frysztacki said Martin indicated he would introduce his own bill. "We are always open to advising and working with the Council on that," Frysztacki said. "I think we all want to ensure that the fares are adequate so that transportation service can be well maintained for the public."

Martin said he spoke with two members on the commission who told him "they were a little surprised that DTS deviated from what the commission had recommended."

Keslie Hui, Rate Commission vice chairman, told the



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**Kirk
Caldwell:**

The mayor's plan to raise fares for TheBus and TheHandi-Van was voted down

Star-Advertiser last month that he would've preferred it if the plan submitted to the

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Council had been the one the commission had proposed in May.

About a dozen people testified on the bill Wednesday — all of them opposed to it.

Bryan Mick of the state Disability and Communication Access Board said his panel had supported the Rate Commission's final draft, which called for paratransit riders to see a 25-cent increase for a single fare to \$2.25 (rather than the administration's \$2.50) and a separate rate of \$1 a ride for low-income individuals.

Bus rider David Bohn pointed out that the Council had already approved a fare increase for TheBus — to \$2.75 from \$2.50 per ride — that took effect on Jan. 1. "The burden is always falling on those who can least afford it," Bohn said.

Waianae resident and Handi-Van rider Marion Kau, a

retiree, said the proposed increase "is going to be a strain on all of us."

Craig Gima, communications director for AARP Hawaii, said the group is not opposed to fare increases but believes they should be fair and reasonable. "Doubling monthly bus passes for seniors and more than tripling the annual pass for seniors ... is not fair and reasonable," Gima said, adding that those who cannot afford to pay should be given special breaks.

Rate Commissioner Barbara Armentrout said she and her fellow commissioners felt the panel came up with a fair proposal that included allowances for those on Social Security.

Donald Sakamoto, president of Citizens for a Fair Americans With Disabilities Act Ride (CFADAR), also opposed the administration's rate schedule.

In his submittal to the Council last month, Frysztacki said the fare increases were based on leveling out

the increases that went into effect in January to create "consistent relationships between the fare categories."

For instance, he said the proposed cash fares for youth riders are priced at half those of adult riders. When the adult fare went to \$2.75 a ride on Jan. 1 (from \$2.50), the youth fare stayed at \$1.25, thus the reasoning behind a greater percentage fare increase now for the proposed youth cash fare than the proposed adult cash fare increase, he said.

Frysztacki said that without fare increases to TheHandi-Van, the service "will face constraints such as an insufficient number of vans and support facilities to accommodate the growing number of riders."

While TheBus riders pay 27 to 33 percent of the cost of their rides, TheHandi-Van riders pay only about 4 percent on rides that cost an average of \$45. The current \$2 fare is also less than the \$3 average mainland paratransit fare, he said.