Honolulu Rail Transit

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The Honolulu Rail Transit Project (also known as the Honolulu High-Capacity Transit Corridor Project) is an urban rail rapid transit system under construction in Honolulu County, Oahu, Hawaii. The mostly-elevated system features design elements from both heavy rail systems and light metros, with a commuter rail-like design incorporated into trains and suburban stations. It will become the first large-scale publicly run metro system in the United States to feature platform screen doors. The first phase of the project, linking East Kapolei and Aloha Stadium, is scheduled to open in late 2020, while the second phase of the project continuing the line to Ala Moana Center across urban Honolulu is due to open in December 2025.

For more than 40 years, debate over the development of a rail system in Honolulu has been a major point of contention in local politics, especially leading into the 2008, 2012, and 2016 election cycles. Proponents of the system say it will alleviate worsening traffic congestion, already among the worst in the United States. They assert that the urban agglomeration in south Oahu is ideally suited to rail as it is constrained by mountains to a narrow strip along the coast, which has resulted in the fourth highest population density in the US. Rail opponent and freeway advocate Panos Prevedouros has questioned its cost effectiveness compared to alternatives and claims that it will have marginal impact on future congestion and that new roads will therefore still be required.

The project is financed by a surcharge on local taxes as well as a $1.55 billion grant from the Federal Transit Administration (FTA). After major cost overruns, the tax surcharges were extended in 2016 by five years to raise another $1.2 billion; however that additional funding was only sufficient for construction out to Middle Street in Kalihi. The FTA stated that its contribution is contingent to completion of the line all the way to Ala Moana Center and will not be increased. After much wrangling, the state legislature in 2017 approved $2.4 billion in additional taxes to allow the city to complete the project according to the original plan.

Construction of the final 4.3 miles (6.9 km) section through downtown Honolulu, which is expected to be the most difficult to build, has not commenced. The contractor selection process for this section was restarted in September 2017 and is expected to take eighteen months.

The final cost has grown from preliminary projections of $4 billion in 2006 to between $9 billion and $10 billion by 2017. Critics have called for a "forensic audit" to establish the cause of the increase. The tax increase legislation passed in 2017 also requires the State auditor carry out an audit of the project's accounts and to consider alternatives for completing the system.
History [edit]

Plans for a mass transit line to connect Honolulu's urban center with outlying areas began in the 1960s,[19] but funding was not approved until 2005.[20] The controversy over the rail line was the dominant issue for local politics leading into the 2008 Honolulu elections,[21] and culminated in a city charter amendment which left the final decision to the citizens of Oahu.[22] The amendment passed with 53% of voters in favor,[23] and ground broke on project construction on February 22, 2011.[24,25]

Previous projects [edit]

For more than 50 years, Honolulu politicians have attempted to construct a rail transit line.[26] In 1966, then-mayor Neal S. Blaisdell suggested a rail line as a solution to alleviate traffic problems in Honolulu, stating, "Taken in the mass, the automobile is a noxious mechanism whose destiny in workaday urban use is to frustrate man and make dead certain that he approaches his daily occupation unhappy and inefficient."[19]

Frank Fasi was elected to office in 1968, and started planning studies for a rail project,[27] named Honolulu Area Rapid Transit (HART), in 1977.[28] After Fasi lost the 1980 reelection to Eileen Anderson, President Ronald Reagan cut off funding for all upcoming mass transit projects, which led Anderson to cancel HART in 1981.[29,30] Fasi was reelected in 1984, and restarted the HART project in 1986,[31] but the second effort was stopped in a 1992 vote by the Honolulu City Council against the necessary tax increase.[32,33]

Fasi resigned in 1994 to run for governor, with Jeremy Harris winning the special election to replace him. Harris unsuccessfully pursued a bus rapid transit project as an interim solution until he left office in 2004.[34] His successor, Mufi Hannemann, began the Honolulu High-Capacity Transit Corridor Project (HHCTCP), the island's fourth attempt to build a mass transit system operating in a dedicated right-of-way.

Studies [edit]

Honolulu High-Capacity Transit Corridor survey marker in the sidewalk at the corner of Kapiolani Blvd and Keeaumoku Street in Honolulu.

The City and County of Honolulu Department of Transportation Services released the first formal study related to the HHCTCP on November 1, 2006, the Alternatives Analysis Report. The report compared the cost and benefits of a "fixed guideway system", along with three alternatives. The first expanded the existing bus system to match population growth. A second option called for a further expansion to the bus system, with improvements to existing roads. The third alternative proposed a two-lane flyover above the H-1 freeway between Pearl City and Honolulu International Airport, continuing over Nimitz Highway, and into downtown Honolulu. The report
recommended construction of the fixed guideway, and is considered the city's official justification for building a rail line.\[41\]

A second planning document, the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS), studied possible natural and social impacts of the construction and operation of the HHCTCP. The DEIS was completed and cleared for public release by the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) on October 29, 2008. After minor changes were made to comply with state law, the document was distributed via the city's official project website four days later. The DEIS indicated that impacts of the rail project would include land acquisition from private owners on the route, displacement of residents and businesses, aesthetic concerns related to the elevated guideway, and noise from passing trains.\[42\]

The city was criticized for timing the release only two days before the 2008 general election. City Councilmember Ann Kobayashi, running as a mayoral candidate against incumbent Mufi Hannemann, suggested that the city deliberately withheld key information to early voters who had already cast their ballots for the mayoral candidates, and a city charter amendment related to the project.\[43\] The anti-rail advocacy group Stop Rail Now criticized the report for not further discussing bus rapid transit and toll lanes, options studied earlier by the city in its Alternatives Analysis.\[44\]

The third and final official planning document, the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS), was approved and cleared for public release by the FTA on June 14, 2010. The FEIS addresses and incorporates public comments received regarding the DEIS.\[45\] The FTA subsequently declared the environmental review process complete in a record of decision issued on January 18, 2011.\[46\]

Impact on Honolulu mayor elections[edit]

The importance of the Honolulu High-Capacity Transit Corridor Project in the 2008 mayoral election led one observer to describe the vote as a "referendum on rail transit".\[47\] Two challengers emerged as rivals to incumbent Mufi Hannemann: City Councilmember Ann Kobayashi and University of Hawaii professor Panos D. Prevedouros. Kobayashi supported a "rubber-tired" mass transit system, as opposed to the conventional steel-wheel-on-steel-rail system chosen by the Hannemann administration. Prevedouros, on the other hand, opposed any mass transit project, favoring construction of a reversible tollway over the H-1, similar to the Managed Lane option studied in the Alternatives Analysis, and reworking existing road systems to ease congestion.\[48\] No candidate won a majority of votes in the September 20 non-partisan primary, forcing a runoff between Hannemann and Kobayashi;\[49\] Hannemann successfully retained his post with 58% of the vote in the November 4 general election.\[50\]

On April 22, 2008, the Stop Rail Now advocacy group announced their intent to file a petition with the city to place a question on the 2008 ballot to create an ordinance that read: "Honolulu mass transit shall not include trains or rail".\[51\] Stop Rail Now attempted to submit the petition with 49,041 signatures to City Clerk Denise De Costa on August 5, but was initially denied after De Costa claimed the city charter did not allow the petition to be submitted less than 180 days before a general election, as the wording of the petition called for a special election.\[52\] Stop Rail Now filed a lawsuit to force the city to accept the petition, and the courts ruled in Stop Rail Now's favor on August 14.\[53\] Stop Rail Now's petition drive ultimately failed on September 4 when De Costa deemed 35,056 of the signatures valid, short of the 44,525 required.\[54\]

In response to the possibility that Stop Rail Now’s petition would fail, the City Council had however voted on August 21 to place a proposed amendment to the city charter on the ballot, asking voters to decide the fate of the project.\[55\] Mayor Hannemann signed the proposal the following day.\[56\] The City Council's proposed amendment was not intended to have a direct legal effect on the city's ability to continue the project, but was meant as a means for Oahu residents to express their opinions on its construction.\[57\] The charter amendment was approved with 53% of votes cast in favor and 47% against. Majorities of voters in Leeward and Central Oahu, the areas that will be served by the project, voted in favor of the amendment, while the majority of those living outside the project's scope in Windward Oahu and East Honolulu voted against it.\[58\]

In the 2016 Honolulu mayoral elections the main three candidates again took opposing views on rail. Charles Djou, former mayor Peter Carlisle, and incumbent Kirk Caldwell all ran for mayor with the stated goal of finishing rail. However, Republican Djou ran on drastically cutting spending on rail by cutting funding on buying cars on the rail before its completion, and hiring mainland consultants.\[59\] Kirk Caldwell also stated that spending on rail should be cut, but instead by shortening the rail to end at Middle Street.\[60\] Carlisle was the only candidate in full support of funding the rail system and stated that rail has gone too far to be stopped.\[61\] Kirk Caldwell won the election, and promptly went on to adopt Carlisle's position that rail should be completed.
Delays[edit]

Construction on the HHCTCP rail line was originally scheduled to begin in December 2009 but did not occur on that date owing to delays in the project review process, delays in obtaining federal approval of the environmental impact statement. Honolulu mayor Peter Carlisle speaking at the project's groundbreaking ceremony

In January 2010, Republican Governor Linda Lingle publicly recommended that the city alter plans for the rail line after news reports on FTA documents where the federal agency raised issues over declining tax revenues in connection with a global economic recession and commissioned a study by the state to review the project's finances in March. The state financial study, publicly released on December 2, 2010, indicated that the project would likely experience a $1.7 billion overrun above the $5.3 billion projected cost, and that collections from the General Excise Tax would be 30% below forecasts. Then Mayor Peter Carlisle (Democrat) dismissed the study as "damaged goods," and "a pre-determined anti-rail rant." He also pointed to several conclusions as "erroneous" and "inaccurate" before concluding that "spending a third of a million dollars for this shoddy, biased analysis is an appalling waste of our tax dollars." Lingle's Democratic successor, Neil Abercrombie, publicly stated that the financial analysis would not affect his decision to approve or disapprove of the project, saying that the state's responsibility is limited to the environmental review process, and that decisions regarding the project's finances belong to the city and the FTA. Governor Abercrombie subsequently approved the project's final environmental impact statement on December 16, 2010. The Honolulu City Council held a hearing on January 12, 2011 about the state's financial review, but the hearing was not attended by any state officials, who had been invited to testify.

On January 18, 2011, the FTA issued a "record of decision", indicating that the HHCTCP had met the requirements of its environmental review and that the city was allowed to begin construction work on the project. The record of decision allowed the city to begin negotiating with owners of land that will be purchased for the project, to begin relocating utility lines to make way for construction of the line and stations, and to purchase rolling stock for the rail line. A ground-breaking ceremony was held on February 22, 2011 in Kapolei, at the site of the future East Kapolei station along Kualakai Parkway.

In 2014 HART CEO Dan Grabauskas blamed lawsuits, launched in 2011, for some of the cost overruns after bids to construct the first nine stations exceeded the budget by $100 million. However his claims were disputed by the plaintiffs in one of the cases who said HART could have put the stations out to tender and that HART had deliberately delayed the legal proceedings so a judgement would only be delivered after a significant proportion of the line had been completed.

Burial issues[edit]

Like most major infrastructure work in Hawaii, construction of the rail line is likely to uncover historic human remains, notably in its downtown Honolulu section. The Oahu Island Burial Council (part of the State Historic Preservation Division, within the State of Hawaii Department of Land and Natural Resources) refused to sign a programmatic agreement on October 21, 2009, over concerns about likely burial sites located along the line's proposed route over Halekauwila Street in Kaka'ako. Three construction projects in the area since 2002 have each encountered unforeseen human remains that led to delays, and archaeologist Thomas Dye stated, "The council is absolutely right that you should expect to find burials on Halekauwila Street."

The Burial Council's core contention is the city's decision to conduct an archaeological survey of the rail line's route in phases, meaning construction on a majority of the line will be complete by the time the survey in the Kaka'ako area is performed, which in turn increases the likelihood that any remains discovered will be moved instead of being allowed to remain in situ. In response to the Burial Council's concerns, the city agreed to begin conducting an
archaeological survey of the area in 2010, two years earlier than originally planned. The state Department of Land and Natural Resources later signed the city's programmatic agreement on January 15, 2011, over the continuing concerns of the Burial Council.

The city's decision to conduct the archaeological survey in phases subsequently led to a lawsuit filed on February 1, 2011, by the Native Hawaiian Legal Corporation on behalf of cultural practitioner Paulette Kaleikini. The suit, which named both the city and the State of Hawaii as defendants, contended that state law requires the full length of the rail line to have an archaeological survey conducted before any construction takes place, and seeks to void the environmental impact statement and all construction permits issued for the project. Kaleikini's lawyers filed on February 18 a request for an injunction to stop work on the project until the case is resolved. The suit was initially dismissed on March 23, 2011, after Circuit Court Judge Gary Chang ruled that state and federal laws allow the archaeological surveys to be conducted in phases. Kaleikini's lawyers subsequently appealed to the Hawaii Supreme Court, which heard oral arguments in the case on May 24, 2012. The court ruled on August 24, 2012, that it agreed with plaintiff Kaleikini that the archaeological survey needed to be completed before construction could take place, and that the State Historic Preservation Division did not comply with state law when it approved the project. The case has now been remanded to Circuit Court. On December 27, 2012, the United States District Court for the District of Hawaii granted the plaintiffs' injunction, and ordered that all construction-related activities in segment 4 of the archaeological survey be halted until compliance with the Hawaii Supreme Court decision made earlier this year is met. This ruling does not affect construction activities in the first three segments, nor does it affect construction planning, design, or engineering in segment 4, which is the final segment to be built. The Phase 4 area encompasses the downtown area and its immediate environs, including Chinatown, Mother Waldron Park, and Beretania Street. Judge Tashima, the only sitting judge on the case, ruled on condition of the injunction that the city is required to file periodic status updates on their compliance with the judgment. The injunction will then terminate 30 days after defendants file a notice of final compliance. City planners and rail representatives stated that archeological surveys will be completed early in 2013, and that this ruling would have no effect on construction in City Center. Both sides are expected to appeal portions of the ruling that they do not agree with.

Financing

Initial General Excise Tax (GET) surcharge

After winning the 2004 election, Hannemann announced that construction of a rail line was an administration priority. The following May and upon prompting by the city, the Hawaii State Legislature passed a bill (Act 247) to allow counties a one-half percent increase in the Hawaii General Excise Tax (GET), from 4% to 4.5%, to fund transportation projects. According to the bill, increased revenue would be delivered to counties implementing the raised tax to fund general public transportation infrastructure throughout Hawaii, and to pay for mass transit in the case of the City and County of Honolulu. Money collected from the initial 4% GET would remain state revenue. Republican governor Linda Lingle initially threatened to veto the bill, believing that money destined for county governments should be collected by the individual counties. After compromising with legislative leaders and Mayor Hannemann, however, she allowed the bill to become law. On July 12, 2005, the bill was enacted as Act 247

Former Honolulu mayor Mufi Hannemann

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of the Session Laws of Hawaii 2005, without the Governor's signature. A month later, the Honolulu City Council authorized the one-half percent GET increase, and Hannemann signed the measure into law on August 24. Act 247 required Honolulu to use the funds only for the construction and operation of a mass transit system, and barred its use for public roads and other existing transit systems, such as TheBus. Since no other county authorized the excise tax increase before the deadline of December 31, 2005, the Hawaii GET remains at 4% for Hawaii’s three other counties. The increase went into effect on January 1, 2007, and was due to expire on December 31, 2022.

The Legislature considered a bill in the 2009 legislative session that would have redirected income from the half-percent increase back to the state to offset a $1.8 billion projected shortfall in the following three fiscal years. The bill was opposed by Mayor Hannemann and other city leaders who believed that redirecting the money would jeopardize federal funding for the project, and was eventually dropped after U.S. Senator Daniel Inouye indicated to the Legislature that he shared the city's concerns.

GET surcharge extensions and "Hotel Tax" surcharge

In January 2016 the Council extended the GET for another five years to add $1.2 billion in funding to cover a budget blowout. The Council also required that the money raised by the extension go into a contingency fund and to pay for disability access to the system. HART was required to provide quarterly financial reports to the Council.

On 1 September 2017 the Legislature, after meeting for a week in a special session on rail financing, approved further taxes to raise $2.4 trillion for the project. The taxes include a further three year extension to the 0.5 percent General Excise Tax surcharge, which will now expire in 2030, and a thirteen year, 1.0 percent surcharge on the existing 9.25 percent statewide Transient Accommodation Tax (TAT) which is charged to tourists. Efforts to pass a funding bill in May 2017 had failed and the impetus for the special session was a FTA deadline of September 15 for a funding plan to cover the shortfall. The bill also grants the state government oversight over the project including the appointment of two non-voting representatives on the HART board and calls for an audit of HART by the state auditor. It was signed into law by the governor on September 5.

Federal Transit Administration’s request for recovery plan

In mid 2016 the FTA requested that HART develop a "recovery plan" by August 7, 2016. Also in June a separate report by Jacobs Engineering, the project management contractor, said under a worst case scenario the final cost would $10.79 billion.

In January 2017 group called "Salvage the Rail" published a plan, based on Option 2A from six alternatives proposed by the FTA to HART in 2016, that would terminate the elevated section at Middle Street and run at street level to the terminus along a route one block inland from the HART plan. The system would need to be reconfigured to use new driver-operated low floor vehicles, lowering the platforms on the stations already constructed. Proponents say it would save $3 billion and four years of construction, as well as avoid disturbing burial sites under the downtown area.

After a lodgement extension was granted by the FTA, HART submitted its recovery plan in April 2017 which concluded that completion of the original 21 station route was the only viable option. An alternative "Plan B" to build only 14 stations within the already funded $6.5 billion budget was ruled out because of lower ridership, legal risks, insufficient contingency and other reasons. The new project cost was $8.165 billion with media reports indicating that after financing charges are included it could be over $10 billion. An updated schedule for opening said the section from East Kapolei to Aloha Stadium will open at the end of 2020 and operation of the full route by December 2025.

In September 2017 HART submitted an updated recovery plan to the FTA with a new estimate price of $9.02 billion. The plan still includes $8.165 billion in construction costs, but has reduced financing costs of $858 million following state legislation granting both prolonged and new taxes to fund the project. The State Auditor has been tasked to consider alternatives for completing the system, as part of its audit of HART.

Route
The project, as planned, will construct an elevated rapid transit line from the eastern edge of Kapolei, near the University of Hawaii-West Oahu campus, to Ala Moana Center (East of Honolulu downtown). The line will pass through communities along southern Oahu, via Honolulu International Airport and downtown Honolulu. The long term plan includes four currently unfunded extensions: two extensions east, to the University of Hawaii-Manoa campus and to Waikiki, an extension west through Kapolei to Kalaeloa, and a link through Salt Lake.

The rail line will have twenty-one stations and run from Kapolei to Honolulu, passing through Waipahu, Pearl City, Waimalu, Aiea, and Halawa. From the eastern terminus at Ala Moana Shopping Center in Honolulu, the line is proposed to split into two future extensions to the University of Hawaii at Manoa campus and Waikiki. Originally, the line was to fork near Aloha Stadium into two routes, one passing Honolulu International Airport, and the other through Salt Lake, before reuniting at Middle Street in Kalihi. The city council initially decided to build the Salt Lake route before the airport route, as a result of horse-trading with City Councilmember Romy Cachola, whose constituents included Salt Lake residents and whose vote was needed to pass the decision. After the city charter amendment on rail transit passed, the City Council reconsidered the decision, and decided to re-route the rail line to pass by Pearl Harbor and the airport, without a Salt Lake alignment. The airport route is 4% more expensive, but is expected to have significantly higher ridership since it will ferry workers to both the airport and the Pearl Harbor navy base. The trains will operate with up to twenty departures per hour. The Rail will operate from 4am to midnight.

On October 21, 2009, the city announced Kiewit Pacific Co. had won the $483 million contract to build the first two stages of the line, bidding $90 million under the expected price. The stations were tendered separately.

The construction of the rail line started from suburban areas in Kapolei and Ewa, and progresses towards the urban center in Honolulu. There will be 112 columns from East Kapolei to Ewa. The choice to start from Kapolei was made because the first phase must include a baseyard for trains, which is more cheaply built away from the center, and because the city chose to delay to later phases of the project the major infrastructure impacts and unpopular traffic delays that will be associated with construction in the urban center. Future extensions would eventually service the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa, Waikiki, and Kalaeloa.

As of November 2016, the line is scheduled to open in two phases in late 2020 and late 2025:

- Late 2020: East Kapolei – Aloha Stadium
- Late 2025: Aloha Stadium – Ala Moana Center

Rolling stock[edit]
The line will use 128 ft (39 m) trains carrying about 390 passengers each, similar in weight to light rail systems elsewhere in the United States (such as the MAX in Portland, Oregon), as opposed to heavier, and thus more expensive, lines found on rapid transit systems like the subways and elevated systems of Chicago and New York City. However, the stations will be standalone structures and will be substantially bigger than typical light rail stations. Physically, the Honolulu system will have a good deal in common with light rapid transit systems such as SkyTrain in Vancouver, British Columbia or the Copenhagen Metro, as well as the Docklands Light Railway in London. The system will be the first metro system in the United States to feature platform gates.

Rolling stock for the line will initially include 80 cars in 40 two-car consists, built by a joint venture between AnsaldoBreda and Ansaldo STS named Ansaldo Honolulu. (AnsaldoBreda and Ansaldo STS previously collaborated on the construction and operation of vehicles for the Copenhagen Metro and the Brescia Metro). Both companies were later bought by Hitachi. Each car will be 64 ft (20 m) long, weigh 72,000 lb (33,000 kg), and have 36 seats with a listed total capacity of 195 people. The cars will be powered by a third-rail electrification system. The two unsuccessful bidders for the rail car contract, Bombardier Transportation and Sumitomo Corporation of America, filed protests over the award. Both protests were rejected during the administrative process, but Bombardier sought judicial review of their bid protest. The administrative decision against Bombardier's protest was affirmed by both the state Circuit Court and the Intermediate Court of Appeals.

In December 2016 Hitachi Rail Italy reported defects were discovered in the welds in the extruded aluminum beams of twenty-seven car shells, four of which were already in Hawaii. The manufacturer will fix the problems but warned delivery may be delayed as production of new vehicles was halted. In March 2017 HART said they would meet the interim opening needs after repair of the defective cars and that full opening would not be affected.

In May 2017 trains were towed on tracks in Honolulu for the first time, to check clearances. Testing of trains under their own power commenced in October 2017.

### Timeline of progress

- **June 2006** - Officials estimate the infrastructure construction cost at estimated at $3 billion, $200 million more than a previous estimate, for a 24-mile system. This does not include the cost of the trains.
- **January 2007** - The General Excise Tax (GET) within Honolulu County is increased by 0.5% with the extra funds earmarked for a mass transit system. The increase was set to expire on December 31, 2022.
- **February 2007** - The City Council approves the Minimum Operating Segment from East Kapolei to Ala Moana Centre, via Salt Lake Boulevard.
- **October 2008** - The Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) is released to the public. The projected cost is $3.7 billion including $1 billion for contingencies.
- **November 2008** - Fifty three percent of voters support an measures to give the Honolulu City Council authority to proceed with "establishment of a steel wheel on steel rail transit system". The estimated cost is $4 billion.
- **January 2009** - The middle portion of the route between Aloha Stadium and Middle Street is amended to have stations at the Pearly Harbor Navel Base and the Honolulu Airport which had one of the original options. The previous route followed Salt Lake Boulevard.
- **June 2010** - The Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) is released to the public. Estimated cost is $5.5 billion. Patronage by 2030 is projected to be 116,300 riders per day.
- **December 2010** - A report, commissioned by outgoing Governor Lingle, is released which warns the project could cost at least $1.7 billion more than the city’s projected $5.5 billion price tag.
- **May 2012** - Construction workers started pouring concrete on the foundations that will hold the rail columns.
- **December 2012** - Honolulu City Council and the Federal Transit Authority (FTA) sign agreement for the project with a budget of $5.12 billion including $1.55 billion provided by the Federal Government. Full system revenue service is projected for January 31, 2020.
- **September 2014** - HART canceled the initial tender for the first nine stations after the bids were higher than budget. The first trips on the railway is expected to be delayed, probably until 2018.
- **November 2015** - FTA withholds payment of a $250 million allotment until the council could show it had sufficient funding to complete the project.
- **January 2016** - Five year extension to the General Excise Tax surcharge adopted to add $1.2 billion in funding.
May 2016 - HART chairwoman Colleen Hanabusa shared a confidential document detailing budget estimates as of March 1, 2016, showing that the rail project is expected to cost $6.9 billion.\[25\]

April 2016 - An audit of the project by the City criticized HART for using outdated financial figures and budgets, lack of documentation for "change orders", and warned the HART estimates of the cost overruns were unreliable.\[30\][31] HART officials disputed the audit's findings.

May 2016 - The FTA revealed that they estimate the total cost as $8.1 billion for the 20 mi (32 km) line. In addition completion of the rail system would be delayed nearly five years until December 2024, versus HART's federal funding agreement stating that full line service from East Kapolei to Ala Moana Center would start in January 2020.\[33\]

June 2016 - Report from Jacobs Engineering, the project management oversight contractor, says that under a worst case scenario the final cost would $10.79 billion.\[32\]

April 2017 - HART sent a "Recovery Plan" to the FTA which concluded that completion of the original 21 station route was the only viable plan. The new project cost given is $8.165 billion with media reports indicating that after financing costs are included it will be over $10 billion. Opening of part of the system, from East Kapolei to Aloha Stadium, is scheduled for the end of 2020 with final completion of the full route by December 2025. The project is reported to be 36 percent complete as of March 2017.\[35\][36]

September 2017 - A new law is enacted to extend and increase taxes to raise $2.4 billion for the project. The GET surcharge is extended by three years to 2030 (generating about $1 billion) and a surcharge of one percent is placed on the statewide hotel room tax for 13 years (generating $1.3 billion).\[19\][17] HART submits a new recovery plan to the FTA with an estimated final cost of $9.02 billion with savings attributed to reduced financing costs given the new taxes.\[13\]

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