

## THE BOAT TO NOWHERE: One hour 43 Minute Door-to-Door Commute Exceeds Time and Cost of 37 Minute Bus Ride

By Kristian Somi and Wendy Fujimoto



TheBoat sails fairly empty. Photo courtesy of KGMB9<sup>1</sup>

TheBoat (Honolulu's city-run subsidized \$2 ferry service) is an expensive and time consuming commute option plagued by high fixed costs and low ridership. Yet, the City & County of Honolulu continues to run the money-losing service despite the fact that its own existing bus service and commuting using personal vehicles are both less expensive and faster options.

**Takes too long.** By the time the first boat leaves at 5:30 AM, the 23 free parking stalls at the Kalaeloa pier are taken and remain occupied until commuters return in the evening. As a result, the remaining travelers must be dropped off or take city bus service to reach the pier.

Commuting by bus and TheBoat is a lengthy process. A passenger's journey might begin by boarding the F13 bus in Kapolei, taking 15 minutes to reach the pier. Upon arrival, passengers wait up to 10 minutes before TheBoat departs. The actual trip from the pier to Aloha Tower takes approximately one hour.<sup>2</sup> Adding the time it takes to get to the pier, and then from Aloha Tower to work or school, easily

adds an additional 25 minutes. Consequently, the realistic door-to-door commute from Kapolei to downtown Honolulu using TheBoat takes about an hour and 43 minutes, as experienced by a Star Bulletin staffer last fall:

*"The ferry won't get commuters to their jobs any sooner, even at peak rush hour. Three Star-Bulletin staffers left Makakilo simultaneously at 5 a.m. yesterday and recorded their times to arrive downtown: commuting by TheBoat took one hour and 43 minutes, by car took 28 minutes and by express bus, 37 minutes."<sup>3</sup>*

**TheBus and driving a car are faster.** If a commuter instead took the express bus C from Kapolei Transit Center, the drive time is less than 50 minutes, and can be as short as 30 minutes. Commute time to the transit center needs to be added if necessary. Driving takes approximately 30 minutes for commuters leaving the Kapolei area around 5:00 a.m. Commute times are longer at later hours, but still less than the hour and 43 minutes it takes using the 5:30 a.m. sailing.

**Costs too much.** In addition to commute times longer than driving or using existing bus service, TheBoat is expensive. In August 2008, TheBoat carried roughly 6,700 passengers one way<sup>4</sup> at a cost of \$416,666 per month or \$5 million per year<sup>5</sup>. This amounts to about \$62 per passenger trip, or \$124 round-trip. Since riders pay a maximum of \$2 per trip, 97% of the cost is paid by taxpayers.

**Commute by car five times less expensive.** Not only is commute by car much faster than TheBoat, it is much less expensive also. The IRS values the use of a car at 58.5 cents per mile<sup>6</sup>. Using this figure, driving from Kapolei to Honolulu, a 22-mile commute costs \$12.87. Using the national average of 1.57<sup>7</sup> passengers per car, the cost is \$8.20 per passenger. Daily early bird parking in Honolulu can be had for as little as \$11 (\$7 per passenger) with little added walking time. This brings the average daily cost per car commuter to less than \$11.70 per passenger one way or \$23.40 round trip. Variations in parking rates and fuel efficiency would adjust this figure, but on average a one-way trip with TheBoat is **five** times more expensive per passenger than by car.

**Commute on TheBus also five times less expensive.** Commuting using TheBus is not only faster than TheBoat, but very much less expensive. The cost of bus travel in 2007 was \$0.53 per passenger mile in Honolulu<sup>8</sup>. Adjusting for inflation, this becomes \$0.56 per passenger mile<sup>9</sup> and results in a cost of \$12.32 one-way and \$24.64 round-trip for the 22 mile trip. So on average, a one-way trip on TheBoat is **five** times more expensive per passenger than TheBus.

**TheBoat will never be less expensive than TheBus.** TheBoat is so costly due primarily to its high fixed cost and secondly to low ridership. **Only** if TheBoat sailed **full on all six daily round-trip sailings** (1,800 one-way passenger trips), would cost per passenger trip be reduced to the cost of commuting by car (including parking) or TheBus. The Grassroot Institute usually supports increased choices, but a government-subsidized option that costs five times more than driving a car or the existing public bus service, is not a worthwhile option for taxpayers.

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<sup>1</sup> Pictures courtesy of Kgmb9 and can be found in the embedded video in the following site:

<http://kgmb9.com/main/content/view/8674/40/>

<sup>2</sup> The Bus schedule: <http://www.trytheboat.com/pdf/TheBoatRouteTimetable.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> City must solicit commuter feedback about TheBoat: <http://starbulletin.com/2007/09/18/editorial/editorial01.html>

<sup>4</sup> Intra-Island Ferry

Demonstration Project: <http://www.co.honolulu.hi.us/Council/d9/tpwpresentation9408.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> Transportation Director Says TheBoat Worthwhile Part Of System:

<http://www.kitv.com/news/17395770/detail.html?subid=10101241>

Cost of \$5 million is \$4 million for the boat and \$1 million for the buses which serve the buses. The \$5 million figure is now commonly used by the press.

<sup>6</sup> IRS mileage rates available at <http://www.irs.gov/newsroom/article/0,id=184163,00.html>

<sup>7</sup> [http://www.milesgallon.com/calculate\\_total\\_cost\\_per\\_mile.php?newprice=2000&newmiles=100000&oldprice=500&oldmiles=150000&mpg=20&gasprice=4&insuranceperyear=1000&years=3](http://www.milesgallon.com/calculate_total_cost_per_mile.php?newprice=2000&newmiles=100000&oldprice=500&oldmiles=150000&mpg=20&gasprice=4&insuranceperyear=1000&years=3)

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.ntdprogram.gov/ntdprogram/cs?action=showRegionAgencies&region=9>

Capital cost for Honolulu bus service calculated by adding 19 % (average capital cost for the last 11 years) to operating costs.

<sup>9</sup> Consumer price index for Honolulu: <http://www.bls.gov/ro9/9225.pdf>

Adjusted cost per passenger mile on the bus calculated using  $0.45 * 1.1873 * 226.738 / 215.681$  to adjust the cost from 2007 to 2008.