

# Study calls for more rideshares, better bus schedules

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Hawaii Island could do more to improve mass transit and bolster rideshare programs.

That's according to a new study prepared for the Kohala Center by the Michigan School of Natural Resources and Environment, which called for increased carpooling and clearer county bus schedules.

With long travel distances and commutes, more than half of the island's energy demand goes to transportation, states the study, titled "Expanding Transportation Opportunities on Hawaii Island."

County bus ridership has increased steadily since its inception, but only 2 percent of commuters choose that option, according to the study, which finds that those same riders who take the bus to work make half the income of regular commuters while facing travel times that average 68 minutes — twice the national average.

Establishing rideshare networks and increasing awareness of the existing VRide system would help, concluded the researchers, a team of graduate students who traveled to the island to conduct the study.

The purpose of the study was to fuel discussion about the next energy issue the island ought to be addressing — transportation, said Betsy Cole, chief operating officer for the Waimea-based center for research, conservation and education.

"We've spent a lot of time over the past 10 years talking about the electrical system," said Cole.

Researchers also recommended that the county's mass transit system enhance its website to make it easier to navigate, along with developing clearer maps and routes that can be viewed in the website without downloading a file. Implementing a Google Transit program would be a low-cost way to help passengers find optimal routes, schedules and connections, researchers found.

"The study puts the county in a better place to understand where the rubber meets the road," said Hawaii County energy coordinator William Rolston, in a statement.

Rideshare participation is already comparatively high on the island — about 15 percent of commuters. That's half again the national average.

"Although we have a high level of rideshare, we could do more," said Cole. "Because we're the largest and poorest county, it becomes pretty important for people getting to work to have affordability."

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