

ED CASE
1ST DISTRICT, HAWAII

2210 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC 20515
TELEPHONE: 202-225-2726
FAX: 202-225-0688

1003 BISHOP STREET, SUITE 1110
HONOLULU, HI 96813
TELEPHONE: 808-650-6688
FAX: 808-533-0133

WEBSITE: CASE.HOUSE.GOV

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS
SUBCOMMITTEES:
MILITARY CONSTRUCTION, VETERANS AFFAIRS
AND RELATED AGENCIES

COMMERCE, JUSTICE, SCIENCE AND RELATED
AGENCIES

LEGISLATIVE BRANCH

COMMITTEE ON NATURAL
RESOURCES
SUBCOMMITTEES:
NATIONAL PARKS, FORESTS AND PUBLIC LANDS

WATER, OCEANS AND WILDLIFE

INDIGENOUS PEOPLES OF THE UNITED STATES

April 14, 2021

Chairman DeFazio, Ranking Member Graves and Members of the U.S. House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee:

Aloha and mahalo for the opportunity to update the Committee on key transportation and infrastructure issues and needs for my home state of Hawai'i. I would like to highlight three today for your consideration and assistance: (1) adapting our surface transportation network to the impacts of climate change on coastal communities; (2) supporting our critical Honolulu Area Rapid Transit (HART) project; and (3) strengthening deficient safety and community disruption regulation of commercial helicopter and small aircraft operations.

As an island state, Hawai'i is uniquely challenged by the growing threat of climate change. Sea levels are projected to rise 20% to 30% above the global mean by 2100. Resulting coastal erosion and flooding already threaten hundreds of miles of key coastal roadways in Hawai'i alone. Only a large and sustained investment in critical infrastructure to include coastal resiliency and road relocation will maintain our surface transportation network. I urge the Committee to continue to support new technologies and strategies and projects to meet this challenge.

In the same vein, Hawai'i and especially the urban center of Honolulu is in critical need of alternate modes of transportation. A 2019 study ranks Honolulu as the single most traffic-congested of all medium-sized American cities. Mass transit remains our best current and especially long-term option to provide efficient and reliable transportation in our urban core.

Our HART project, now over 50% complete, has, like virtually all other large mass transit projects, endured substantial cost increases and delays. However, it is even more critical now to Hawaii's transportation and infrastructure present and future. I ask for this Committee's continued support for HART and other mass transit projects nationwide.

Finally, I ask for the Committee's support of full and responsive regulation by the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) and, if the FAA remains unable or unwilling to do so, by other federal, state and local regulatory agencies, of rapidly increasing safety and community disruption concerns from commercial tour helicopters and small aircraft operations.

In many parts of the country, but especially Hawai'i, these operations have accelerated rapidly in recent years. Yet regulatory capacity and commitment by the FAA has not kept pace, with tragic and widespread consequences.

2019 pre-COVID alone saw 17 tour flight and skydiving accidents nationwide, with 37 tragic deaths from six of those crashes. Hawai'i saw three dead in the crash of a commercial air tour helicopter into a residential neighborhood, eleven more dead in the crash of a commercial skydiving plane and then seven more dead in a commercial air tour helicopter crash in a remote mountain region.

The National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB), which reviews incidents but cannot regulate changes, has concluded that existing safety-related regulation of commercial tour helicopters and small aircraft skydiving operations is insufficient. Just yesterday, the NSTB reported that one factor in the eleven-dead skydiving crash was insufficient FAA inspection of the aircraft safety. Many of the NTSB's specific recommendations have not been adopted by the FAA.

These operations have also disrupted whole communities with excessive noise and other impacts, destroyed the peace and sanctity of special places and weakened security and management of national security operations. The FAA states that its responsibility is strictly operational safety and national airspace efficiency and does not extend to ground disruption and other negative impacts. As a result, the operators are virtually free to fly wherever, whenever and as often as they want. And they do, with little to no self-regulation.

I need and ask for this Committee's assistance in resolving this intolerable situation. For starters, I seek your support for H.R. 389, my Safe and Quiet Skies Act, which would require the FAA to implement the NTSB's recommended enhanced safety regulations, prohibit flights over certain federal properties, to include military installations, national cemeteries and national parks, require standard equipment to monitor the location of flights, prevent pilots from also serving as tour guides, and limit decibel levels to those commonly applied to operations in residential areas. There are other approaches that get to the same place, and I ask to work with this Committee towards their implementation.

In closing, I want to extend my warmest mahalo for your leadership in fixing our nation's transportation and infrastructure and for your consideration of Hawaii's critical needs.