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DOT seeks public input on Kahekili Highway expansion

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It's a dilemma that faces many rural communities: Keep the country country, or improve and widen roadways to accommodate transportation needs.

The Hawaii Department of Transportation is considering improvements to Kahekili Highway from Haiku Road to Kamehameha Highway near the landmark Hygienic Store in Kahaluu. The highway is mostly one lane in both directions and that often leads to traffic jams.

Anyone who's driven Kahekili knows that a traffic accident, slow-moving vehicle or construction can back up cars for miles.

The DOT is aware of this, and is thinking about adding lanes to alleviate the congestion. But before it does so, the department wants to hear from the public.

The DOT will hold a public meeting to gather comments at 6 p.m. Monday at the [Windward Community College](#) Hale Akoakoa Campus Center. The department will make a presentation and then solicit comments.

The DOT is wise to be seeking input at such an early stage in the planning process. Windwardites will recall the public outcry when the DOT unveiled the "improved" Kahekili Highway in the 1990s.

The highway was widened from two to six lanes between Likelike Highway and Haiku Road. But critics blasted the state because the highway, which had

been lined with trees and greenery that matched the rural community, now featured tall concrete walls, large overhead signs and zero landscaping.

The state apologized for the sterile look of the highway and spent millions of dollars on improvements. The DOT also learned a lesson that the community should be consulted before any major work is planned.

"People have issues with the traffic because the road is narrow, but they also want to keep it rural and maintain the nature of the rural community," said DOT spokesman **Derek Inoshita**. "It's hard to balance those two issues."

Anyone with questions about the meeting is asked to call **Darell Young**, project manager for the Hawaii Department of Transportation, at 587-1835.

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