

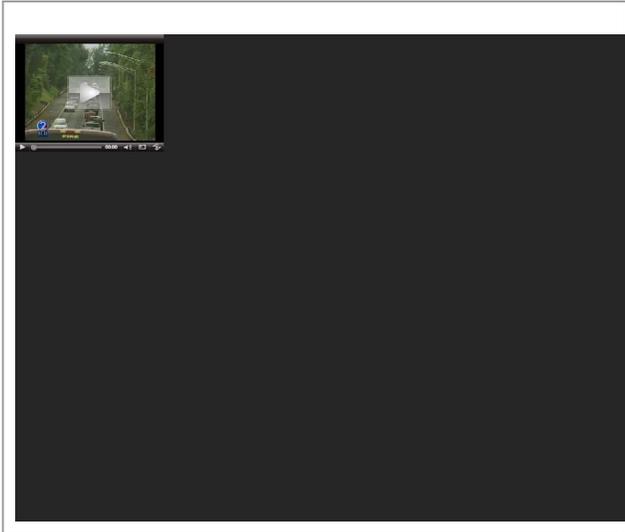
D.O.T. seeks input on widening of Kahekili Highway

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KANEOHE- A proposal to widen 4.4 miles of Kahekili Highway in Windward Oahu is likely to become another battle cry to keep the country, country.

The Kahaluu Neighborhood Board has already taken the position that the highway should remain as it is – a two lane country road.

“The board's position is that we need to explore some transportation solutions that'll attack the traffic problem now, not in twenty years and it'll do it in a way that'll preserve the rural character of our community,” said Kahaluu Neighborhood Board Chairman David Henkin.

The D.O.T. completed an environmental impact statement for the project in 1990 that would have added two lanes to Kahekili Highway from Haiku Road to Kamehameha Highway. The plan also envisioned a new interchange where Kahekili Highway merges onto Likelike Highway so that drivers would no longer be forced to stop at a traffic light.

But after more than twenty years the EIS document is outdated and will likely require a supplemental assessment. More importantly, D.O.T. has pledged not to proceed with the widening of Kahekili Highway unless local residents agree it's really necessary.

As part of that promise the D.O.T. held the first of a series of community workshops Monday night where residents were encouraged to speak out. About a hundred people attended the meeting at Windward Community College.

“We are looking to get the comment and community input as we move forward into this process,” said D.O.T. Deputy Director Jadine Urasaki. “It depends on the input that we get from the community and how we vision it to move forward.”

In 1995 Kahekili Highway was widened to include six lanes from the Likelike Highway intersection to Haiku Road. However the existing bottleneck further north causes severe traffic congestion, especially during the morning rush hour. The roadway's level of service during peak a.m. hours was rated as low as an 'F' according to project consultant SSFM International.

“The last improvement that they did was a nice improvement but definitely was not enough,” said Kaneohe resident David Johnson. “The other widening is long overdue.”

However in a community that places a tremendous amount of value on its rural character there is a definite split on whether the widening project is really needed and what may follow.

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