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State Looks At Widening Kahekili Highway

Expansion Could Finish Project Started Two Decades Ago

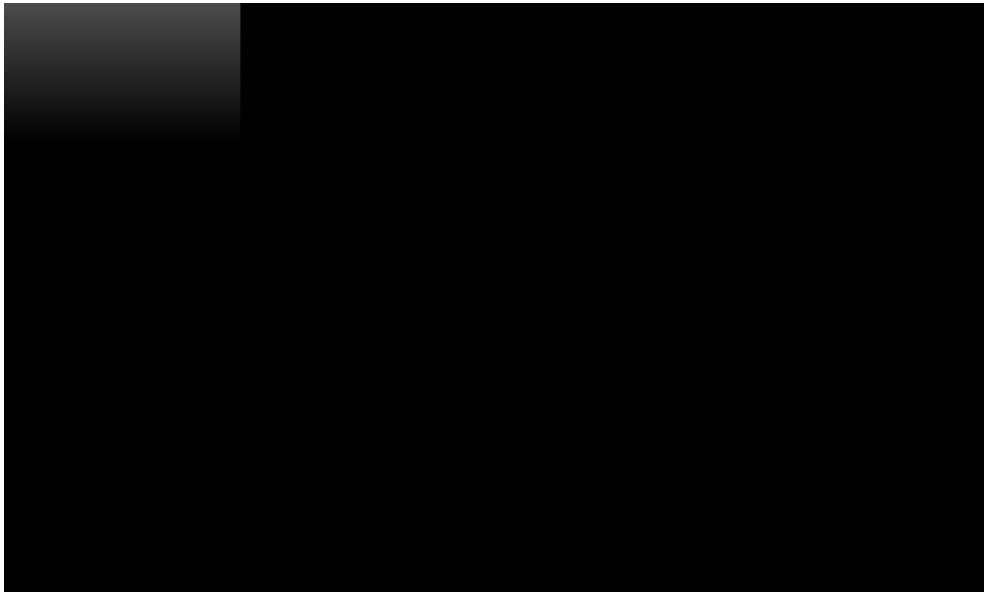
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HONOLULU -- Will the state finish a road expansion project started two decades ago?

Part of Kahekili highway was widened in the early 1990s, now residents are meeting to decide what will happen to the rest of the road.

Each day over 38,000 drivers use the busy highway. If you ask around, it seems like there are nearly as many opinions on what to do with the highway.

"I'm against widening the road, what it appears it would do is add more cars and congestion, so it would have the reverse effect," said Kaneohe resident Ray Boland.

But Gabriel Wong said, "They should have widened it a long time ago. As soon as you hit that part traffic stops. It comes to a halt and then it creeps along for 10-15 minutes -- that's a lot of time wasted."

Dozens of residents who use the road took part in a public meeting Monday night to come up with ideas to cut down on traffic. Congestion is a problem the state had been expecting since the original widening project in the 1990s.

"The traffic analysis that was done shows we are 20 percent over what was projected back then in the early 90s. It is hitting a level of service that is unacceptable and we are looking to address it," said Jadine Urasaki, a deputy director with the Department of Transportation.

Along with expansion options, the state is also looking into adding bike and turn lanes and even beautifying the busy highway.

The state has to get public input on the project, because the original environmental impact statement is over two decades old. And many residents took advantage of the opportunity and shared the pros and cons of turning the rural road into a major highway.

"I think it would be cool if they widened it. They are fixing up other roads, so it is about time they help us with ours. There is so much congestion," said Kehau Mendes of Ahuimanu.

But some who live along the highway said it is not the traffic that needs to be reduced but instead the push for bigger and better highways.

"We need to fix the roads, fix the sewers and get our infrastructure lined up before we spend anymore money on special projects," said MJ Culvyhouse of Kaneohe.

Monday's community meeting was the first of several planned by the state. The next one is scheduled for this fall. At the same time, the state is waiting for hydrology, soil and other studies to be completed on the land around Kahekili highway in case the road is widened.

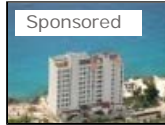
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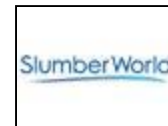
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