

INTEGRATING STATE AND COUNTY TRANSPORTATION POLICY

Technical Report Prepared for Kauai General Plan Update

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prepared by:



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in association with





INTRODUCTION

This report is intended to provide a basis for development of the transportation element of the updated Kauai County General Plan. It recommends a strategic approach to achieving the County’s vision for the future of this beautiful island and its people.



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21st CENTURY TRANSPORTATION PLANNING FRAMEWORK

Surface transportation in the US is changing more rapidly today than at any time since the early 1900s. A range of technological innovations as well as economic and cultural trends are shifting travel behavior and demand in ways that will profoundly impact transportation policy in Kauai.

Sharing Economy

Car sharing operations (CSOs) have begun to gain momentum in US cities. Zipcar and Flexcar were both founded in 2000. By 2008 the major car rental companies (Hertz, etc.) had started their own CSOs. Personal (P2P) car sharing is also gaining ground as insurance companies eliminate barriers to this. While car sharing may not reduce vehicle miles traveled dramatically, it does appear to reduce parking demand at residential land uses. On average, car share memberships own 30 cars for every 1,000 members, compared to 800 to 900 cars owned per thousand in the general population. However, car sharing tends to thrive only where land uses are highly mixed (supporting walking) and transit service is robust (serving commuting). Car sharing in suburban and rural areas is almost non-existent. While car sharing may have a future in Kauai, it could be a decade or more before any measurable effects are seen.

Ride Hailing Services

Uber, Lyft and many smaller ride hailing companies (RHCs) are bringing about a dramatic reorientation of travel demand in US cities. (Note: these services are also referred to as “real-time ridesharing.”) Taxi companies are having to adapt their business models quickly to compete and stay in business. Ride hailing also appears to have the effect of reducing peak parking demand in destination commercial areas – downtowns, resorts, etc. These smartphone-app-based services are also gaining popularity in tourism destinations, especially with people accustomed to relying on them at home or on business trips. While RHCs do not have a presence on Kauai yet, it is reasonable to expect them to be on the island within the decade.

Urban transit agencies in US cities are beginning to adapt to a future where “special services” (transportation disadvantaged) and low volume fixed route/scheduled public transit are replaced by the private sector through RHCs. Already a number of regional transit agencies have contracted with RHCs for special services and an increasing number are integrating their fare systems with the apps and fare systems of RHCs to allow a single fare for linked trips.

Autonomous Vehicles

While newspapers are filled with splashy coverage of “self-driving cars,” the more important developments are in semi-autonomous technology – crash avoidance, lane-keeping, adaptive cruise control and so forth. These features are already commercially available on high-end cars and trucks and are likely to bring about a significant improvement in traffic safety – especially on rural roads and major freeways. It is not possible to predict how soon fully autonomous vehicles will become a significant presence on public roads. However, that will happen eventually and it will affect not just personal vehicles but also motor trucks and transit buses. In fact, efforts to facilitate autonomous truck “caravans” on public highways are well underway in several states.



A closely-related, emerging trend is the convergence of autonomous vehicle technologies with ride hailing services, a strategy being pursued by both Google and Uber, as well as by the major auto manufacturers. While these are important trends that may provide safety benefits in an era of distracted driving, the potential impacts on vehicle miles of travel and mode share are unclear and impossible to predict with any confidence.

Traffic Safety

For decades, traffic safety has received lip service in state DOT mission statements and municipal planning documents. During this period there have been improvements in motor vehicles (seat belts, airbags, etc.), emergency services, and rural highways (wider shoulders, guardrails, etc.). However, real progress toward safe city and town streets has been slow and uncertain. As a result, pedestrian and bicycle fatalities and injuries have been growing at an alarming rate. For example, one out every four traffic fatalities in California in 2015 were pedestrians.

The “Vision Zero” movement is spreading in the US now and is leading to a serious conversation in transportation policy arenas about how to design and build safer facilities for pedestrians, bicyclists and vehicles. Design innovation is proceeding rapidly, with the National Association of City Transportation Officials (NACTO) in the lead. Protected bike lanes, protected intersections, mid-block pedestrian crossings, and other design solutions are yielding highly-positive results and the associated body of knowledge and design principles are readily available for use by Kauai County and Hawaii DOT.

Energy Prices and Vehicular Travel

Ten years ago it was common to see such terms as “post-petroleum era” and “peak oil.” The gas price surge in 2010 that continued into 2014 seemed to be an indication that the world would begin a transition away from use of fossil fuels to power transportation. At the same time cultural trends (rise of the millennials) and economic trends (the great recession) seemed to be leading to a reduction in personal vehicle ownership and in personal driving. Annual vehicle miles of travel (VMT) peaked nationally in 2006 and began to decline, a trend that continued well into 2014.

However, a variety of factors have combined to reverse these trends. The rapid development of natural gas supplies in the US through new extraction technologies combined with increases in Middle East and West Asian oil production have driven energy prices down to historic lows in real dollar terms. At the same time, the economic recovery has increased employment and spending. US motor vehicle annual sales, which had dropped from pre-recession levels of over 14 million vehicles per year to less than 10 million vehicles in 2010, have surged back. About 17.5 million new vehicles were sold in the US in 2015.

Total daily VMT began to climb again late in 2014 and this trend has accelerated. In the first six months of 2016, US VMT surged by an annualized growth rate of 3%, setting new records nationally for monthly and annual vehicular travel.



Summary of Implications

Kauai's Multimodal Land Transportation Plan (MLTP) established a baseline/trend scenario that included a projection of potential vehicle miles of travel (VMT). The baseline scenario VMT projection was based on actual 2010 VMT per capita combined with County forecasts of future de facto population growth. ("De facto" population = residents + visitors.) The projection thus made no assumption about a change in VMT per capita.

In the years since the MLTP was adopted, actual VMT has grown even faster than shown in the baseline scenario. However, during this period de facto population also increased faster than forecast in the baseline scenario, a result of the economic recovery combined with renewed tourism travel both in the US and internationally. Interestingly, during the same period, County transit ridership increased more rapidly than shown in the MLTP's preferred scenario.

Recent forecasts by the US Energy Information Administration suggest there could be little or no increase in real dollar petroleum and gasoline prices between now and 2040. The development of natural gas reserves, the continued glut in world oil markets as OPEC nations struggle with internal politics, and the development of feasible renewable energy sources are expected to hold gas (and diesel) prices low for many years.

Some reasonable conclusions from the interaction of these trends would be:

- Kauai County de facto population may continue growing faster than previously forecast;
- County transit ridership has the potential to grow at or above the rates shown in the MLTP preferred scenario – but only if transit service levels can keep up with demand;
- While cultural trends away from auto ownership and vehicular travel in urban regions continue, these are much less pronounced in rural and suburban regions like Kauai;
- The long-term prospects for the impacts of car sharing, ride hailing, and autonomous vehicles are unclear;
- Kauai County may face a future where its mode share strategies yield significant positive results, but not at sufficient rates to prevent its traffic from growing at the same time; and consequently,
- There is no reason to expect that the baseline scenario trend line for Kauai's VMT growth shown in the Multimodal Land Transportation Plan is too high. If anything, it could turn out to be too conservative, increasing the challenge associated with achieving the preferred scenario of no long term growth in VMT.



PRIORITY IMPLEMENTATION PROCESSES

Kauai County and its people face a major challenge, the outcome of which will affect the quality of life and economic viability of the island in the decades to come. That challenge is to develop – in collaboration with Hawaii DOT – a strategic approach to multimodal transportation system development that is financially feasible and that leads to achievement of the County’s goals as stated in the updated County General Plan. Three obstacles stand in the way of surmounting this challenge:

- Kauai County is a small, rural island with limited road and street infrastructure. History, culture and the island’s topography have combined to create a poorly-connected road network. There is little or no parallel redundancy for the state highway “ring road” that serves as the primary route for both regional and local travel. Now, with low fuel prices and a recovering economy, traffic is growing beyond the capacity of the island’s transportation system, creating congestion that threatens mobility and access for residents and visitors alike. The State transportation program, managed by Hawaii DOT, is significantly underfunded and there is limited prospect for major highway system expansion. The County budget is small and the capacity for tax increases is severely constrained.
- The 2013 Multimodal Land Transportation Plan proposed solving this challenge by aggressively growing the County’s public transit system to levels sufficient to support a significant shift from driving to transit ridership for commuting and other daily trips. This transit-based strategy has proven difficult to implement because of existing funding constraints and the lack of a county-wide consensus on the idea of pivoting to public transit.
- The State and County land planning and transportation planning processes, which are guided by Hawaii Statutes and by federal transportation provisions, are outdated and no longer provide a reasonable blueprint for logical development of a strategic, implementable approach to transportation system development in Kauai.

This report proposes that the General Plan update serve to cue up two major implementation programs to begin the process of modernizing Kauai’s transportation system along the lines described in the 2013 Multimodal Land Transportation Plan. Both of these implementation programs would require a significant commitment of County (and State) staff and resources, and will probably also require the County work with the State government to secure grant funds to support this work.

The two major implementation programs are:

1. Proactively address congestion in state highways through an advanced planning and project development process.
2. Develop informed support for the role public transit should play in the future of Kauai.

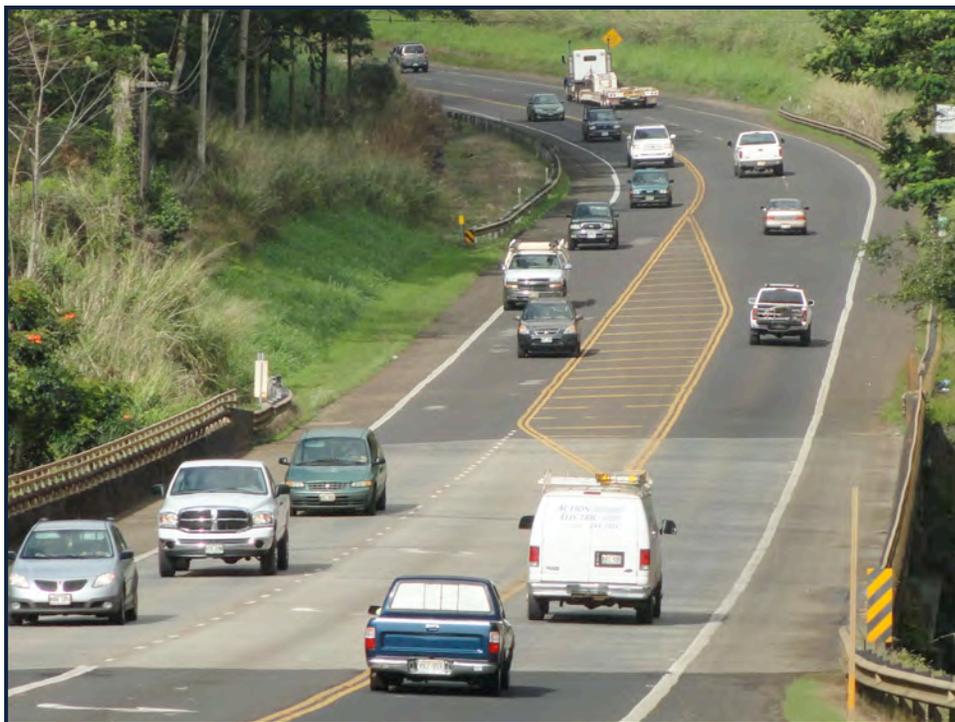
These are described in detail below.



1. Manage Congestion in State Highway Corridors

Findings:

- State highway funding will be severely limited in the near term and perhaps permanently. Consequently, it is highly unlikely that HDOT will be able to implement the project list shown in the Federal Aid Highways Plan within the General Plan timeframe.
- Traffic will continue to grow in the near term, encouraged by low fuel prices, population growth, increased tourism and low levels of transit service. This will increase public pressure to address traffic congestion.
- The long-term national trend, which has not yet manifested in Hawaii, is a movement away from auto ownership and single occupant driving.
- The long-term perspective argues against the need for or wisdom of corridor-wide multi-laning of Kauai's state highway corridors.
- The Federal Aid Highway Plan for Kauai serves more as a basis for estimating the magnitude of "need" than as a plan or program for specific highway improvements.
- Without a list of feasible state highway projects, there is no criteria-based process for bringing feasible, high-priority, state highway improvement projects into the STIP for advancement into design and construction.
- These issues are present to some degree in the Neighbor Counties. The need to develop a different approach to investing in the state highway system is a statewide challenge.
- Kauai County could serve as a prototype laboratory for a new approach to investing in the state highway system.



Strategies:

- a. State Highway Corridor Management Program. Work with HDOT to develop corridor management plans (CMPs) for the state highway corridors. Use the concept of “low cost/high return” investment to identify specific worthy spot improvements, intersection upgrades and other projects that can be implemented in the near term. Develop CMPs for these corridors (tentative list not necessarily in priority order):
 - Kuhio Highway from Kapaa to the Wailua River Bridge;
 - Kaunualii Highway from Puhi to Maluhia Road;
 - Kuhio Highway from Wailua River Bridge to intersection with Kapule Highway; and,
 - Kuhio Highway from Kilauea to Hanalei.

- b. Low Cost/High Return Design Concepts. Work with HDOT to develop and implement the highest priority intersection, pedestrian and bicycle design concepts identified in the CMPs. Apply modern criteria and national design practices including these potential features:
 - One- and two-lane roundabouts;
 - Pedestrian crosswalks and curb extensions at multilane intersections;
 - Bicycle lanes through signalized and stop sign controlled intersections;
 - Protected bicycle lanes (cycle tracks); and,
 - Bus prioritization techniques.

- c. Lihue Relief Route Phased Plan. Initiate discussions with HDOT and a planning process for the Lihue Relief Route mauka of Hanamaulu. Develop preliminary terms of an agreement to shift the “Kuhio Highway” designation and state jurisdiction to the new corridor (once complete) with the County taking jurisdiction of the former Kuhio Highway through the bypassed section. Address land use, zoning and agriculture issues in the planning process with the intent of creating an access-controlled highway corridor.

- d. Transportation Coordinating Committee (TCC). Re-initiate the Transportation Coordinating Committee called for in the MLTP (Chapter 7). Model this on the “technical committees” that are part of the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) process in large urban areas, where the technical committee is an administrative entity that makes recommendations to elected leadership. As such, the TCC should not include elected officials, whose role is to review recommendations provided by the technical committee (as occurs within MPOs). Obtain a commitment from HDOT to actively participate in the TCC process and in its outcomes. Initial tasks the TCC should take on are:
 - Work with HDOT to identify priority corridors for corridor management plans (CMPs);
 - Identify low cost/high return improvement opportunities based on CMPs;
 - Develop a list of cost-feasible projects to be advanced from the LRLTP into the STIP;
 - Initiate grant prospects research to identify potential sources of grant funds for planning, design and construction of projects in priority corridors.



2. Develop Informed Support for the Role of Public Transit in Kauai

Findings:

- The 2013 Multimodal Land Transportation Plan called for major increases in public transit service levels by 2035 sufficient in magnitude to absorb the increased demand for travel on Kauai (as measured by VMT).
- The County has had little success implementing this program. Bus service levels today are similar to what they were in 2010. Although ridership increased during the period of high fuel costs and the recession, it has since declined. Although larger used urban buses were obtained from the Honolulu transit system, these have not yet been placed in service due to issues with driver certification and funding.
- Without increases in service frequency and route capacity, there is no prospect for transit to play a significant role in helping Kauai achieve its General Plan vision or goals.
- The County does not have a clear consensus on the relative priorities of the public transit needs of commuters, visitors and tourists, and other travelers.
- Shuttle feasibility studies are underway for the North Shore, South Shore and Eastside. The County is also preparing a short range transit service plan. This work may offer specific strategies for potential service enhancements and transit improvements.
- The County Council decision not to pursue the ½¢ GE tax indicates a lack of consensus about how to proceed on public transportation and transportation in general.

Strategies:

- a. Outreach to Employers. Working with the Built Environment Task Force, initiate an outreach to large and mid-size employers: resorts and resort associations, hospitals and health institutions, educational institutions, public agencies, and agricultural companies. Develop an understanding of the needs of these entities and their employees. Document the process and use the outcomes to guide strategies b through d below.
- b. Implementation Project Plans. Working with the Kauai Transportation Agency, and taking into account results of the Kauai Transit Feasibility Study, identify a short list of strategic implementation measures to increase transit service levels and ridership. Develop these into an easily-understood set of one-page “action plans.”
- e. Informed Transit Advocacy. Identify an advocacy organization for focused transit advocacy. This could be an existing group or a new independent organization established for this purpose. Support and provide information to this organization as needed. Key steps for this group should include:
 - Identify priorities for action based on b above (Implementation Project Plans);
 - Develop a business model for private sector involvement in funding and delivery of shuttles, circulators and other specialized transit services;
 - Develop an approach to incorporating ride-hailing services into visitor and tourism transportation systems;
 - Work with the County Administration and Council, and with Hawaii DOT to develop a proposal for state involvement in County transit system development.



RECOMMENDED GENERAL PLAN TRANSPORTATION GOALS

This section provides recommended transportation goals for incorporation into the update of the Kauai General Plan. The goals are structured as follows: a “goal” statement is supported by “policy objectives,” which in turn are supported by “actions.” The recommended goals are based on goals contained in Chapter 2 of the 2013 Multimodal Land Transportation Plan (MLTP). They have been updated to reflect the structured interviews and the County experience with the State’s 2014 Federal Aid Highway Plan and implementation of the MLTP.

Goal: Implement a balanced, multimodal transportation system that provides choice, flexibility and resiliency in personal access and circulation for all.

Policy Objective: Increase the mode choices available for access and circulation, reducing the mode share of daily travel by single-occupant vehicles to 49.2% in 2020 and 39.4% in 2035, and reducing vehicle miles of travel per capita.

- Action: Increase transit service levels for commuters as the highest priority.
- Action: Increase transit services levels for all other users as the second highest priority.
- Action: Provide safe, convenient sidewalks within towns and villages.
- Action: Provide safe, convenient bicycle facilities within towns and villages.

Policy Objective: Ensure road and streets are designed for safe, convenient use by all modes.

- Action: Apply complete streets design principles and criteria in county street projects.
- Action: Work with Hawai’i Department of Transportation to ensure that complete streets design principles and criteria are applied in state road and street projects.

Policy Objective: Ensure equitable access and mobility for all residents and visitors, regardless of age, income or physical condition.

- Action: Improve local pedestrian and bicycle connectivity to reduce trip lengths.
- Action: Provide accessible facilities based on universal design principles and on the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act and related regulations.

Goal: Ensure that Kauai County is served by a transportation system that supports continued development and viability of the island’s key economic sectors.

Policy Objective: Encourage growth in active sports and recreation in support of resident health and low impact tourism.

- Action: Continue development of recreational trails along coastal areas and between closely-spaced towns and villages in manner that serves recreation and commuting.
- Action: Work with resorts and tourism industry officials to improve access to and safety of low impact recreational activities.

Policy Objective: Encourage development of sustainable transportation technologies and practices in support of economic diversification and resiliency.

- Action: Actively collaborate with the State and with neighbor islands to develop sustainable energy sources and technologies for bus transit.



Policy Objective: Support efficiency and resiliency of the island's truck freight network.

- Action: Address site specific traffic bottlenecks with cost-feasible solutions.
- Action: Work to ensure reliable, efficient access to Kaua'i's ports – including Nawiliwili Harbor and Lihue Airport – for freight imports and exports.
- Action: Where alternate routes are available, designate truck routes in corridors where there would be the least impact on non-motorized modes.

Policy Objective: Improve viability of small plot, diversified, organic agriculture.

- Action: Work with farmers and growers to improve access to markets and solve storage and processing challenges.

Goal: Ensure that Kauai County is served by a transportation system that provides affordable access to jobs and economic opportunity.

Policy Objective: Encourage a land use pattern that directs development to existing towns and villages and reduces average commute trip lengths.

- Action: Set connectivity criteria for land development that supports internal circulation.
- Action: Require “complete streets” design in all development, redevelopment and infill projects.

Policy Objective: Prevent unsustainable increases in the percentage of household income that must be spent for transportation.

- Action: Improve service levels and the passenger capacity of commuter routes on the Kauai Bus transit system.
- Action: Improve safety and convenience of pedestrian access to bus stops.
- Action: Improve opportunities for walking and bicycling to and from work and school within existing developed towns and villages.

Policy Objective: Encourage new job creation in Lihue and other existing developed areas.

- Action: Work cooperatively with property and business owners to solve access, circulation and parking challenges in areas of potential employment growth.

Goal: Make improvements to the Kauai County transportation system that support and enhance public health.

Policy Objective: Improve the safety of walking in neighborhoods, villages and towns.

- Action: Invest in safe, convenient sidewalks and crosswalks within developed areas.
- Action: Adapt local streets with designs that encourage low traffic speeds.
- Action: Target pedestrian investments to safe routes for access to K – 12 schools.

Policy Objective: Improve the safety of bicycling in neighborhoods, villages and towns.

- Action: Provide safe, convenient bicycle lanes and trails within developed areas.
- Action: Target bicycle investments to safe routes to school for access to K – 12 schools.



- Action: Work with resorts and tourism industry to improve local bicycle connections to major regional trails and other recreational resources.

Goal: Ensure that Kauai County is served by a transportation system that makes efficient use of energy and is less dependent on imported petroleum.

Policy Objective: Work to reduce per capita consumption of petroleum-based fuels in motor vehicles and to reduce per capita consumption of energy for access and circulation.

- Action: Actively collaborate with the State and with neighbor islands to develop sustainable energy sources and technologies for ground transportation.
- Action: Encourage and facilitate non-auto travel choices for visitors and tourists.

Goal: Ensure that the Kauai County transportation system is planned and designed to protect and enhance the island's natural landscapes and environmental quality.

Policy Objective: Work to reduce the physical footprint of paved roads, streets, drive aisles and surface parking.

- Action: Adopt and implement design standards for county roads and streets that minimize roadway cross sections and impervious surface area.
- Action: Collaborate with Hawaii Department of Transportation to encourage use of design standards for state roads and streets that minimize roadway cross sections and impervious surface areas.
- Action: Work with property and business owners to reduce surface parking area by meeting parking demand through shared parking and strategic parking management techniques.

Policy Objective: Work to reduce per capita air pollutant and carbon emissions from motor vehicles.

- Action: Encourage purchase and use of low emission vehicles by addressing needs for charging stations and alternative fueling options.
- Action: Encourage increased public transit ridership, walking and bicycling to reduce per capita vehicle miles of travel among both residents and visitors.

Policy Objective: Guide design of public and private transportation facilities to avoid impacts to viewsheds and landscapes.

- Action: Consider viewshed and landscape impacts of County road and street projects and protect those resources in design and construction.

Goal: Ensure that the Kauai County transportation system is maintained in a state of good repair.

Policy Objective: Provide for adequate, timely maintenance, repair and recapitalization of roadway, transit, bicycle and pedestrian capital facilities.

- Action: Develop state-of-good-repair (SOGR) criteria for County transportation facilities.
- Action: Routinely monitor and report condition of County facilities using SOGR criteria.



STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

This project was based on interviews with State and County staff directly involved in transportation for Kauai. The list of people to be interviewed (below) was developed by the General Plan Update consultant and County Staff. Interviews were conducted by Jim Charlier over the telephone, beginning with Lyle Tabata on June 14 and wrapping up with Michael Moule on July 12. Interviews generally took about 45 minutes to an hour. Notes were taken and were used to prepare this summary.

Interviewee List

- Michael Moule, Kauai County Department of Public Works, Chief of Engineering
- Lee Steinmetz, Kauai County Planning Department, Transportation Planner
- Celia Mahikoa, Kauai County Executive on Transportation
- Marie Williams, Kauai County Planning Department, Chief, Long Range Plan Division
- Larry Dill, Hawaii DOT, Highways Division, Kauai District Engineer
- Ken Tatsuguchi, Hawaii DOT, Planning Division
- Lyle Tabata, Kauai County Acting County Engineer

Overview

Interviews were organized around a list of questions/topics, which provided a consistent framework for discussion. Most of the interviews also ranged over related topics. Questions were grouped in three categories:

- General questions addressed to all interviewees;
- County staff specific questions; and,
- Hawaii DOT specific questions.

The land use and transportation challenges facing the State and the County are daunting. The lack of funding to address needs represents an enormous barrier to implementation of their respective visions for the future. There is also considerable frustration with the way the State and County planning processes work today. The County feels the State is overly focused on highway widening projects that have little prospect of ever being built. The State feels the County's multimodal vision is unrealistic and infeasible, given governance and funding realities.

However, there is significant goodwill among the interviewees and a strong interest in finding ways to merge the two visions and to work together on project-level solutions. The recent collaborative effort between HDOT and County departments on the Kapa'a Transportation Solutions plan was cited by most of the interviewees as an example of what can be accomplished through collaboration. That planning effort may in fact offer clues to a more productive path into the future, as discussed below.



General Questions – All Interviewees

- 1. How aware are you of the contents of the current Federal Aid Highway 2035 Plan for the District of Kauai? Did you have a chance to read it? How would you describe the primary objectives the Highways Plan seeks to achieve? What project(s) or element(s) in the Highways Plan do you think are most important?*

Interviewees were all familiar with the 2014 Update of the Kauai Regional Land Transportation Plan – the “Federal Aid Highway Plan” – and all had opinions about its usefulness. County staff (including, at the time, Larry Dill) was directly involved in plan development. The land use basis for the Plan was coordinated directly with County Planning and reflected County zoning and local development trends.

There is general agreement on the part of both State and County staff that the primary metric HDOT used in developing the plan was traffic congestion and that the primary congestion mitigation strategy HDOT considered was highway widening. County staff feels there is too much emphasis on adding lanes to the mainline sections of state highways and not enough attention paid to less expensive redesign and improvement of intersections, along with other smaller and more feasible improvements. County staff also wonders if the proposed projects might tend to just move the traffic bottlenecks around without really solving anything.

County staff believes the actual objective of the Statewide and Regional planning effort was to demonstrate to the Legislature and the public how large the transportation need is and to demonstrate that the State should have more transportation revenue. State staff confirmed that this was a significant purpose of the update process.

This points to one of the dilemmas inherent in the State of Hawaii land use and transportation planning processes as practiced at the State and County levels. The State develops a highway project list that should be reflected in the County General Plan. However, the State highway plan is not a plan, per se, but rather a needs list. If the County assumes those projects will be built within a 20-year timeframe, its land use planning will be unrealistic because that amount of future system capacity won't actually be provided. Because there is no prioritization of the project list beyond the near-term STIP, the County cannot gauge what will and will not be built during the General Plan horizon. And there is no process, other than the STIP, for the County to advise HDOT concerning its transportation priorities over the life of a 20-year General Plan.

Finally, HDOT's practice of summarizing major projects at the corridor level as “place holders” for what actually might be built means that no actual detailed project planning is carried out until after projects are advanced into the STIP. Yet, in many cases, a more focused, strategic look at congestion, safety, access and other issues might reveal much less expensive projects – intersection improvements, roundabouts, and multimodal elements (like bike lanes or improved crosswalks). Even though these projects might be affordable in the near-term within HDOT's limited resources, they are not identified at the LRTP stage.



2. Have you seen the Multimodal Land Transportation Plan? Did you have a chance to read it? How would you describe the primary objectives the MLTP seeks to achieve? What project(s) or element(s) in the MLTP do you think are most important?

All interviewees were knowledgeable about the MLTP. County staff describes it as multimodal and strategic, noting that it is targeted at “mode shift,” “sets a very high bar,” and has a preferred scenario that would “flat-line” vehicle miles of travel on Kauai. HDOT staff sees the MLTP as “visionary” and agrees that it will be important to balance modes.

Several interviewees noted the barriers to County of Kauai’s attempts to achieve significant increases in transit service levels and ridership. The feasibility of an 800% increase in service is doubtful within the current transportation planning, development and funding regime in Hawaii. There has been almost no progress on implementation of MLTP transit objectives, other than bus stops. Kauai Bus has acquired used 40-ft buses from Honolulu that would increase capacity on existing routes, but has not been able to put them in service due to driver qualification issues and funding shortfalls.

The County is developing a clear vision of how to proceed with bicycle and pedestrian improvements in the towns and villages and is making some progress on that front. Hardy Street in Lihue was frequently mentioned as an example. HDOT staff understands the “compete streets” imperative. However, project development and conceptual design are done by HDOT staff on Oahu. As a result State/County coordination at the project development stage is limited. Interviewees also noted a lack of public support for bicycle and pedestrian investments. The public asks “why are you spending money on that when the roads are congested?”

There is consensus that it has been difficult to envision how the agriculture chapter of the MLTP could be implemented. County staff hopes that the agriculture logistics and distribution needs described in the MLTP can be picked up in the agriculture sections of the General Plan update.

County staff was significantly disappointed with the Council’s decision not to increase taxes to fund transportation. There is a general sense of “how do we make progress on the MLTP without the required funding?” A couple of interviewees noted that Council unanimously adopted the MLTP but it cannot be implemented without increased funding for transit and other priorities. Staff noted that the State has provided funding to build bus stops, but “if there is no money to build crosswalks or ADA sidewalks to ensure safe access to them, what’s the point?”

3. How aware are you of the documents that have been produced so far by the General Plan Update (Updating the Vision for Kauai, Issues and Opportunities Paper, Draft Adequacy of Future Infrastructure Assessment, and so forth)? Have you had a chance to read any of them? What do you think should be the primary transportation objectives the updated General Plan should achieve?



County planners, of course, have been directly involved in the General Plan update. Other county staff is aware of the process and has participated in some meetings. HDOT staff is aware of the process, but has not been directly involved.

In general, the General Plan is seen as a “planners’ plan” – not likely to have much impact. Several interviewees noted that it will not be possible to “limit growth.” Apparently, talk of placing a moratorium on development approvals has emerged again. But interviewees think the General Plan should show how the County will accommodate growth. Most agree the best strategy will be to concentrate new development in the existing town and village core areas. But they feel that the State’s proposed investment of highway funds in expanded corridor capacity will defeat the County’s land use objectives.

HDOT staff feels the General Plan should acknowledge the need for truck freight improvements and should address the key role that Nawiliwili Harbor plays.

4. The draft Vision for the updated General Plan describes Kauai in 2035 as follows:

text from Vision was provided

Can you describe one or two (or more) key transportation strategies that would lead to achievement of this vision? Can you describe one or two (or more) key land use strategies that would lead to achievement of this vision?

There is some concern on the part of County staff that the General Plan vision will be an accurate representation of what people want and what should happen, but won’t be achievable and thus won’t be realistic. There is broad support for the sustainability and resilience direction the Plan is taking, but pessimism about the County’s prospects. Again, the disappointment over the Council decision not to pursue a ½¢ General Excise tax is seen as an indication that “all we are going to be able to do is the same old same old.” Several staff believe the General Plan should be more clear about that reality. The vision is great, but the County should say “if this is what we want, these are the changes we are going to have to make in order for it to happen.”

On the positive side, staff points to the area community plans, the Kapaa Transportation Solutions study and the TIGER grant award as indicators of strategies that are working.

5. To what extent do you think continued traffic growth will present a barrier to achieving the draft Vision?

Interviewees do see inexorable traffic growth as inconsistent with the vision and direction of the General Plan. County staff views this as a land use and a transit challenge. HDOT sees the importance of a land use strategy but also sees a need to widen the state highway “ring” road, all the way from West Side to North Side. But neither the transit system expansion nor



extensive highway widening can be funded. County and State staff agree that the proposed Lihue bypass (at Hanamaulu) is good idea – this is in the LRTP but is not funded.

County staff noted that the island population (residents + visitors) is growing and congestion bottlenecks on state highways are steadily getting worse. It appears that participants in the General Plan update are beginning to ask “Why are we not talking about those things that can really happen?”

6. Do you think the State and County working together can address the challenges of increased traffic congestion in areas like Kapaa and Lihue?

A couple of County staff noted that the cost of driving is so low that traffic will grow inexorably. One interviewee was concerned that Kauai would become “like Oahu – one endless traffic jam.” All interviewees noted that the main state highway route around the island is where all the bottleneck problems occur and will occur in the future.

In general, there is significant interest in pursuing smaller, spot highway improvements, in part because the big multi-million-dollar projects are unlikely to be funded. Roundabouts come up frequently and the Kapaa Transportation Solutions study is seen in a favorable light: the mix of smaller, site-specific projects seems like a potential template for future action.

Finally, several interviewees feel that there is a need for improvement in the coordination between the County and HDOT. The Technical Coordinating Committee called for in the MLTP met for a while, but has stopped meeting and thus is not helping resolve these problems.

7. What should be the primary strategies for mitigating traffic congestion? To what extent could these strategies actually mitigate or prevent increased congestion?

Interviewees see two primary strategies: continuing to work on mode shift and focusing on smaller, more affordable site-specific road improvements – intersections, etc. There is some impatience that, smaller, more focused road design solutions are not being considered.

8. What role do you think public transit services should play in achieving the draft Vision?

County staff reports that ridership is down from two years ago (because of low gas prices), but buses are still running full on the most popular routes. There is concern that when gas prices go up again, transit demand will increase, but the funding won't be available to meet demand and the required capital investments in system capacity will not have been made. There is some interest in the anticipated recommendations of the ongoing shuttle studies.

HDOT's position on flexing STP funds to transit has been “no.” They will not divert any of the federal highway funding away from highways. And since there is no statewide transit program, there is no way for HDOT to help with a major expansion of the County transit program.



9. *What role you think bicycling should play in achieving the draft Vision?*

County and State interviewees agree that bicycling is important and can play a role in circulation within the towns and villages, but will not have much of a role in addressing traffic congestion. Hardy Street is seen as a successful and worthwhile project.

County staff notes that what has been built so far are short segments that don't add up to a network. There is a need to connect local facilities and that will take many years to complete. Since there is no dedicated bicycle planning and design program, progress on this has, and will be, slow. There is continued support for completion of the East Side Kauai Coastal path but the public asks "why are you spending money on that when you should be widening roads?"

County Staff Specific Questions

1. *Are there elements of the Multimodal Land Transportation Plan (MLTP) that you think should become significant parts of the updated General Plan?*

County staff feels as much of the MLTP as possible should be incorporated into the General Plan update. Staff continues to support the vision, policy direction and action plan elements of the MLTP. A couple of interviewees suggested including elements of the MLTP in the General Plan but others suggested incorporating the entire document as an appendix.

Staff has concluded that it does not make sense to include a list of specific capital highway projects. The Federal Aid Highway Plan has \$3.2 billion in projects, but only be \$600 million will be available. So, the General Plan should instead describe how the County will make decisions about its priorities for transportation. There is a consensus that the County should establish criteria for transportation priorities, including priorities for the Federal Highway program. Staff feels that improving the State/County working relationship on transportation is essential.

2. *Are there elements of the MLTP that you feel are no longer consistent with the policy direction emerging from development of the updated General Plan?*

Staff feels it is "still the right plan" but that the County is stuck without the means to implement it. One specific element staff has concluded is missing from the MLTP is guidance to the State on how Federal Highway program funds should be prioritized in Kauai. There is consensus that the General Plan should provide that guidance. The agriculture concepts in the MLTP should go in the General Plan but should be incorporated somewhere other than in the transportation element. Also, there is no County-side bike network plan and there is a need for that.

3. *Do you think any of the projects shown in the Federal Aid Highway 2035 Plan for the District of Kauai are inconsistent with County objectives and should not be built? If so, how should the State and County resolve that conflict and how should we prevent this from happening in future updates of the Highway Plan?*



There is general consensus among County staff that the State LRLTP is in direct conflict with what the County is trying to do and with the County's vision. The most common example of this cited by interviewees is the widening of Kaunualii Highway to Maluhia Road, which is seen as a really bad idea. On the other hand, projects like the Lihue Bypass do have County support, but staff is not optimistic the State would actually fund or move forward on that project. Again, as in responding to some of the other questions, staff feels that the focus on huge highway widening projects is not the right answer for Kauai.

4. In the past, the County's General Plan has directly incorporated the project list from the current Hawaii DOT Federal Aid Highway Plan. Does this serve the County's needs? If not, what should the General Plan show for transportation projects, programs and improvements and how should that list be developed?

Apparently, the premise for this question is inaccurate: the 2000 General Plan took the State's list, but then identified projects that should and should not be built.

Opinion on this varies somewhat, but staff generally feels that the County should identify what its priorities are for transportation improvements, including federal-aid highway projects. There is some willingness to acknowledge the State's LRLTP project list and to show it as an appendix, for information. But that list is seen as wildly unrealistic and misleading for the public because it will not actually be built. Staff believes there should be a cost-feasible list of state highway projects that will be built by the General Plan horizon year.

5. To what extent did development of the Kapaa Transportation Solutions Plan shape or change your understanding of and opinions about transportation and land use in Kauai?

The Kapaa Transportation Solutions study is seen as a positive experience and a prototype for future collaboration between the State and County. Interviewees liked the focus on specific locations and the decision to go forward with just those elements that there is a reasonable prospect of funding. The study also helped reveal some of the specifics of how land use is creating demand on the state highway system.

Hawaii DOT Specific Questions

1. What role did the County's Multimodal Land Transportation Plan (MLTP) play in shaping the Federal Aid Highway 2035 Plan for the District of Kauai? Were specific policies or programs in the MLTP picked up and used in the Highways Plan?

HDOT staff recognizes the MLTP as a reasonable statement of where the County wants to go with transportation, but feels the States LRLTP is more realistic: "it is more feasible to spend money on highways."



HDOT feels the County's role is to address local traffic, while the State role is regional traffic. However, the state could participate in implementation of multimodal measures within towns. The state should be able to implement complete streets, but it is a "new animal" for HDOT. One example of progress: HDOT formerly defaulted to 12' lanes, but now will consider 11' lanes.

2. What role do you think the County's General Plan update should play in shaping future updates of the Federal Aid Highway Plan for the District of Kauai?

HDOT staff believes the Federal Highways plan should be based on the County's land use planning. There is not much opportunity to have the General Plan influence the LRLTP, because the federal aid highway plan will not be updated again for a long time.

3. Will the land use policies, objectives and socio-economic forecasts developed in the General Plan update shape future updates of the Federal-Aid Highways Transportation Plan for the District of Kauai? How?

HDOT staff indicated that the 2014 Long Range plan was reflective of the County General Plan at that time. They worked together with the County on the TAZ data. However, the LRLTP won't be updated again for many years, so the General Plan update will not impact the Federal Aid Highway Plan.

4. What is Hawaii DOT's role in helping Kauai grow its transit system?

HDOT staff reports that the new DOT director has asked that same question. HDOT staff feels that "each island is an island" and HDOT should defer to the Counties. There is support for the State having increased statewide funding to help the Counties match federal transit funds.

5. Should the State play a more direct role in county transit or should the State continue to focus on highway system investment?

It appears that HDOT is not actively interested in being involved in public transit system planning and development.

6. What effects will completion of the Kapaa Transportation Solutions Plan have on future planning and programming at Hawaii DOT? Is this just a project report, or does it have broader implications from the Hawaii DOT perspective?

With both HDOT and the County working on this staff feels it should be possible to implement the plan. The State won't have the \$600m for the full Kapaa bypass, but can make the more modest investments called for in the Kapaa Transportation Solutions Plan.



RESOURCES

Information sources relied on in the preparation of this report included:

Kauai Multimodal Land Transportation Plan (2013)

Kapaa Transportation Solutions (August, 2015)

Community Advisory Committee Meeting 11 Presentation (May 9, 2016)

Technology, Passenger Information, and Transit Service – Kauai Transit Feasibility Study (January, 2016)

Federal-Aid Highways 2035 Transportation Plan for the District of Kauai (July, 2014)

Issues and Opportunities – Kauai General Plan Update (September, 2015)

Updating the Vision for Kauai – Kauai County General Plan Update (version 3, July 2015)

Kauai General Plan Update: Socioeconomic Analysis and Forecasts (February 2014)

Complete Streets Indicators County of Kauai – 2014 Report (2014)

Lihue Community Plan (June, 2015)

South Kauai Community Plan (December, 2015)

