

Date: March 7, 2025

To: Windward Planning Commission

Fr: South Kohala Traffic Safety Committee

Subject: Draft General Plan

Aloha Chair and Members:

Recently at our February meeting of the South Kohala Traffic Safety Committee members of the community discussed the need to express our views about traffic in South Kohala. Following is a summary of the responses received after we solicited by email to over 400 contacts on our list of interested residents.

Mahalo for your consideration. We can provide names and contact information upon request.

Chair Gunner Mench, Kamuela
Vice-Chair Cindy Evans, Kamuela

RESPONSES

Number 1

The plan should include the goal of bypassing freight and general highway traffic from the cores of small towns like Waimea.

The intersection of Kawaihae Rd and Hawaii Belt Rd provides an example of a choke point for Hawaii island traffic.

All freight transportation from Kawaihae that is not going to Kona or N. Kohala goes up Kawaihae Road and winds up at this intersection. A large percentage of parents who need to take kids to and from Waimea School, HPA or Parker School pass through this intersection. The same is true of a large fraction of daily work traffic.

Traffic has changed Waimea and is transforming its character.

Another aspect that should be emphasized in prioritizing, justifying, and planning is safety, especially in emergencies like fire. Traffic breaks down when too many cars enter a chokepoint sometimes to the point it is literally faster to walk than drive. If there is a fire makai of my house, I will be trapped if Kawaihae Rd gets jammed, or an escape over Kohala Mountain Rd is blocked. It is possible to estimate the numbers of people who will be similarly trapped by traffic in different scenarios. Perhaps that is a metric that can help to justify provision of practical if not temporary emergency bypasses like in Waikoloa.

Number 2

The section of the draft GP that you attached to your message (4.2 Access and Mobility) does not address the primary concern of most residents in the Village which is the ability to escape the flames during a wildfire emergency, and to bring into the Village the first responders from the Puako fire and police stations needed to fight the fire.

The policies governing access needed to protect health and safety of residents during disaster events are addressed in Section 4.4 Public Facilities. Objective 32 sets out the policies we need to protect Village residents. Those include policies aimed at ensuring that Waikoloa Village will have a second access road --

32.h. Establish, map and maintain alternative and emergency evacuation routes in each high risk hazard area.

32.k. Develop and/or improve secondary access roads for those communities with only one means of ingress/egress.

32.20 Prioritize hazard mitigation projects in the CIP (Capital Improvement Plan).

Our primary concern with the Draft GP is that these policies are not implemented with proposed actions. We submitted comments last summer asking that a second access road be identified as a priority project with a schedule for implementation. The current Recommended Draft does not respond to that request.

The South Kohala Community Development Plan adopted in 2008 includes a chapter establishing priorities for Waikoloa Village.

The Waikoloa Village Plan added “action plans” and identified priority projects. Specifically, the Village Plan, at p. 93, identified “construction of a second access road to Queen Ka’ahu-manu Highway” as the first priority for the community, and adopted the following policy:

Waikoloa Policy 3. PROVIDE TRANSPORTATION AND CIRCULATION IMPROVEMENTS IN A TIMELY MANNER, including roadways, bikeways, and pedestrian paths, and with very high priority given to the construction of a second access road connecting Waikoloa Village to Queen Ka'ahumanu Highway.[1]

To implement this Policy, the Village Plan adopted "Strategy 3.1 Plan, Fund, and Construct a Second Access Road to Queen Ka'ahumanu Highway." [2]

The Plan explained why this road was flagged as a high priority project:

A second connecting road to Queen Ka'ahumanu Highway is a top priority, both to accommodate increasing traffic volumes and, perhaps more importantly, to provide a second emergency egress route for Waikoloa residents. If feasible, the new access road should also provide pedestrian and bicycle facilities. The preferred general alignment for this second access road is shown on the Waikoloa Village Concept Plan graphic.

The most significant type of natural disaster that threatens the Waikoloa community is the threat of wildfires. The area's dry climate, combined with the highly flammable introduced vegetation consisting primarily of fountain grass and kiawe trees, and the frequency of high winds make the Waikoloa area especially prone to large-scale wildfires. A 2003 brush fire threatened Waikoloa Village. The fire burned all the way up to the elementary school. Another major fire in August 2005 burned some 20,000 acres to the east and south of Waikoloa Village. That fire burned to the very edge of the Waikoloa Road/Paniolo Avenue intersection, the main intersection in Waikoloa Village. In the case of the 2005 fire, fire fighters were able to control and eventually extinguish the blaze without injuries to people or damage to structures. However, the fire threat is an ever-present danger for the Waikoloa community, and a second access/egress road may well prove to be the difference between successful evacuation of the Village and injuries and even loss of life.

Despite the adoption in 2008 of an action plan that identified the second access road as the highest priority project for Waikoloa Village, the project has not been funded in the CIP, or required to be constructed as a condition for the approval of new residential developments in the Village.

Now the Recommended Draft GP completely ignores the Community Development Plan. It does not recognize that the second access road has already been designated through the County Planning process as a "very high priority."

Section 6 Implementation describes the Phases of the 2045 Plan. During Phase 1 priority projects are to be implemented. But the GP fails to identify the second road for Waikoloa Village

as a priority project to be implemented during Phase 1 of the GP. This is the missing piece in the GP.

In section "6.3.1, Prioritization of Capital Improvement Projects," the Draft GP quotes the County charter: "Capital improvements shall be prioritized based on criteria aligned with the general plan, community development plans, emergency expenditures and other pertinent functional plans." Section 10-6(a)(2). But then goes no further to recognize priority projects identified in adopted community development plans.

We ask that the GP recognize that the SK Community Development Plan includes a chapter for Waikoloa Village that designates the second access arterial road as a "very high priority," and that it should be scheduled for implementation through the CIP during Phase I of the 2045 Plan.

We would appreciate your support by including these points in the comments submitted by the Traffic Safety Committee. We will be submitting comments directly to the Planning Commission asking that the draft plan be supplemented with additional language to ensure that the priority identified in the Community Development Plan be implemented.

Number 3

- a) Because 2 people have hit by cars and died walking/running on Kawaihae between Laelae and Opelo in the past 10 years create sidewalk barrier that runs on both sides of road from Kahawai to Opelo (it is my understanding sidewalk to be installed from Opelo to Spencer- why not extend it 2 blocks where deaths have already occurred from autos veering off road)
- b) Install barrier at bend just past Hospice on Kawaihae where cars going makai/west cut that curve and drive into shoulder almost hitting pedestrians walking to town (you can see paint worn and road bumps gone from drivers not driving in proper lane)
- c) Mandate all county and state roads have shoulder big enough to move my car over into it to allow for dangerous tailgating cars and cars wanting to speed and pass into oncoming traffic (like Kiholo accident 2/18/25 killing 2 Waimea residents).
- d) Put more crosswalks in Waimea Town- at Opelo/Kawaihae, at Kahawai/Kawaihae (Waimea Trails at end of Kahawai gets a lot of people crossing)
- e) Because Kawaihae Road was never meant to be a highway, mandate 3 lanes to accommodate turn out lanes all up and down Kawaihae. Kawaihae has too many cars causing traffic backed up for miles during am and pm commuting hours and special events-

f) ADD 2 NEW SUBDIVISIONS on South side of Kawaihae above Mauna Kea and below Waiula (self help housing) with minimum 2 cars per household traveling on a winding dangerous road - Needs total restructuring of this "highway"/old jeep road (reminds me of Tantalus on Oahu that would never accommodate the Matson trucks+ commuters+ school busses+ tourist that travel daily on Kawaihae

g) Put in bypass from Waimea Transfer Station road to Mamalahoa Hwy (up Lalamilo?) to pull traffic off Kawaihae just before town
That is about it

Number 4

a) Page 117, 20.b

Language is non-committal to problem of ingress and egress in neighborhoods of size. I suggest amend to read: Amend County Code design standards to eliminate neighborhoods of lots totally 50 or more, incrementally built out or not, with only one inlet or outlet.

b) Page 118, 22.3

Definition of vulnerable is not defined. In drought prone geographic areas the population is vulnerable. In a rural area with unsafe roads, for example, gravel or dirt, the population is vulnerable. In a area of flood hazards and volcanic hazard area the population is vulnerable. In areas where mass transit is unavailable, the population is vulnerable. Senior citizens who do not drive are vulnerable.

c) Page 121, Table 32

Insert a requirement to reevaluate and upgrade roads based on increased usage and in response to properties developed in the neighborhood or district. For example, Waikoloa Road is a primary road not a secondary road. Trucks from the PORTS, trucks from solid waste management, military convoys, Kohala Coast and North Kohala communities use Waikoloa Road to connect to Saddle Road.

d) Page 83. Comment on use of maps and planning director making land use decisions. Current General Plan is a vision of where growth and what kind of growth is envisioned. The language in this draft does not provide that kind of certainty on what to expect and how decisions will be made. For this reason I ask for unfavorable recommendation. For your information at the community meeting I attended to go over the draft the land use maps were not provided for public comment.