

April 7, 2025

Neil Azevedo
Department of Public Works Acting Director
101 Pauahi Street, Suite 7
Hilo, Hawai'i 96720

Dear Mr. Azevedo,

We are urging your support for this vital public safety concern. Thousands of Puna residents live in communities with only one access road. Still more communities with limited road connectivity are underserved and imperiled due to these conditions.

Since well before the adoption of the Puna Community Development Plan in 2008 Puna communities have been working on the problem of non-existent road connectivity between the Puna subdivisions. The situation was also outlined in the Puna Regional Circulation Plan of 2005.

In January of 2013 the Puna Community Development Plan Action Committee voted to establish the Connectivity and Emergency Response Subcommittee (CERS) to research Puna connectivity and recommend solution options for implementation by Hawaii County.

The Committee, working with Civil Defense, held two Puna Regional Emergency Preparedness (PREP) fairs in Kea'au that were attended by thousands of Puna residents. The main focus of the fair was the Mapping Room where attendees could participate in defining the limitations and options of connectivity in their own neighborhoods.

From data collected at the 2013 and 2014 PREP fairs a total of 49 points of subdivision connectivity were identified. Working with Department of Public Works a set of criteria for the possible development of Connectivity Locations (CLs) were identified and using these criteria the CLs were prioritized.

The reports on Puna Road Connectivity were presented to the County Council and at the request of Council Member Ilagan, an Ad-Hoc Committee was established by the Council to study and present a report back to the Council. This report was completed, submitted, and accepted by the Council.

An administration change then necessitated that the entire body of work be re-studied. Roy Takemoto chaired a four-year study of the exhaustive and substantial work already produced by the CERs and Ad-Hoc Committees. At the close of the Kim administration Roy Takemoto recommended that the report be implemented and turned it over to Planning.

An administration change then required that the entire project be re-established for the new mayor and department heads. Despite the mayor's support, none of the priorities were addressed by Department of Public Works.

Four years have passed, and we are once again presenting this significant body of work to the new administration urging the establishment of these critically needed emergency access routes be established between and withing the Puna subdivisions.

We have experienced multiple disasters affecting Hawaii and Maui Counties and must note that the lack of emergency connectivity has been a major issue in all of these incidents. The 2014 Pahoehoe lava flow, 2014 Hurricane Iselle, the 2018 eruption, and the Maui and Kona wild fire events have all demonstrated the necessity for communities to be able to evacuate in emergencies. We watched as Waikoloa was granted an emergency access route, and still, not one single point of connectivity has been established in Puna.

Many of our subdivisions have only one road in and out. Our first priority connectivity location (between Fern Acres and South Kopua Road), which could be completed for a very small cost, would provide an additional access route for **four** subdivisions!

It is long past time that the County of Hawaii begin to seriously address the emergency hazards faced by Puna residents. These small, inexpensive connector roads could enhance public safety and quality of life for thousands of Puna residents.

We encourage, no, implore you to study our reports and actively support the work to establish Puna Road Connectivity. It is time.

These are the first five Connectivity Locations (CLs):

- CL-14 Connects Fern Acres to Kopua Farmlots and Eden Roc via Plumeria creating an additional access for Eden Roc, Kopua Farmlots, Fern Acres, and Hawaiian Acres.
- CL-1 Connects between Fern Forest and Eden Roc subdivisions on Kaleponi creating an additional access for Fern Forest and Eden Roc. Additional access for the shared volunteer fire department.
- CL-2 Connects Eden Roc to Kopua Farmlots via Palainui Ave & Naia Street. Additional access to Hele On, and for first responders.
- CL-4 Connects Fern Acres to Hawaiian Acres between Plumeria and One Road. Additional access to Hele On and for first responders.
- CL-5 Connects Hawaiian Acres to Orchidland between Ola'a and Kuauili creating additional access for Orchidland and Hawaiian Acres.

Sincerely,

Patti Pinto
Puna Community Development Plan Action Committee, former Chairperson

Leilani DeMello
Chair Puna Community Development Plan Action Committee Chairperson