

The Maui News

Traffic flow could improve with a third 'contra-flow' lane on the pali

VIEWPOINT

The traffic situation in West Maui has become unbearable and is getting worse by the day. Forty percent of all the people who work in West Maui don't live there and commute over the pali every day.

SOCIAL SECURITY STINKS

TEXAS STATE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
BUREAU OF VITAL STATISTICS
STANDARD CERTIFICATE OF BIRTH

NAME OF CHILD: Arcan Acosta
DATE OF BIRTH: Apr 8 1969
TIME OF BIRTH: 7:07 P.M.
PLACE OF BIRTH: 733 S Campbell
FATHER: Mmanuel Acosta
MOTHER: Juanita Acosta

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Maui Airports District Manager Marvin Moniz told me that 38 wide-body planes and 50 interisland planes land on Maui daily. Certainly half of those visitors will end up in West Maui.

Also, there are now a significant number of housing and retail projects on the drawing board for West Maui that will add to the traffic woes for sure if nothing is done.

The Maui County website states that 80 percent of all jobs on Maui are now directly or indirectly related to the visitor industry. If the visitors

reach a point where getting to their destination in West Maui has become virtually impossible, they will go elsewhere, severely impacting both local jobs and visitor revenue.

The state Department of Transportation, supported by the governor, has publicly declared that it will not be building any major roads in Hawaii but rather use its funds for small infrastructure fixes. The state gets about \$150 million in federal highway funds annually and the DOT director has the discretion as to where that money will be spent.

Since Oahu has 90 percent of the population, it will get the lion's share of the money. Getting any major projects built on Maui becomes an ongoing uphill battle.

But let's look at the statistics: Oahu gets 5.6 million visitors a year while Maui gets 2.6 million, or almost half of Oahu's total with 10 percent of that island's population and infrastructure. In 2016, Oahu generated \$7.3 billion in visitor revenue while Maui generated \$5.4 billion. Those are telling numbers.

When former Gov. Neil Abercrombie was on Maui for the opening of the Lahaina bypass, I spoke with him one on one. He told me that as long as he was governor, all four phases of the Lahaina bypass, including the phase to Kaanapali, would be completed.

The new administration has stated that it does not have the funds and is not committed to completing the bypass despite the compelling statistics of what will happen if the bypass is not built.

Before the recent transportation meeting hosted by the Long Range Planning Division, I was able to talk with Deputy DOT Director Ed Sniffen.

A long, ongoing traffic discussion on Maui has been what do we do on the pali between Launiupoko and Maalaea. It has become a nightmare for residents and visitors alike.

Every time a traffic fix for the pali has been discussed (tunnel, light rail, four lanes, etc.), including three task force meetings of all stakeholders

exclusively devoted to finding a solution for the pali, the dollar figures to implement any of the ideas coming out of the task force have been daunting, upwards of a half a billion dollars or more. And that ended the discussion. Anything done on the pali, which is a state road, not county, would require 80 percent federal and 20 percent state funding. I do not see that happening anytime in the foreseeable future. It's just not going to happen. And the DOT agrees.

So, I made a suggestion to Mr. Sniffen for something we can do now, at a reasonable cost, that could work for us.

Have the DOT create a third "*contraflow*" lane on the pali. I believe there is space to be able to do this. That would mean there would be two lanes going north around the time that most of the planes land, and two lanes going south around the time in the afternoon that employees are leaving their jobs to go home.

Mr. Sniffen agreed that a third contraflow lane on the pali would be a workable solution that the DOT could implement.

But what about the tunnel?

Mr. Sniffen said he believes that DOT engineers could solve the tunnel problem.

The traffic situation in West Maui touches everybody. The state Legislature and executive branch on Oahu have to recognize that Maui is not just an "*outer island*" but a significant and outsized visitor destination and revenue producer. Our situation demands urgent action.

* Bob Pure is a Kaanapali resident and the former president of Lahaina Bypass Now action group.

COMMENTS