

Bill calls for second Puna road

Study would identify best site for access route

By Jason Armstrong
Tribune-Herald

Despite being the size of Oahu and undergoing skyrocketing growth, Puna has just one commuter road to the lower region, which is something the district's councilman hopes to change.

Puna Councilman Gary Safarik is seeking \$250,000 to identify the best location for a second commuter route between Pahoa and Keaau or Hilo.

"I think everybody in Puna doesn't disagree with this," Safarik said. "It's something that I've had in my mind ever since I was elected."

Safarik, who took office 17 months ago, said the limitation of having just one highway from lower Puna again became obvious April 9.

A fatal traffic accident that day resulted in both lanes of Highway 130 being closed for four hours during the morning rush hour.

Police routed some cars through Ainaloa Boulevard and Hawaiian Acres to Kurtistown, but hundreds of other motorists were forced to wait until the highway was opened.

More than 18,000 people travel Highway 130 each day, according to a project justification attached to the bill Safarik has authored.



SAFARIK

level, causing severe delays and preventing safe transit from affected areas," states the document accompanying the bill.

To improve the situation, Safarik is proposing to amend the county's capital improvements budget to include a \$250,000 appropriation for a road study.

The County Council's Finance Committee is scheduled to discuss the bill during its 10 a.m. meeting April 30 in Hilo.

Often called a "wish list" by lawmakers, the CIP budget does not have any money, but rather names projects the mayor may build if funding becomes available through loans or other sources.

Safarik said he hopes the county can use federal grants to pay for the study.

Federal and state money also would be key sources to pay for a road — if one is ever approved — that would cost an estimated \$8 million to \$10 million, he said.

Those figures could be a little optimistic based on the cost

"During traffic accidents, construction projects, flooding and other civil defense emergencies, congestion along Highway 130 reaches a near-critical

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of the recently opened Mohouli Street extension in Hilo. The county spent \$9.4 million building the two-lane, 1.4-mile road.

Before taking a position on whether to spend money studying where to build a Puna road, Mayor Harry Kim said Monday that he will review the county's 1995 Puna Community Development Plan.

"First of all, I need to get background on what studies have been done or not done before I can comment on this," Kim said.

Railroad Avenue, a fragmented roadway which cuts through the middle of Hawaiian Paradise Park and then continues behind Prince Kuhio Plaza,

would be a good location for a new commuter route, Safarik said.

Another viable route would be mauka of both Ainaloa and Orchidland subdivisions, he said.

Safarik added that he would like to see access be from the Pahoa Bypass Road rather than from the interior of a subdivision.

Puna's population grew by 50.8 percent from 1990 to 2000, the fastest of any Big Island district, according to the latest census.

More than 31,000 people — about one in five Big Island residents — reported living in the district as of April 2000.