

**Central Oahu Sustainable Communities Plan Review
Agricultural Discussion Group
Notes from November 5, 2008 meeting**

Present:

Alan Arakawa	A & B Properties, Waiawa Ridge Development
Tom Fee	Helber Hastert & Fee
Nestor Garcia	City Council
Dean Hazama	NB # 35
Tony Herrmann	Monsanto
Ray Kunishige	Castle & Cooke
Dean Minakami	Castle & Cooke
Sean Newcamp	Carpenters' Union
Richard Oshiro	Waipahu NB
Kiyomi Oyama	City and County, Public Transit
Alan Suwa	Mililani resident
Glenn Yasui	State Department of Transportation
Lance Yoshimura	Carpenters' Union
Pam Young	NB # 35
Kathy Sokugawa	City and County Department of Planning and Permitting
John Kirkpatrick	Belt Collins Hawaii
Noa Ching	Belt Collins Hawaii
Mike Lim	Belt Collins Hawaii

SUMMARY:

This was a broad discussion of transportation policy. All present were interested in improving mobility both within Central Oahu and between Central Oahu and the Primary Urban Center. Several speakers recognized that funds are limited, so the City and State will need to find new ways to improve transportation. Participants expressed support for rapid transit and interest in finding ways to make rapid transit accessible and attractive to residents of communities throughout Central Oahu.

Participants were interested in finding additional ways to improve traffic flow or make sure that new development does not lead to increased congestion. These could include:

- Cooperation between City and State and among government, developers, and community groups in planning;
- Projects to link mauka communities to rail transit. The City's plan for a flyover from H2 to the Pearl Highlands transit stop was welcome. Some want to see continuing plans for a rail spur going up the hill.
- Encouragement for job-creation in Central Oahu (including mixed-use zoning or relaxation of rules that limit the range of occupants at Mililani Tech Park);

- Planning based on the trips people actually take, not just single-destination commuting;

Tom Fee introduced the Oahu Bike Plan now under way.

The discussion turned to the issue of sustainability. The starting point for the Sustainable Communities plan is the General Plan, which calls for continuing wellbeing and prosperity for residents, and for maintaining environmental quality. Sustainability involves respect for land uses. Transportation solutions have to respect adjoining land uses.

At the end, the sustainability issue was very much unresolved. Your help in moving us forward will be very much welcome. Please send your thoughts to centraloahu@beltcollins.com on:

1. The SCP currently says little about sustainability but focuses on community wellbeing and transportation. We have already heard very clearly that Central Oahu includes key agricultural lands, and this land use needs to be protected for future generations. Equally, we heard that Central Oahu communities should be more than bedroom suburbs. Do we need to say more about sustainability, or should we focus on identifying ways to support community life and agriculture?
2. Given limited resources for new infrastructure, what's most important? (We presume that rapid transit is going to happen – what's next?)

Please send any corrections to these notes to centraloahu@beltcollins.com within a week after you get this, so we can post the corrected notes (without speaker names) on the website (www.beltcollins.com/centraloahu).

GROUP MEMORY:

The main question tonight is: does the vision of Central Oahu (CO) still work? Want to focus on transportation for this meeting. How can we plan now to move ahead?

What specific projects can we look at to address transportation issues, i.e. how will congestion in CO will be taken care of?

Rail opponents say that the rail won't work; traffic congestion would not improve. These opponents were mainly located on the windward side. If rail will not relieve congestion, what will? Development should move to the windward side in Kailua and Kaneohe, where traffic infrastructure is better. Commuting times in Kailua and Kaneohe to town during rush hour are only 20 minutes.

Not sure that there is much to say on that in this meeting.

This issue is a long term issue. The possibility of moving development to the windward side has been discussed by members of the council, especially if the rail vote failed. However, mobility also goes with land use. We need to consider mobility, access and circulation. But tonight we are talking about sustainability of Central Oahu.

If last night's vote actually went against rail, would the project actually die?

No. It would only mean we would have to look at another technology. It would not quickly die out.

The Mayor's office did a press release on the draft EIS. In the DEIS, it is estimated that without rail, traffic congestion will be 43% greater than today. So rail does affect congestion.

Also want to point out that the rail project is not the only transportation solution, as envisioned by the development plans. Rapid transit (not limited to steel on steel) is part of the Ewa Development Plan, as well as the Central Oahu Sustainable Communities Plan. However, these plans do not dictate the date when a rapid transit system should be in place.

There will be a healthy ridership at least during rush hour.

Rail will not solve all our problems but need integration of all modes.

Really want the spur *in Central Oahu*. Need to keep on pushing for development of the spur now. Maybe not for us, but for the next generation.

Rail will not solve all the problems. Rail is about choice, not anti-car. Part of the rail plan includes improvements (Waiawa interchange) of all other roads, especially ones that will connect to the rail. The rail is the "spine" of CO, and DOT is planning on improving all types of transportation to connect to the rail system.

We need to look at new ideas. SLUG is a project in Washington DC that organizes hitchhiking as part of the transportation system.

We also need to realize what local residents need. "Trip chaining," when people make multiple trips during the work day (drop kids off to school, go to work, after school pick up kids and drop them off at soccer practice). Many people are dependent on cars and will never use rail during the weekdays. That's why they voted against it. But people want to have a choice. Whether by bus, rail, car, or bike; all modes of transportation should be available and relatively efficient.

Need to have spurs from Mililani, to UH. We need the whole rail system/alignment. We can't stop development, so we need to keep up and proceed with traffic improvements. The rail opponents won't stop. Look at how long H-3 took to build.

DOT is committed to make H-1 work w/ various improvements. DTS is planning a flyover from H-2 to connect to Pearl Highlands transit center.

Let's get back on track. At the last meeting held in Mililani, members from various agencies gave status reports on what they were doing. DPP staff talked about how over recent years DPP has addressed "concurrency", the issue that infrastructure is there to support development on a timely basis. Example: having traffic studies updated at each increment of development.

As big projects come in for zoning, DPP is getting more involved in the timing of land use developments and infrastructure. Recent rezonings in Ewa require updated traffic impact analyses every 2 years to determine if and when planned traffic improvements are necessary, and whether new ones are needed.

Connectivity is increasingly seen as an important part of land use planning.

Question to Kathy: Are cul-du-sacs still feasible?

Yes. We recognize that they may be more marketable. Under the subdivision process, we accept cul-du-sac streets but not dead end streets, there's a difference.

Idea of transportation has been at the heart of the plan for many years. There are vision elements of the plan: Central O'ahu will be developed with a transportation system: How does the vision for Central O'ahu need to be changed?

Please change all references in the SCP from "Traffic Calming" to "Traffic Engineering" instead. DTS now uses the latter term.

How do you improve traffic? Are there any assurances or definite plans that the state will meet transportation issues?

The vision statements may be okay, but how do they get implemented? What is the status on HOT lanes? What is DOT's position on it? Can it be done or not? If it can be done, why isn't it?

What are the other projects that are going to supplement rail to address congestion? More zipper lanes?

Is there a standard of an acceptable level of traffic improvement for people in Central O'ahu? What is a good standard to try and achieve?

Clearly, we need coordination of state and county efforts, and coordination between rail and other modes of travel. People do get together and cooperate between city and state. City, state, and developers need to cooperate, especially now.

What would make you happy in terms of transportation in CO?

We worked hard to develop the Kunia interchange, which cost \$30 million. It's beautiful, but it leads to a standstill on the freeway.

Transportation coordination occurs at OMPO and with the ORTP 2035 underway. He is OMPO's Policy Committee Chair.

The state will do whatever it has to do. We are looking at the system as a whole, at developing traffic management strategies to move people more effectively. The next Zip lane may be a dedicated lane that is bidirectional, used as zip in one direction in the morning, then in the other for the evening rush hour. Only in the discussion stages are new ideas such as express service lanes, fewer off/on ramps. There are other ideas out there, such as congestion pricing, but that comes close to punishing people for driving, and in Hawaii, we aren't going in that direction.

For Mililani Mauka there is a project called Central Mauka Road. It is on the ORTP list, but it is in the long term category. We can't assume it will be built any time soon.

We don't want to solve traffic problems by paving their way out. There are other traffic solutions that do not require new major structures, but make adjustments to existing resources and technologies, or dampening demand. There are very limited traffic funds to go around, especially for new construction. We cannot depend on federal funds for future traffic improvements.

Everyone is analyzing "traffic congestion." What does "traffic congestion" mean? Depending on where you live, "traffic congestion" has a different meaning. The term "congestion" is loosely used. Maybe some attitudes will have to shift, as congestion is a relative term; e.g. West Coast commute times versus Hilo peak hour characteristics.

People complain about the price of gas...but inevitably end up buying it anyways. This might be what will happen to the traffic situation in CO. The reality is that traffic in CO will always be there, and people need to get used to at least a moderate level of traffic. The price of homes out in CO is a lot cheaper than prices in Manoa or downtown, and you have to take the good with the bad.

A hopeful possibility in 20 to 30 years is that a large portion of drivers from the baby boomer era will be too old to drive. The increase in traffic from now to 2035 may be lower than projected.

Not many schools are projected to be built in CO right now. It is hard to time the building of schools to meet new developments.

The city or developers need to disclose these transportation issues to prospective buyers on development projects. Buyers should be told how long it takes to get to town during rush hour.

There needs to be a middle range between shutting down projected projects for the sake of reducing traffic and simply allowing them without adequate infrastructure. . Need to allow home growth to meet demand.

Projected increase of population 11-13 percent. Note that City is increasingly pushing developers to create communities that meet residents' needs on-site. We're asking for day care, church sites within the community.

We are not meeting the demand for housing. Because demand is greater than supply, the prices are high. All this is market driven.

The market can work both ways – right now, people aren't flocking to affordable for sale condos at Plantation Town Apts.; they can't get mortgages.

Councilmember Garcia has a proposal to look at housing options to the east side of the island. But prefer not to have region vs. region. East vs West. Should we share the development between other areas beside CO?

Community vs. community happens sometimes and you can't do anything about it.

There are no major roadway projects planned for the Windward side. After H-3, that's it.

No projects in Kapolei either. If you are inclined to keep expanding Kapolei, there is nothing in the books to increase traffic improvements.

If you move some development to the windward side, you will also be stuck with moving the limited traffic funds to the windward side.

Current traffic solutions like the zipper lane might not be around for long.

To respond to John's question about what would make people happy with respect to transportation, would the availability of more jobs in Central Oahu be an acceptable approach to help address commuter traffic? How successful is the Mililani High Tech Park?

I'm told the Park isn't attracting businesses because there are no supporting infrastructure/services. There are no restaurants, attorneys' offices, or other businesses that professional companies need to operate. Need to build up infrastructure/services first before professional businesses will be attracted to the park.

Someone brought up the need of mix use zoning to get jobs in the communities. Also, the jobs just can't be minimum wage (retail, service) – needs to include professional (higher wages).

Kapolei doesn't have enough jobs in the region as is.

CO will eventually have just as much people as Kapolei. We can't just build there and not take care of the infrastructure.

CO shouldn't just be a "bedroom community"; should be encouraging private schools, and universities.

Do people want a full range of available jobs in CO? Zoning and developers can provide the flexibility to provide a wide variety of jobs to meet community needs. However, it is also up to the private sector to buy or lease constructed space.

Zoning restrictions in High Tech Park are pretty high. Ex. You can't build a restaurant.

DPP is now looking at "complete communities" when reviewing development proposals – not just housing and commercial areas, but day-care and meeting (church) facilities.

Tom Fee of Helber, Hastert & Fee, consultant to DTS, was asked to introduce Oahu Bike Plan (www.OahuBikePlan.org):

We are about halfway through updating the plan. Still in talks with communities to get an idea of their biking needs. A draft should be out next spring.

There are pockets of people who do bike, then there are "latent" pockets of people who would like to bike but are afraid or don't want to deal with unsafe paths/roads.

Policies and Programs:

- Clean roads are important for bike safety.
- Access to downtown and other high priority destinations should be easy and safe.
- Commuters need to be convinced to bike instead of drive.
- Buses and future rail need to be bike-friendly.
- Bikes must be integrated with public transportation (become part of the multi-modal transportation); make sure the network and facilities are there.

Bike planning is in the 3rd or 4th generation already. A lot of planning has been done already. Want to start actually doing things, and will be coming up with big ideas for the next 5 years.

As is done in Vancouver's Skytrain, there should be a dedicated bike lane directly under the rail. The bikes would not have to deal with cars. This should at least be developed for Waipahu since it has a long biking history.

In Mililani Tech Park, is there bike access?

There are segments, but not a continuous path from the Tech Park to Kamehameha Highway.

Some companies also strongly encourage their employees to ride bikes or take the bus. Example: Microsoft. Do we want the bike to become a part of the community? Do we need bike stands for every shopping center? People in downtown use bikes more than people in the rural areas.

A circle bike path in Oahu would be good for sport tourism.

What does “sustainable” mean? CO is not just Mililani and Waipahu; there are other communities like farmers on Kunia Road that “sustainable” has a different meaning. When they first coined the term “sustainable,” what did it mean back then, and how has it changed now?

Would prefer communities define *sustainable*, not DPP.

The General Plan defines “sustainability” in terms of population guidelines that keep outlying areas “country,” preserving the landscape for future generations.

There is a tension on the use of Kunia Road, where the agricultural community wants the road to be a local, farm vehicle road and not high speed access to Schofield.

Kunia road: want to develop west side of road as agriculture. Have 3 seed companies, HARC, and other various companies. Short term improvements: wants Ananui street opened up so we can access our property; another access point -- stoplight – where there’s access to Syngenta and Jefts properties on either side of Kunia road. Local farm traffic is an issue because cane haul roads no longer serve as local streets; they no longer belong to a single entity.

Seed Companies: \$140 million industry in Hawaii with 6 companies on 4 islands. There are high paying jobs available in the seed industry. Wants access for agricultural vehicles, workers to Kunia Road.

Seed companies purchased 5,000 acres for seed development. In the future, how can we coexist? Seed companies are becoming the next sugar and pine.

It may be more important to define livable communities, rather than sustainable communities.

CO is split up into various communities with their own needs and agenda, but the CO plan is only 1 plan. How can we speak for the entire region?

What is “sustainable” for agriculture – having fields in use, supplying food for local market? That’s very different from “sustainable” for planned communities.

To encourage businesses to move out to CO, reducing costs are key.

Are people willing to pay more for their house if a part of the money will be used for infrastructure to their own neighborhood? This would ensure some level of infrastructure will be in place for new communities. An example is the Ewa Highway Impact Fee program - idea of concurrency that as houses are built, infrastructure will be there at the same time (or close enough). This “surcharge” is added to the cost of housing that will be used to pay for specific infrastructure improvements needed by that community.

That just adds up more costs to the project. If a project becomes too expensive on paper, it doesn't get built at all. Prices go up and nothing good happens.

The private sector wants incentives, but above all, certainty.

Transportation and land use go hand in hand.

Instead of looking at communities, maybe should look at functions; creating incentives and price-sensitive controls.

We at BCH will write up these notes for review by participants, and will add some questions that come out of the discussion, for you all to react to. [see beginning]
Thanks!