

# VIEWS

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OUR VIEW

## TURTLE BEACH

### Laniakea traffic needs controls

In early 2000, when a few turtles began hauling out at the North Shore's Laniakea Beach, wildlife officials started getting calls from people who thought the honu were in distress. To the contrary, they were closer to blissed-out, having claimed a new hangout in a relatively safe cove with plenty of limu in the near-shore waters.

As more turtles turned up — officials estimated that the cove had up to 80 regulars by summer 2005 — more camera-toting tourists turned up, too. NOAA's Marine Turtle Research Program initiated a "Show Turtles Aloha" campaign, directing visitors to avoid harassment of the threatened species. The nonprofit Malama na Honu continues to safeguard the turtles.

But since Laniakea — previously known as a relatively quiet launch site for surfers and others paddling to surf breaks — is not a formal beach park, it has no parking lot or other facilities to accommodate crowds.

The upshot, for much of at least 15 years now, is routine haphazard vehicle parking along the mauka side of Kamehameha Highway, which edges the beach. And since there is no crosswalk, traffic light or any other significant traffic control measure in place, beachgoers cross the narrow highway in an unsafe manner.

On Thursday afternoon, a car hit and seriously injured a 10-year-old boy crossing the highway. Sadly, the accident underscores the longstanding presence of an uncontrolled public safety hazard. Government officials need to work in tandem with the North Shore community to swiftly install at least a temporary traffic control safeguard that lends more predictability to the flow of vehicular and foot traffic.

The state Department of Transportation's attempts, over a span of several years, to improve traffic safety in the area have yielded mixed results. DOT must continue to push for long-term fixes, including a much-needed roadway realignment, which holds potential make room for parking and greatly improve safety conditions.

In late 2013, DOT installed a concrete barrier — about 1,000 feet long — on the mauka side of the highway. Supporters maintained that the move reduced vehicle-pedestrian problems by easing the often-clogged flow of traffic between Haleiwa and Turtle Bay. But opponents argued that the barrier essentially blocked beach access. A year and half after installation, a group secured a court-ordered injunction to have it removed.

In that case, Circuit Court Judge Gary Chang's order said the barrier was "obliterating" beach access in an area where access was already constrained amid rising demand. That view is debatable.

After all, no one was ever denied opportunity to set foot on the public beach. With the barrier blocking dozens of previously makeshift parking places, beachgoers were simply denied access to across-the-road parking to mitigate a growing traffic-safety problem — a problem that must be solved.

In the aftermath of Chang's ruling, the state has rightly continued to seek permitting that could open the door to re-installing the barrier, while also weighing options for realignment that would move a stretch of the highway farther inland. The DOT's preferred option would cost \$65 million and move the highway out of an erosion inundation zone, while barrier opponents recommended a more limited, less expensive option.

However, due in part to land ownership snags, needed environmental clearances and scant government funding, progress has been slow going.

In the meantime, the North Shore has been feeling the effects of several years of record-breaking visitor arrivals, along with growing climate change concerns tied to sea level rise. Moving forward, safety-related upgrades at Laniakea should rank as both a short-term and long-term priority.