

North Shore

7/3/06 HSB

Community leaders say a new inland route would help traffic and the famous, fragile coast

By Susan Essoyan
sessoyan@starbulletin.com

Half of all Oahu visitors go to the North Shore, and the first beach they come to is Laniakea, where traffic often slams to a stop at the sight of turquoise surf just yards away and pedestrians

crossing the highway.

Concerned about traffic, safety and access for emergency vehicles, the North Shore Neighborhood Board wants to reroute Kamehameha Highway inland or build a bypass from Laniakea past Chun's Reef and Kawailoa Beach.

The proposal has caught the imagination of residents frustrated by the traffic bottleneck as well as coastal experts, who want to restore the natural shoreline at Laniakea, known for its surf break and basking sea turtles.

"It's just a fantastic opportunity, if it can be pulled off," said Sam Lemmo, head of the office of conservation and coastal

Please see Laniakea, A6

touts new road

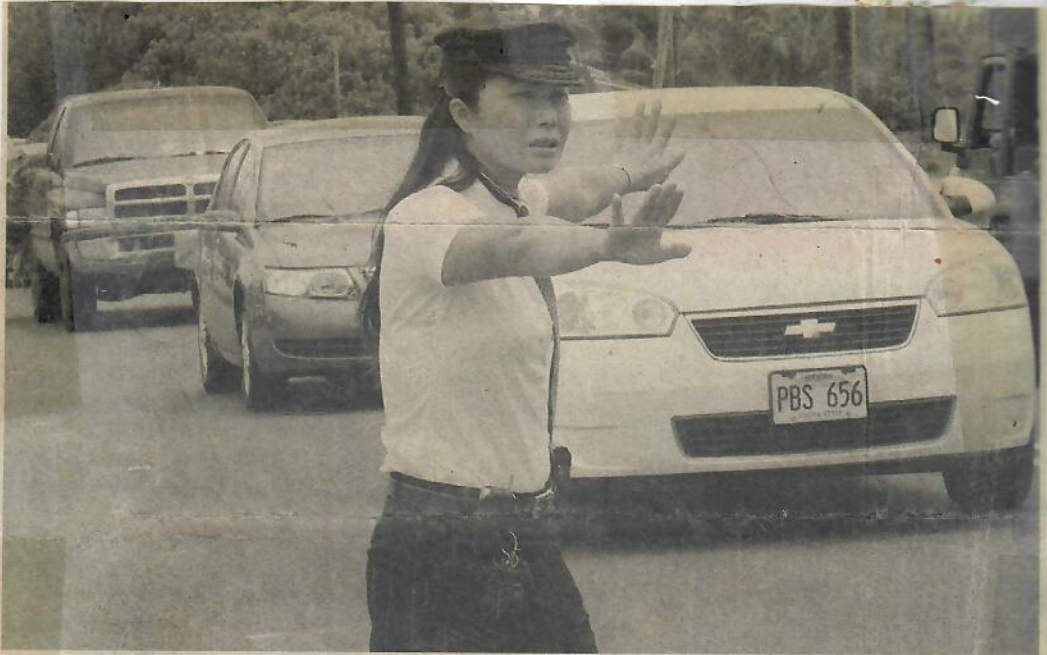


Pedestrians crossed Kamehameha Highway at Laniakea Beach on the North Shore on Saturday. A proposal to reroute the busy stretch inland is being considered to ease traffic and improve public safety.

CINDY ELLEN RUSSELL /
CRUSSELL@STARBULLETIN.COM

221

Subject: ...
From: ...
To: ...



CINDY ELLEN RUSSELL / CRUSSELL@STARBULLETIN.COM

Limousine chauffeur Jennifer Ryu stopped traffic Saturday to help her customers cross Kamehameha Highway after a stop at Laniakea Beach.

Laniakea: Oahu planning agency has \$1.9M that could be reallocated

Continued From A1

lands for the state Department of Land and Natural Resources.

"It's a rare opportunity to actually reverse the trend of beach loss and loss of our beautiful coastal areas," he said. "It would be a real legacy for future generations."

The proposal, however, has gone nowhere at the state Department of Transportation, which controls the highway. The Neighborhood Board sent a letter on Dec. 5 to Transportation Director Rodney Haraga, with maps of different options, asking for feedback on what might be workable. Last week, the board was still awaiting an official response.

"There is no funding and it's not in the plans," Haraga told the Star-Bulletin on Wednesday. He said he had talked to board members at a meeting early this year, and that he thought a response letter had been sent to the board. A staff member said Thursday that one was being drafted.

Haraga said the project must

compete against other transportation priorities, and would have to clear many hurdles, including acquiring government approval, property, and rights of way, along with environmental studies.

The proposed new road would jog inland 200 feet or so, then run parallel to the old highway for half a mile or more through pasture and agricultural land owned largely by Kamehameha Schools. Access to the beach and homes at Pohakuloa Way would be limited to local traffic if the highway were realigned.

The city has already obtained a three-acre parcel of land mauka of the highway to create beach parking and restrooms for Laniakea. An environmental assessment for that project strongly urged that the highway be moved inland, so that the facilities would instead fall on the makai side and beachgoers would no longer have to cross the highway on foot.

A bigger beach park would also allow the dynamic shoreline

to undulate naturally with the seasons, rather than having waves and sand hit the highway, eroding the beach and endangering travelers.

"It could be a model shoreline restoration project," said Carol Philips, a North Shore Neighborhood Board officer. "If you were to relocate the highway, it could alleviate traffic and improve safety and access to the beach. The other thing is that there are no homes in the path of the new road, so you're not relocating anybody. That's a really big issue in the overall picture."

The North Shore Chamber of Commerce is joining forces with the neighborhood board to back the highway realignment or bypass, and has been working with state legislators and others to push it forward, said chamber President Kalani Fronda.

The major landowner, Kamehameha Schools, is also ready to explore the idea, according to Fronda, who also happens to be Kamehameha Schools' land asset manager for Haleiwa. "We're open to discussion," he said. "We're willing as an institution to work with the community as well as the government on improving traffic."

Haraga said the Transportation

Department has to juggle requests from many communities with traffic complaints. To help set priorities and ensure fair treatment, projects must get the approval of the Citizens Advisory Committee of the Oahu Metropolitan Planning Organization.

Gil Riviere, who chairs the Traffic and Transportation Committee of the North Shore Neighborhood Board, is also a member of that Citizens Advisory Committee. He said OMPO's budget already sets aside money to deal with coastal erosion in the Laniakea and Kawaiiloa area, and it would make more sense to use the funds for a long-term solution.

"Right in the existing budget plan there's \$600,000 budgeted to design a new bridge in the exact same place at Laniakea, and \$1.3 million for coastal erosion protection to protect the highways in the Kawaiiloa area against wave action — basically

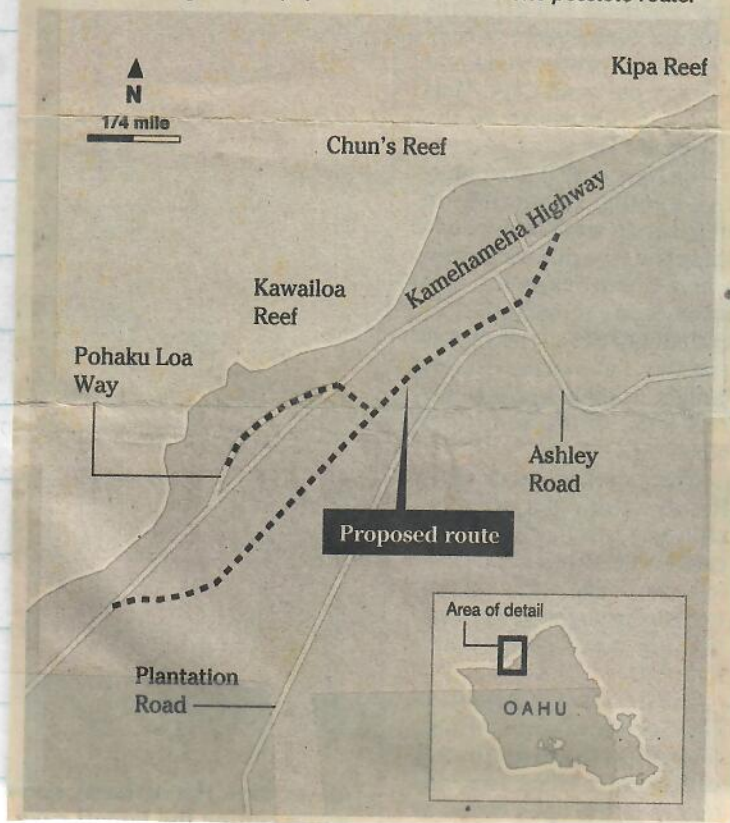
to keep the road in the same place," Riviere said. "Our (OMPO) Transportation Improvement Program subcommittee is recommending to the Citizens Advisory Committee that the two projects be reallocated for design and consideration of the realignment or bypass."

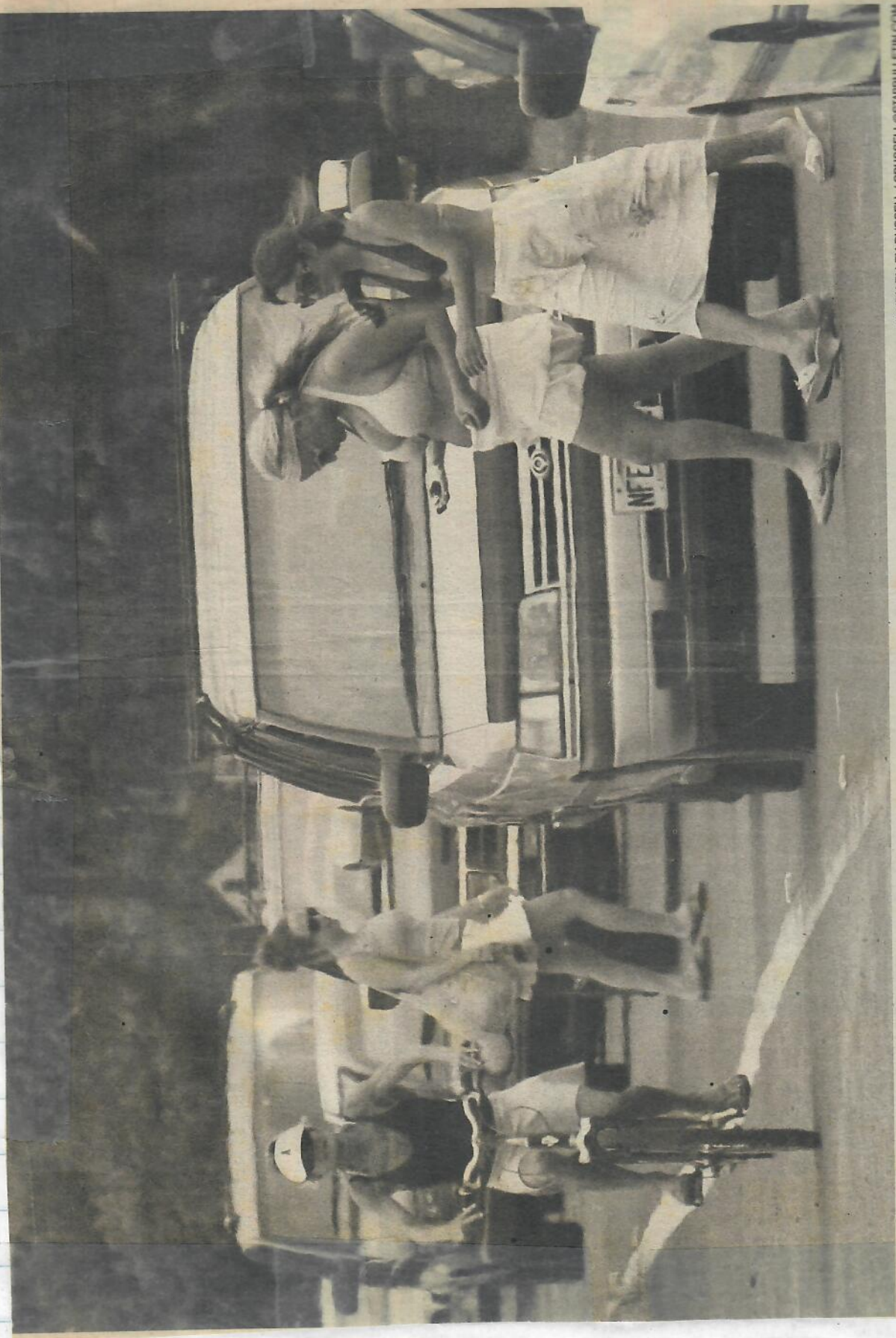
City Council Chairman Donovan Dela Cruz, who represents the North Shore, said Kamehameha Highway is dangerously close to the ocean in many parts of his district, and should be moved inland when practical.

"I think the priority would be protecting the beach from further erosion," he said. "There are sections of the beach that have eroded so much that the only thing separating the ocean from the highway are boulders. It's not safe for the drivers either. If we don't do something now, then we may be at risk of losing sections of the road."

NORTH SHORE BOTTLENECK

The North Shore Neighborhood Board is proposing a rerouting or bypass of Kamehameha Highway near Laniakea Beach, which has become a traffic bottleneck. The plan could improve traffic flow, enhance the coastline and protect pedestrians, who now walk across the highway to get to the popular beach. Here is one possible route.





CINDY ELLEN RUSSELL / CRUSSELL@STARRBULLETIN.COM

Traffic on Kamehameha Highway typically slows to a crawl at Laniakea Beach, where the fabled North Shore surf and ubiquitous Hawaiian green sea turtles pose tantalizing attractions. Community members and coastal zone managers say both traffic and the shoreline would benefit from a road further inland.