



UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII SYSTEM

Legislative Testimony

Testimony Presented Before the
House Committee on Higher Education
January 29, 2009 at 2:00pm

by

John Morton

Vice President for Community Colleges, University of Hawai'i

HB 85 – RELATING TO LEEWARD COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Chair Chang, Vice Chair Nakashima, and Members of the Committee:

Leeward Community College supports the efforts made by Representatives Takumi and Aquino on behalf of the College and endorses the proposed legislation of HB 85. This measure would appropriate funding necessary for the planning, design and construction of a second access road to the Leeward campus and surrounding residential neighborhoods.

The Second Access Road project at Leeward CC is part of the campus' Long Range Development Plan (LRDP). This specific project was identified in the initial 1966 Master Plan for the College and was recommended to be completed prior to 1971 when the campus became fully operational. In 1974, the Department of Accounting and General Services (DAGS) completed construction plans and an Environmental Impact Statement for this project. Subsequently, CIP funds were awarded to the State Department of Transportation (DOT) in 2002 by the Legislature with construction slated to begin in 2004 but the project never materialized. It has now been more than 40 years since this project was identified as a critical need for the campus and the surrounding communities and to date the project has yet to be completed.

In January 2008, the State DOT completed the Second Access Road Environmental Assessment (EA) and issued a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI). The Wilson Okamoto Corporation, a consultant working on behalf of the State DOT, was paid nearly \$800,000 by the State DOT to conduct the EA study. The Second Access Road would be approximately one mile in length and would connect the existing Ala Ike road that fronts the Leeward CC campus and extend this roadway makai to the southern boundary of the campus and then turn in an Ewa direction running on the makai side of the Navy Drum Storage Facility site and Waipahu High School and ultimately connecting to the Waipio Point Access Road. The EA study estimates the total project cost to be \$17 million.

The same concerns and issues that have been continuously raised since the identification of this project still exist, but have only been further exacerbated (i.e. traffic congestion, pedestrian and bicycle health and safety, lack of emergency evacuation egress points, deteriorating conditions of existing roadways). This is especially true since Leeward CC has seen unprecedented enrollment growth occur over the past two years. Fall 2008 enrollment at the campus was at record level of nearly 7,000 students. Traffic congestion is worsening as Ala Ike and Waiawa Roads are frequently backed up for its entire one mile length to the intersection of Farrington Highway. The viewpoint held by many is that it is only a matter of time, not if, a tragic natural or man-made incident will occur that could have been avoided had this project not been delayed. Several incidents over the past couple of years provide adequate evidence of this point. For instance, two years ago a military truck hit an overpass on the westbound H1 freeway that closed the highway for literally hours. Had that military truck hit the Waiawa Road overpass that serves as the only access point to the Leeward CC campus and surrounding neighborhood, thousands of students, staff, and residents would have been effectively stranded on the makai side of H1. In the spring of 2007, a contractor working on a water line project accidentally broke a natural gas line feeding the campus science labs and the resulting gas leak required a partial evacuation of campus. Luckily, this incident occurred in the late afternoon when most classes had concluded for the day and the evacuation proceeded relatively smoothly. But had this incident occurred during the morning or early afternoon or had the emergency been more profound, then the safe evacuation of the campus and adjoining residential neighborhood may well have been compromised. Other incidents, namely the earthquake and resulting blackout in October 2006 would have been a logistical challenge if it had occurred during the school week.

Adding further justification to the need of a second access road is related to the City and County's planned rail system. Leeward CC is to be the site of a transit stop for the rail system. The adjoining Navy Drum Storage Facility site to the Ewa side of campus is planned as the rail system's base yard maintenance operations center. The current roadway infrastructure (Waiawa Road and Ala Ike Road) does not support the vehicular and pedestrian traffic that is required for these projects. To the credit of the City and County rail planning officials, their preliminary plans include making roadway improvements to/from the base yard maintenance operations center. These costs are included in the rail project. However, those roadway improvements would terminate at the Ewa boundary of the Navy Drum Storage Facility site, which is approximately one half the length of the Second Access Road project. Based upon the total project cost of \$17 million for the Second Access Road, that would effectively leave a funding gap of approximately \$8.5 million in order to complete the project. Leeward CC would propose that the \$8.5 million necessary to complete the Second Access Road project be designated as CIP funds in the University of Hawaii budget in order to avoid many jurisdictional issues between the State DOT, the City and County, and the University of Hawaii. This was also the concluding recommendation in the State DOT Environmental Assessment study of the project.

Leeward CC is by no means the only beneficiary of the Second Access Road project. This project is also of strategic and regional importance in terms of facilitating the infrastructure needs related to many planned State and City and County initiatives in our neighboring communities. In addition to serving the approximate 7,000 students, faculty, and staff of the campus, this project is critical to the Department of Education's planned expansion at Waipahu High School. It will provide access to the future development of the Pearl Harbor Middle Loch Park, and it will provide much improved recreational access to the Pearl Harbor Historic Trail corridor which would become a much more visible community asset to Oahu residents and visitors. This project is also avidly supported by the Pearl City Neighborhood Board.

A second access road would certainly ease the severe vehicle congestion at several critical periods of each day by providing an alternative access point to/from the campus. The neighborhood and surrounding communities adjacent to the campus would also feel traffic relief as well. In addition, pedestrian, vehicle, mass transit, and bicycle health and safety issues would be addressed with the addition of curbs, sidewalks, and lighting as roadway improvements are made. Alternative transportation modes to/from campus would be more fully supported by these same roadway improvements. The Leeward CC campus would have a more welcome accessibility option to students, staff, and visitors who frequent the campus for classes and special events which is especially important at a higher education facility where there is a constant turnover in users. Leeward CC views this not only as a critical need, but a roadway that will serve the best interests of the Pearl City, Waipahu, and other surrounding communities.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of HB 85.