

Road repairs continue as usual

By [Stephanie Shinno The Garden Island](#) | Friday, May 22, 2020, 12:05 a.m.

Share this story



Stephanie Shinno / The Garden Island

In Kapaia, at the intersection of Ma'alo Road and Kuhio Highway, construction work is coned off.

LIHU'E — The state Department of Transportation is poised to identify shovel-ready projects on Kaua'i and other islands should more federal funding be directed toward the Highways Division during the pandemic.

A DOT spokesperson, though, has confirmed that, currently, no extra money has come through for highway and road repairs throughout the islands.

So no new projects have been added to the list for county or state roads for the calendar year.

Nationally, some nonprofits, like the transportation research group TRIP (The Road Information Program), are looking into America's rural transportation system and ways to improve traffic safety, and in a recent press release listed Hawai'i as being in need of upgrades for roads and bridges.

In that release, TRIP not only identifies current transportation funding shortfalls, but forecasts reduced revenues that could impact states' abilities to repair roads.

"The health of the nation's economy and the safety and quality of life in America's small communities and rural areas ride on our rural transportation system," said Dave Kearby, TRIP executive .

"The nation's rural roads and bridges already faced a significant funding shortfall, and that will only be exacerbated by the looming reduction in state transportation revenues as a result of decreased vehicle travel due to the COVID-19 pandemic," said Kearby.

A DOT spokesperson confirmed the department agrees "additional funding for roads and bridges is needed," and the department has been focusing resources on high-volume and high-need roads first, and prioritizing the preservation of existing roads and bridges over projects that may provide congestion relief.

Ongoing DOT projects on Kaua'i include: Kuhio Highway slope stabilization in the vicinity of Kalihiwai bridge, and Kuhio Highway resurfacing from South Ko'olau Road to Papa'a Road near Anahola.

Work is also ongoing on guardrail and shoulder improvements on Kaumuali'i Highway in Puhī, Hanapepe River bridge replacement, Kuhio Highway, Kapa'a Stream bridge replacement and safety improvements to the Mailihuna Road intersection.

DOT said the department recently gave notice to proceed on the Kuhio Highway short-term improvements that will add a southbound lane on Kuhio Highway from Kuamo'o Road to the Kapa'a bypass, and are undertaking the environmental review process on an additional capacity project, and Kuhio Highway widening from Kapule Highway to North Leho drive (Hanama'ulu to Wailua).

Other projects set to begin in 2020 are: 'Ele'ele pedestrian overpass, Kaumuali'i pavement markings, resurfacing Lihu'e to Puhī and Kalaheo to 'Ele'ele on Kaumuali'i Highway, and Wailapa to Kahilihōlo roads. DOT will also be working on Kaumuali'i Highway intersection improvements at Waimea Canyon Drive, resurfacing a mile of Ma'alo Road in Kapaia.

Also on the list is mitigation work that needs to be addressed as a result of the March flooding. The DOT spokesperson said the department will be seeking emergency funding to make repairs to a drainage canal in Kekaha and further repairs on the Wailua bridges. The mauka Wailua bridge has already had two rounds of successful scour prevention, the last of which wrapped up after recent rains pushed a large amount of driftwood down Wailua River.

"While we do not agree completely with the lack of mention of contributing human factors to highways fatalities such as alcohol and drug impairment, speeding and distracted driving in the TRIP news release, HDOT does agree that additional funding for roads and bridges is needed," the DOT spokesperson said.

According to DOT, impacts from the COVID-19 pandemic on highways construction have been minimal.

In fact, whenever possible, HDOT is encouraging extended closure times to maximize production during this time of low traffic volumes, even though no new projects have been added to the list.

Department of Public Works Acting County Engineer Troy Tanigawa said COVID-19 emergency rules like the curfew and the stay-at-home and work-from-home orders have helped keep traffic to a minimum.

"Regarding COVID-19, the reduced traffic resulting from the stay-at-home order has actually reduced the amount of traffic on county roads, which is beneficial since it is generally safer for work crews and typically allows for more roadway maintenance work to be completed faster," said Tanigawa.

"Roadway work has been deemed to be critical infrastructure work, so most crews, including in-house forces and contractors, have been able to continue unabated."