

8 FINDINGS AND REASONS SUPPORTING THE DETERMINATION

This Environmental Assessment has found that the potential for impacts associated with the proposed action will not be significant, or will be mitigated to less than significant levels. Potential environmental impacts are generally temporary, occurring during construction, and are not expected to adversely impact the long-term environmental quality of the area.

The potential effects of the proposed project were evaluated based on the Significance Criteria specified in Section 11-200-12 (Hawai‘i Administrative Rules, revised in 1996). The following is a summary of potential effects of the action.

SIGNIFICANCE CRITERIA

1. Irrevocable commitment to loss or destruction of natural or cultural resources.

The proposed action will provide paved surfaces for pedestrians, bicyclists, wheelchair users, and others. Several alternative alignments were examined and most of them are or were previously used as travel ways, albeit of different types, including informal social paths, beach accesses, old cane haul roads, maintenance easements, residential streets, and highway shoulders. Paving a pathway will enable people on foot and bicycles to travel with greater ease, comfort, and safety.

The intent of the proposed facility is to enable users to connect with the environment; therefore, the improvements are minimal, consisting only of the pathway and context-appropriate landscaping. Structures, such as boardwalks, retaining walls, barriers, and railings will be constructed only where necessary for user safety and as engineering solutions for particular site conditions. The improvements are intended to be permanent. They will require long-term commitments of land, but are not irrevocable. Materials that will be used to construct the path, such as concrete (for pavement) or recycled plastics (for boardwalks) are in plentiful supply.

The proposed project will not adversely impact natural or cultural resources. There will be no destruction or loss of threatened or endangered plant or animal species. For the coastal sections, the path will be sited in or adjacent to areas developed for recreational use. The canal section of the main alignment will have no direct impact on wetlands (i.e., no destruction or loss of wetlands). An archaeological monitoring program will be implemented and a Memorandum of Agreement has established procedures for handling inadvertent discoveries of cultural artifacts and human remains.

2. Curtailment of the range of beneficial uses of the environment.

The project will not curtail the range of beneficial uses of the environment. For many people, the bike/pedestrian path is expected to increase access to outdoor spaces, provide more travel options, and create new opportunities for recreation and fitness activities.

3. Conflicts with the State's long-term environmental policies or goals and guidelines as expressed in Chapter 344, HRS, and any revisions thereof and amendments thereto, court decisions, or executive orders.

The proposed project is consistent with the environmental policies, goals, and guidelines defined in Chapter 344, HRS. In particular, the project is consistent with the following guidelines by improving the region's transportation infrastructure and expanding its recreation facilities.

Parks, Recreation and Open Space

- A. *Establish, preserve and maintain scenic, historic, cultural, park and recreation areas, including the shorelines, for public recreational, educational and scientific uses.*
- B. *Protect the shorelines of the State from encroachment of manmade improvements, structures, and activities.*
- C. *Promote open space in view of its natural beauty not only as a natural resource but as an ennobling, living environment for its people.*

Transportation

- A. *Encourage transportation systems in harmony with the lifestyle of the people and environment of the State.*
- B. *Adopt guidelines to alleviate environmental degradation caused by motor vehicles.*

Community Life and Housing

- A. *Foster lifestyles compatible with the environment; preserve the variety of lifestyles traditional to Hawaii through the design and maintenance of neighborhoods which reflect the culture and mores of the community.*
- B. *Develop communities which provide a sense of identity and social satisfaction in harmony with the environment and provide internal opportunities for shopping, employment, education, and recreation.*
- C. *Encourage the reduction of environmental pollution which may degrade a community.*

D. Recognize community appearances as major economic and aesthetic assets of the counties and the State; encourage green belts, plantings, and landscape plans and designs in urban areas; and preserve and promote mountain-to-ocean vistas.

4. Substantially affects the economic or social welfare of the community or state.

The project will provide needed transportation and recreation facilities for the Wailua-Kapa‘a community and, overall, is expected to have a positive impact on the economic and social welfare of the community. Short-term negative impacts to surrounding residents and businesses are associated with construction noise, dust, and traffic disruption—the latter in areas adjacent to heavily traveled roadways. These impacts will be temporary. After the project is completed, some residents and businesses near the path may experience inconveniences because of new activities or street patterns in their neighborhood. Others may find that the path has created new ways of enjoying the outdoors.

5. Substantially affects public health.

The proposed path is anticipated to have a beneficial effect on public health. Widespread news coverage has focused attention on the growing number of obese adults and children and the need to encourage a sedentary population to exercise more. Walking is reported to be especially beneficial because it is low impact, low cost, and low skill. The path at Lydgate Park has become a popular venue for fitness buffs. A path “in town” is expected to receive comparable use.

6. Involves substantial secondary impacts, such as population changes or effects on public facilities.

The project is seen as an amenity for the community that will contribute to an enhanced quality of life and make the living environment more attractive. There may be opportunities for businesses to tap into the path’s market potential, as has occurred in other places. However, the scope of the project itself does not involve commercial activity.

The path—not only this project, but in combination with the Kapa‘a-Keālia segment—will connect various public facilities, such as parks, schools, the public library, Kapa‘a Neighborhood Center, and pool. By providing more convenient access to these facilities and enabling people to safely reach these places by alternative means, the path may lead to increased use of these facilities. The relationship between the path and public facilities is viewed as one of positive synergism.

7. Involves substantial degradation of environmental quality.

The path will not substantially degrade environmental quality. By design and function, the proposed path is intended to provide access while minimizing harm to the surrounding environment. In parks and refuges, it is common to remind visitors to “stay on the path.” In a similar fashion, the proposed bike/pedestrian path will define a travel corridor that helps to contain and manage human impacts in a particular area.

8. Is individually limited but cumulatively has considerable effect on the environment, or involves a commitment for large actions.

The proposed project is part of a larger vision to build a world-class path. The overall plan is being phased. Each phase is being studied and evaluated in relation to the whole and as a self-contained project. Therefore, implementation of this phase (Lydgate Park to Kapa‘a) will not commit resources for or compel the construction of any other phase. However, it should be noted that this particular project plays the important role of connecting the Lydgate Park path (already completed) and the Kapa‘a-Keālia path (under construction).

9. Substantially affects a rare, threatened, or endangered species, or its habitat.

Most of the project area has been urbanized or modified by agriculture. The proposed path will not have a significant, adverse effect on rare, threatened, or endangered species or their habitats. The canal section will pass adjacent to, but not within wetland areas. The path may bring people closer to endangered waterbirds, but their movements will be restricted to the path itself by signs and design cues. Potential opportunities for birdwatching from a safe distance is expected to raise public awareness of and appreciation for wildlife in general, and Kaua‘i’s native bird populations in particular. The Wailua-Kapa‘a community is surrounded by natural areas, but most urban dwellers do not experience nature on a day-to-day basis. The path could be an important part of nature education for children and families.

10. Detrimentially affects air or water quality or ambient noise levels.

There will be short-term impacts on air quality and noise levels during the construction period. Mitigation measures will be implemented to minimize construction-related noise and fugitive dust impacts. Long-term, adverse impacts to air and water quality and ambient noise levels are not expected.

11. Affect or is likely to suffer damage by being located in an environmentally sensitive area, such as a flood plain, tsunami zone, beach, erosion-prone area, geologically hazardous land, estuary, freshwater, or coastal waters.

Short sections of the path are located in the tsunami inundation zone. The path crosses over Wailua River, which is a floodway, but the improvements will not change the base flood elevation. Although the path passes through areas subject to coastal flooding, such as Wailua Beach Park and Lihi Park, it is not expected to experience significant damage. All improvements will meet or exceed current design standards. Paved concrete paths are particularly durable. No occupied structures are proposed in this project.

12. Substantially affects scenic vistas and view planes identified in county or state plans or studies.

The State of Hawai‘i is still in the process of developing a scenic highways program. The Kaua‘i General Plan identifies scenic roadway corridors whose purpose is “to conserve open space, scenic features, and views within and along Kaua‘i’s most heavily-traveled routes” (p. 5-20). The proposed path is located inside a scenic road corridor that runs between Wailua River north to Coconut Grove. The scenic corridor overlaps with the path alignment from Wailua River to the Seashell Restaurant, on the north end of Wailua Beach Park. However, the path will be largely obscured by a low rock wall that runs along the highway. It is proposed that the rock wall be extended along the entire beach park frontage. Over Wailua River, the path will be integrated into the design of a new deck for the existing cane haul bridge.

13. Requires substantial energy consumption.

Fuel will be consumed by construction vehicles and equipment, but this use will be comparable to other urban construction projects. To the extent that trips taken on the completed path replace travel by motor vehicles, the project will help to reduce the consumption of non-renewable fossil fuel.

CONCLUSION

Shared use paths are transportation facilities that give pedestrians, bicyclists, wheelchair users, and other “human-powered” travelers a route that is separate from cars and trucks. For this reason, whenever possible, paths should be located away from roadways, driveways, and cross streets that increase the possibility of conflict between vehicles and people. Locating paths away from roads usually means locating them on the outskirts of urban development.

The preferred alternative for the Lydgate Park-Kapaa path and the connector routes for Wailua House Lots and Kawaihau are located in a combination of undeveloped and developed areas. In light of environmental concerns, the proposed alignment was kept to the boundaries of developed areas. This will separate paths from vehicular circulation, while staying in areas that are already altered and impacted by human use.

In the Wailua-Kapa‘a region, places on the outskirts of town are also places of great beauty, and will provide path users with exposure to open space and open views. Appropriate designs will be adopted to minimize the bulk and profile of the facility, with careful selection of materials and the use of screens, dividers, and landscaping. Temporary, construction-related impacts can be mitigated through best management practices.

Through route selection, design, and proposed mitigation measures, the analysis contained in this environmental assessment has determined that the project will not have significant adverse impacts or have impacts that can be mitigated to less than significant levels. The County of Kaua‘i, Department of Public Works and State of Hawaii, Department of Transportation have prepared a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) that has been published in the State Office of Environmental Quality Control’s *Environmental Notice*.