

EDITORIAL | OUR VIEW

# Make long-term plans to protect Ka Iwi coast

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GEORGE F. LEE / [GLEE@STARADVERTISER.COM](mailto:GLEE@STARADVERTISER.COM)

The Ka Iwi coastline taken from the Makapuu lookout and looking toward Waimanalo.

An ongoing community effort aimed at preserving the Ka Iwi coastline started in the early 1970s, when plans were in the works to develop lands between Sandy Beach and Makapuu as a resort and residential site. The prospects of traffic on Kalanianaʻole Highway, crowded beaches and pollution prompted “Save Our Surf” and other grassroots rumblings that fended off what was dubbed as “Makapuu madness.”

When the madness continued in the next decade, the “Save Sandy Beach” initiative took shape — with the Ka Iwi Coalition filing a lawsuit against the city to prevent it from granting a permit for condo construction along the beach, and collecting 40,000 signatures to qualify for a successful ballot initiative opposing development.

Thanks to such efforts, these largely pristine open-space resources remain free of development. But stewardship along the coastline — now a magnet for tourists — is a never-ending vigil.

It’s fortunate that at the request of the Hawaii Kai Neighborhood Board, the coalition — now a subcommittee of the nonprofit Livable Hawaii Kai Hui — is leading an effort to chart a future management plan for 6.8 miles of state-designated scenic byway, bounded by an entrance of Hawaii Kai and Makai Research Pier.

The plan for Maunalua-Makapuu State Scenic Byway is packed with ideas that aim to protect character while improving access and enhancing visits. Prioritized projects range from the uncomplicated — clearing foliage blocking views — to the potentially knotty — negotiating tourism access-related agreements at routinely clogged lookouts. The full list is worthy of reflection, given the lure of picturesque gems dotting Oahu’s southeastern tip.

Hanauma Bay Nature Preserve, for example, attracts some 800,000 visitors a year. Its parking lot, which is small by design to deter shoreline overuse, fills up quickly, often resulting in congestion along the highway. The plan suggests replacing cones and temporary signage at the entrance with roadway and intersection upgrades along with real-time parking updates posted on a scenic byway mobile app.

The app would also provide smart-phone toters with the latest on weather, surf and traffic conditions; historical and cultural information, including protocols and sensitivities; location of restroom facilities and nearby amenities. For the sake of safety and smooth traffic flow, among other things, the resource is a good idea.

Similarly, the state Department of Land and Natural Resources recently installed about 30 signs around Oahu that feature a map of managed hiking, snorkeling and camping spots. The signs also have a QR code that provides more site and environmental protection details, in multiple languages, when scanned.

Also among Maunalua-Makapuu’s proposed upgrades: a pedestrian/bicycle path, moving overhead electrical lines underground, and installing public restrooms at Makapuu Lighthouse Trail. Of course, many of the ideas would require partnership with government agencies and landowners that have jurisdiction along the corridor. Success hinges on careful planning that rejects any impulse to doll-up the byway with anything beyond basic improvements.

The state Department of Transportation has so far designated seven other byways based on scenic, historic and recreational qualities. Modeled after the National Scenic Byways program, ours can compete for federal dollars when eligible. Currently, about 150 scenic routes have the federal designation, although none in Hawaii. So, for now, supporters are looking to tap city and state grant-in-aid programs and other funding sources.

Maunaloa-Makapuu secured byway status four years ago — four decades after the first fight to protect the Ka Iwi coastline. Surely, the fight is not over. Developers will always be eyeing the rugged coastline for resort-oriented facilities. Here's hoping the Ka Iwi Coalition in tandem with others succeeds in shaping a future for the corridor that gracefully balances access with preservation.