

**Planning Issue Identification Report:
Stakeholder Interviews
Focus Groups
And Telephone Survey
August-October 2009
Oahu Regional Transportation Plan 2035 Project**

Deliverable 2.2.7



February 2010

Prepared for the
Oahu Metropolitan Planning Organization

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This report was funded in part through grants from the Federal Highway Administration and Federal Transit Administration, U.S. Department of Transportation. The views and opinions of the agency expressed herein do not necessarily state or reflect those of the U.S. Department of Transportation.

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Acronyms Used in this Document

EJ	Environmental Justice
OahuMPO	Oahu Metropolitan Planning Organization
ORTP	Oahu Regional Transportation Plan
T6	Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964

Executive Summary

This report documents the results of the initial phase of public outreach activities to identify issues related to the Oahu Regional Transportation Plan 2035 (ORTP 2035). These activities were: Stakeholder Interviews; Focus Groups and an Islandwide Telephone Survey. All primary research was completed by OmniTrak Group Inc., a member of the PB Team.

Stakeholder interviewees included representatives of non profits, federal and state agencies, universities, and business interests. Two focus groups were held, one with Title 6 and Environmental Justice (T6/EJ) Service Providers and one with Emergency Management staff. All focus group participants and stakeholder interviewees were asked to respond as a representative of the particular agency or business they represented. The Islandwide Telephone Survey was a statistically valid, random sample telephone survey to land lines on Oahu.

Although the purpose of all these outreach activities was generally to identify transportation issues, the format and focus of the questionnaires varied. The stakeholder interviews and focus groups were conducted first. The results were used to inform the telephone survey content. Although the results of the stakeholder interviews and two focus groups differed in predictable ways, it is interesting to note that their responses were further reflected in the islandwide telephone survey.

The top transportation priority identified by Stakeholder interviewees and Uniformed responders was **congestion relief**, followed by **road maintenance**; the top priority identified by the T6/EJ focus group was **improve the mass transit system** and the top priority of the Emergency Management staff was **providing alternative access** to isolated communities.

Traffic congestion was also identified as the key transportation challenge in the islandwide phone survey, with **road maintenance** identified as the most effective solution.

Further information, shown in the tables below, confirms the consistency of the responses across the solicited groups.

Key Transportation Corridors:

Stakeholder Interviewees	T6/EJ Service Providers	Emergency Managers	Uniformed Responders	Telephone Survey Respondents
Ewa to Downtown	Congestion relief H-1 in Ewa, H-1 to downtown	Waianae 2 nd Access	Leeward/Ewa to Honolulu corridor	Leeward to Downtown Central Oahu to Downtown

Most Needed New Transportation Projects:

Stakeholder Interviewees	T6/EJ Service Providers	Emergency Managers	Uniformed Responders	Telephone Survey Respondents
Widen Middle Street Merge H-1	Alternate routes to isolated communities	Waianae Second Access	Widen Middle Street Merge H-1	Improve H-1 Corridor Waianae Second Access

There was a uniform lack of support for any of the eleven potential transportation funding sources. The least objectionable were found to be developer fees and commercial vehicle fees, but these were still supported by less than 25 percent of respondents.

This report documents the results of the initial phase of public outreach activities to identify issues related to the Oahu Regional Transportation Plan 2035 (ORTP 2035). These activities were: Stakeholder Interviews; Focus Groups with Environmental Justice (EJ) service providers, all-hazards first responders, and Islandwide Telephone Survey. All primary research was completed by OmniTrak Group Inc., a member of the PB Team.

The results of these outreach activities are not an end in themselves, but are intended to aid in the development of the ORTP 2035 and guide further outreach activities. To illustrate this point the small sample size and lack of a random sample process for recruiting participants and subjects for the stakeholder interviews and focus groups preclude the results being more generally projected to the overall population. Rather, the results from the Stakeholder Interviews and Focus Groups were important to help frame the issues and develop more specific questions that were asked during the Islandwide Telephone Survey. The primary purpose of this phase of public outreach was “issue identification” and the results will be used to shape the next steps in the planning process.

1.1 Stakeholder Interviews

The key stakeholder interview participants were identified from the critical representation list, outlined in the ORTP 2035 Public Outreach Plan, section 3.1¹. The target audience included industry and commercial users, decision makers, community leaders, and environmental group leaders. Individuals were chosen to participate in an interview with an emphasis on maintaining diversity across the identified industries and groups.

Altogether, twenty interviews were conducted July 31 through August 18, 2009. Most were telephone-based and some were face-to-face. Interviewees included representatives of four neighborhood boards, federal and state agencies, universities, real estate developers, business and cultural organizations and major employers. A complete list of interviewees and complete results of the stakeholder interviews can be found in the Appendix to this document and is available upon request.

1.2 Focus Groups

Focus group participants were screened and recruited by a team of experienced recruiters. They were selected from the PB Team’s lists of emergency service providers and social and transportation service agencies. The PB Team determined which organizations were contacted. Focus group sessions were conducted in OmniTrak’s professional facility located at 841 Bishop Street, Suite 1250, Honolulu, Hawaii 96813. A complete list of participants and complete results of the focus group discussions can be found in the Appendix to this document and is available upon request.

¹ [Public Outreach Plan, Oahu Regional Transportation Plan 2035 Project, June 2009](#)

Title 6/Environmental Justice Service Providers (T6/EJ) focus group was conducted on August 7, 2009. The T6/EJ focus group was made up of eight agency representatives who work directly with persons who are members of T6/EJ communities throughout the island of Oahu, including community centers, churches, and public health centers. The service providers gave insight and perspective from the T6/EJ community member who may, because of limited income, disability or recent immigrant or refugee status, qualify for social services provided by the agency. This focus group was cohesive, meaning they came to consensus and tended to agree on issues and questions presented and they elaborated or contributed to others' ideas within the group.

Emergency First Responders; Management and Uniformed Responders focus group was conducted on August 20, 2009. The emergency first responders' focus group was made up of eight people who work as emergency management or as uniformed first responders (e.g. police, fire, etc.). The members of emergency management provided insight and perspective of the big picture of evacuation transportation needs in case of major storms or other disasters whereas the uniformed responders provided perspective on the day-to-day transportation needs of those who must quickly respond to accidents and other emergencies. The responses of this group are divided in the summary below, as the perspectives of managers and responders often diverged.

1.3 Telephone Survey

The Islandwide Telephone Survey was a random sampling of 601 Oahu residents. The telephone calls were placed between October 9 and October 25, 2009. The resulting sample of residents was weighted by ethnicity proportionate to Oahu Census data to best reflect an accurate distribution of respondents by ethnic background. The sample was also weighted by age to better achieve representation by younger adults who are less likely than older adults to have a landline telephone. Complete results of the telephone survey are contained in the Appendix to this document, which is available upon request.

Although the format was different for each of the specific outreach techniques outlined above, the overarching goal of transportation issue identification was consistent throughout the process.

2.1 Summary Findings – Focus Groups and Stakeholder Interviews

The findings for focus groups and stakeholder interviews reported here are qualitative, not quantitative, in nature. The focus groups and stakeholder interviews were designed to explore HOW these corporate and agency representatives feel about certain transportation options rather than determining HOW MANY think in specific ways. Therefore, the findings are not intended to be projected on a larger population, but used to better understand the underlying concerns about proposed transportation option among a small and specific cross-section of Oahu transportation users.

Overall the key priority in transportation identified by stakeholders and the uniformed responders was congestion relief. Uniformed responders specifically mentioned their ability to navigate through congested corridors is aggravated by the conversion of roadway shoulders to travel lanes. Road maintenance and safety/security were also ranked very high by 50 percent or more of stakeholders. A review of the stakeholder comments indicates that “safety” concerns are related to accidents, bike and pedestrian issues, and evacuation in an emergency. Several comments also mentioned mass transit as a means of alleviating congestion.

The T6/EJ service providers maintain improving mass transit is the key priority for their clients. These improvements include longer and more frequent service, better bus stops, and express service. The emergency managers spoke from a system wide perspective and said disaster infrastructure, such as alternative evacuation routes, is the key priority.

Both focus groups and stakeholders alike agreed that the highest priority transportation corridor included “Ewa to downtown”. Both the emergency managers and responders also specified the Waianae Coast, as there is only one route for these communities in case of an evacuation or disaster crisis.

When assessing new transportation projects “Widen Middle Street Merge/H-1” was the highest recommendation by both the stakeholders and as well as uniformed responders. The T6/EJ providers agreed that providing alternate routes to isolated communities were the highest priority; the emergency managers specifically listed providing the Waianae Coast a secondary access route. The T6/EJ service providers also mentioned improving pedestrian facilities.

When it comes to alleviating congestion downtown many ideas were brought up to better manage traffic including signal synchronization, telecommuting, providing real time traffic information (variable message signage), contra-flow lanes and encouraging alternative transportation choices, such as bus, carpool and bike. Stakeholders would not support the removal of on street parking as a way of alleviating congestion.

None of the eleven proposals to fund transportation were supported by the stakeholders interviewed, what is shown below are the “least unpopular” alternatives. The least objectionable funding sources identified were charging developer fees to fund needed transportation improvements and raising the gas tax. Tolling was mentioned by some emergency managers, but the comments seemed to indicate they were speaking personally, and not from their agency viewpoint. T6/EJ service providers did not address funding alternatives directly, but recommended that the OahuMPO focus on a few key initiatives. Again, they recommended improving transit and pedestrian facilities to relieve traffic congestion, rather than spreading limited funds among too many projects to have an impact.

Overall, stakeholder interviewees and the focus group participants showed a high degree of interest in and familiarity with transportation issues. There appears to be general agreement that “congestion relief” is the number one traffic issue on Oahu. Clearly, improvements in the H-1 corridor are recognized as needed by a wide cross section of respondents. However, the proposed remedy for general congestion relief seems to be split between advocates for mass transit or road widening and building alternative access.

2.2 Key Findings for Stakeholder Interviews and Focus Groups – Comparison by Outreach Activity

Top Three Priorities For Improving The Transportation System:

Stakeholder Interviewees	T6/EJ Service Providers	Emergency Managers	Uniformed Responders
Congestion relief	Improve Mass Transit System	Disaster infrastructure	Clear the bottlenecks
Road maintenance	Bus scheduling	Provide alternate routes	Improve ability to maneuver through traffic
Safety/Security	Safety at bus stops	Control traffic flow	Shoulders are now traffic lane

Specific Transportation Corridors That Need Improvement:

Stakeholder Interviewees	T6/EJ Service Providers	Emergency Managers	Uniformed Responders
Ewa to Downtown	Congestion relief H-1 in Ewa, H-1 to downtown	Waianae Second Access	Leeward/Ewa to Honolulu

Most Needed New Transportation Projects:

Stakeholder Interviewees	T6/EJ Service Providers	Emergency Managers	Uniformed Responders
Widen Middle Street Merge/H-1	Alternate routes to isolated communities	Waianae Second Access	Widen Middle Street Merge/H-1

How Best To Alleviate Congestion Downtown:

Stakeholder Interviewees	T6/EJ Service Providers	Emergency Managers	Uniformed Responders
Coordinate traffic signals Telecommute Bus, carpools, bikes	This is not perceived to be a T6/EJ issue and they had no comment	Downtown is not a specific high priority but this group generally agreed with uniformed responders	Telecommute Coordinate traffic signals Install contra-flow lanes

Best New Funding Options:

Stakeholder Interviewees	T6/EJ Service Providers	Emergency Managers	Uniformed Responders
Developer fees Gas tax	Focus on a few key initiatives rather than spreading limited funds	Toll in the most congested urban areas	Not specified

2.3 Summary Findings–Islandwide Telephone Survey

The Islandwide Telephone Survey was conducted out of OmniTrak’s professional facility located at 841 Bishop Street, Suite 1250, Honolulu, Hawaii 96813. Statistical results were prepared by the staff of OmniTrak Group. Each question has a detailed response explanation, which can be found in the Appendix to this document and is available upon request. These survey findings do have quantitative significance with a margin of error of plus/minus four percent and an overall confidence rating of 95 percent.

Oahu residents' priorities clearly reflect usage of the H-1 freeway as the primary east-west transportation corridor linking Oahu's key residential and job centers. Residents' top priority in transportation projects – *improving the H-1 corridor between Leeward and Downtown* – was supported by 56 percent. The *Waianae Second Access Road* emerged as a second priority due to strong support in West Oahu, which includes Waianae.

Similarly, the top priority in transportation corridors is the *Leeward to Downtown corridor*, representing the main commuting route between the most populous residential zone, Leeward Oahu and the key job center, Urban Honolulu. Residents chose the Leeward-Downtown corridor by a 3-to-1 margin over the next highest priority, the Central Oahu-to-Downtown corridor.

Easing traffic congestion is generally seen as the top transportation challenge. When asked to rate the importance of six transportation challenges facing Oahu, 55 percent of residents gave top ratings to "*traffic congestion on existing roadways*," followed by "*unsafe driver behavior*," rated highly by 47 percent of residents. Other challenges mentioned include the lack of alternative routes, the high cost of parking, and dangerous roadways – but these challenges ranked well behind congestion.

Easing traffic congestion is particularly important to residents in West Oahu and Windward Oahu, where residents have long commutes to the urban area. The second highest-rated issue, "*unsafe or inappropriate driver behavior*," ranked highest only in Central Oahu.

While traffic congestion is a key issue in transportation, road maintenance emerged as the most effective transportation solution for residents. Of six solutions rated for perceived effectiveness, "*better maintenance of existing roads*" garnered high ratings from 57 percent, far more than any other solution tested. The next highest ranked solution, which was well under 50 percent of residents, was "*improving pedestrian facilities*," followed by "*widening or extending existing roads...*" and "*Improvements to... TheBus system.*"

As a solution, "*better road maintenance*" topped the list in all Oahu regions but especially so in West Oahu, Central Oahu and Metro Honolulu. This is consistent with the fact that most residents use their vehicles for daily commuting, with 80 percent of Oahu workers and students driving themselves to work or school vs. only nine percent taking *TheBus*.

Data on satisfaction reinforces the finding that road maintenance is an immediate concern. Asked to rate their satisfaction with the road system, residents indicated low satisfaction, overall, with over half rating in the bottom half of a 10-point scale. In none of the individual areas were the roads rated higher than 5.7 of 10, on average (6.0 or below is considered low by Hawai'i standards).

When asked why they gave low ratings, 87 percent of the most dissatisfied residents polled commented about road conditions, citing "*pot holes, uneven surfaces, poor repair*

and maintenance.” Some even mentioned that the public agencies’ attempts at “quick fix repairs” for road surfaces seemed to make the problems worse, not better.

Finally, the survey tested 11 proposed options for funding transportation. Consistent with prior research, none of these options received substantial support from residents though “*charging fees to developers*” and imposing a “*commercial vehicle tax*” were relatively less opposed, with both proposals supported by about 1 in 5 residents.

Residents were overwhelmingly opposed to tax increases and new fees on driving. Three-quarters or more indicated opposition to *raising the excise tax, charging a vehicle-miles-traveled tax, raising the gasoline tax,* and, especially, *charging a fee for driving into Downtown* and *raising property taxes*. Ninety percent were opposed to *raising County property taxes* as a means of funding transportation.

Lower-income (<\$35,000 income) residents overwhelmingly opposed *raising the tax on gasoline* and *charging a toll on HOV lanes*.

2.4 Key Findings for Telephone Survey

Priority Projects	Priority Transportation Corridors	Overall Satisfaction with Road Network
Improve H-1 corridor (56%)	Leeward to Downtown (59%)	6 or lower on 10 point scale (69%)
Waianae Second Access (26%)	Central Oahu to Downtown (19%)	Least satisfied residents from Central Oahu and Windward

Key Transportation Challenges	Solutions to Challenges	Possible Funding Sources
Traffic congestion (55%)	Road Maintenance is rated most effective solution (57 %)	Developer fees (23%)
Unsafe motorist behavior (47%)	Of the residents who thought the most pressing transportation challenge was traffic congestion on Oahu, 63% said better maintenance would make the most effective improvement	Commercial vehicle fees (19%)

2.5 Overall Summary

Overall the key priority in transportation identified by stakeholders, the uniformed responders, and in the telephone survey was congestion relief. In the islandwide telephone survey of Oahu residents, 55 percent found traffic congestion to be the most important transportation challenge closely followed by unsafe driver behavior at 47percent.

The T6/EJ service providers maintain improving mass transit is the key priority for their clients. In the islandwide telephone survey 34 percent of residents polled thought improvement to and expansion of TheBus system would be effective solution to meet transportation challenges on Oahu, however they rated three other solutions higher.

Road maintenance and safety/security were also ranked very high by 50 percent or more of stakeholders, and road maintenance was the key priority for residents polled in the telephone survey with 57 percent of residents reporting the most effective solution (to traffic congestion) is better maintenance of existing roads.

The emergency managers said disaster infrastructure, such as alternative evacuation routes, is the key priority.

All agreed that the highest priority transportation corridor was “Ewa to Downtown”. Both the emergency managers and responders also specified the alternative access to the Waianae Coast.

When assessing new transportation projects, improvement to the H-1 corridor was identified as the highest priority by stakeholders, uniformed responders and the telephone survey respondents. Residents in the phone survey also identified “Provide a Waianae Second Access Road”, as did the emergency managers. The T6/EJ providers agreed that providing alternate routes to isolated communities is a high priority, but they did not identify a specific route. The T6/EJ service providers also mentioned improving pedestrian facilities.

Several solutions were identified to alleviate congestion downtown: signal synchronization, telecommuting, providing real time traffic information, contra-flow lanes and increased bus, carpool and bike services. Stakeholders would not support the removal of on street parking as a way of alleviating congestion. The islandwide telephone survey respondents overwhelmingly (89 percent) did not want a fee imposed for driving into the downtown.

None of the eleven proposals to fund transportation were supported by respondents in any of the outreach activities. New funding sources that received the most support were charging developer fees and imposing additional taxes on commercial vehicles. T6/EJ service providers did not discuss funding alternatives directly, but recommended that the MPO focus on a few key initiatives. Telephone survey respondents also overwhelmingly opposed raising property taxes to fund transportation.

Overall, representatives of these outreach activities showed a high degree of interest in and familiarity with transportation issues. There appears to be general agreement that “congestion relief” is the number one traffic issue on Oahu with “road maintenance” seen as the solution from residents in the telephone survey. Clearly, improvements in the H-1 corridor are recognized as needed by a wide cross section of respondents. The proposed remedy for general congestion relief seems to be split among stakeholder and focus group members between advocating for mass transit or road widening and building alternative access.

Responses to the New Transportation Projects, some of which had been “on the books” for years, were somewhat enlightening. Specifically, not everyone was familiar with proposed transportation projects, at least not by the names that were used to identify them in the outreach activities. The lack of support for additional funding, while not surprising, indicates a real discrepancy in the respondents’ understanding of the costs associated with transportation projects, including maintenance, new construction, mass transit and roadway, and their overall expectations of the transportation system.