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West O'ahu about to get a whole lot better

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From a long-stalled university campus to several badly needed road projects, residents in rapidly growing West O'ahu will soon see big construction projects that could improve their lives.

By the time the final gavel fell at the Legislature last week, the region had received commitments totaling more than \$300 million in construction money over the next two years from state, federal and private sources.

'Ewa Beach resident Jim Moylan is ecstatic. The father of two school-age daughters, Moylan said he expects his younger child will attend the new 'Ewa Makai Middle School when it is completed in 2010.

He's also trying to convince his older daughter of the virtues of attending the University of Hawai'i-West O'ahu campus just up the street, which is scheduled to greet its first students within two years.

The public projects, combined with a boom in private building, will go a long way toward making the 'Ewa Plain corridor the commercial and residential hub of the "Second City" envisioned by planners decades ago.

Private projects include thousands of new homes and new malls, one with a Target store, and a new Costco.

Moylan, whose insurance business is in 'Ewa Beach, said the long-awaited, multimillion-dollar road projects will help ease the notorious traffic woes experienced by his neighbors from Kapolei to 'Ewa Beach. So, too, will projects such as the UH campus and the Kapolei courthouse, which will bring middle-income jobs to the area so fewer West O'ahu residents will need to commute to Honolulu, he said.

"There's no way we can ever resolve the traffic issue unless you live and work in your community," said Moylan, who is completing a term on the 'Ewa Neighborhood Board.

State Sen. Will Espero, D-20th ('Ewa Beach, Waipahu), agreed. "You've got jobs, you've got education, and finally, traffic relief because now, with all of these opportunities on the west side, people will not have to go into town," he said.

Espero said that all told, he sees West O'ahu getting some \$330 million from various sources. He includes \$5 million for planning and design of an H-1 afternoon Zipper Lane from Honolulu into West O'ahu in his total. "The Kapolei-'Ewa region was the big winner this session," he said.



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LOBBYING PAYS OFF

About a half-dozen major projects got money this year, but the lobbying had begun much earlier, Espero said. For instance, UH-West O'ahu nearly received \$100 million-plus a year ago, but the money fell through in the final days of the 2006 Legislature.

"I think there's a realization that this is the new city, and it is the fastest-growing region in the state, and with that, we have to develop the infrastructure in order to accommodate the growth, because this is where both the state and city government said the growth would be directed," Espero said.

Warren Wegesend Jr., general manager of the Villages of Kapolei Association, which represents about 3,000 households, said his organization has been lobbying for completion of the North/South Road and widening of Fort Barrette Road for years. The hope for Wegesend and other Kapolei advocates is that the Kapolei Parkway extension-North/South Road route will offer an alternative route for 'Ewa motorists, many of whom now avoid the traffic jam at Fort Weaver Road during peak hours and take a five- to seven-mile detour west into Kapolei to go east to Honolulu.

Wegesend said the projects offer relief from the community's growing pains.

Projects such as the UH campus and courthouse don't just mean jobs and services, Wegesend said. "They will help bring some flavor and some life into the community."

With the new services will also come an increase in the demand for housing in the area, and "it will certainly increase values," he said.

As required by land-use regulations, much of the land for the projects and a good share of the infrastructure has been provided by major developers in the 'Ewa Plain, including Kapolei Property Development, Gentry Homes and Haseko (Hawai'i), in the form of impact fees and other levies.

For instance, the land for the the new 'Ewa middle school was provided by Haseko near its Ocean Pointe development. It also provided the land for the Keone'ula Elementary School, which is being dedicated today.

Kapolei Property Development Co. — an affiliate of the James Campbell Co., which is the successor to the Campbell Estate that master-planned Kapolei — also contributed land for roads, schools and sewers on its properties, as well as other improvements. The largest private landowner in West O'ahu, for instance, is set to install three traffic signals along Kamokila Boulevard this year.

Brad Myers, president of Kapolei Property Development, also applauded the large infusion of state money approved last week. "We are happy to see these regional projects move forward," Myers said. "These are wise investments, and they will benefit many."

Brennon Morioka, the state Department of Transportation's deputy director in charge of highways, said the Kapolei Parkway has gradually been expanding while work on the North/South Road is already well under way. The additional money will allow the project to be completed, offering a new route to the H-1 Freeway from both 'Ewa and Makakilo.

EASED ACCESS

The Fort Barrette project will ease access to the developing Kalaeloa area while the new East-West Road will help the UH-West O'ahu campus, a planned Kroc Center and planned housing projects by the state Department of Hawaiian Home Lands and others.

Meanwhile, state officials are undertaking a \$60 million expansion of Fort Weaver Road from four lanes to six, beginning this summer with money that was previously approved.

"Transportation is finally getting the appropriate attention that it needs," Morioka said. "I think the Kapolei region will see a significant change in the way people drive in that community.

"They will have so many more options."



