

# Inouye praises county over new highway, interpretive center | Hawaii 24/7

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Sen. Daniel Inouye said he was pleased to see the project is under budget and ahead of schedule. (Hawaii 24/7 photo by Karin Stanton)

Karin Stanton | Hawaii 24/7 Editor

U.S. Sen. Daniel K. Inouye had nothing but praise for Mayor Billy Kenoi and his administration for the speed and efficiency with which they are constructing Ane Keohokalole Highway.

On Wednesday afternoon, Inouye toured portions of the \$32 million Ane Keohokalole Highway, as well as the cultural interpretive center that is being funded as part of the highway project.

Inouye said leaders in Washington D.C. keep a close watch on whether projects are on time and on budget.

The senator praised Kenoi, the county staff and construction crews for pushing the project along under budget and ahead of schedule, and especially for getting the Environmental Impact Statement completed in eight months. That process typically takes up to three years.

“This took unique leadership skills,” Inouye told Kenoi. “You have demonstrated to my committee and to the U.S. Congress that there is one person who can deliver and you’re the one.”

Kenoi thanked Inouye for his help in securing funds for the project and noted it is the largest in the state under the federal stimulus package.

He said the project has been aided by the community’s enthusiasm for a new road and by residents whose families have traditional ties to the area and who have helped properly care for ancient artifacts and burials.



Robert Ozaki, Mayor Billy Kenoi, Kari Kimura, Sen. Daniel Inouye and Leann Crabbe. (Hawaii 24/7 photo by Karin Stanton)

The center, which is expected to be complete in January, is an effort to properly care for Native Hawaiian cultural sites and showcase the historic preserve area.

The \$1 million interpretive center focuses on the culture of the ahupuaa of Keahuolu through a 16th century farm, or kauhale. The center also will house artifacts found in the area, and offer a respectful resting place for Native Hawaiian remains.

The interpretive center was designed with traditional Hawaiian architecture by Kari Kimura, a Konawaena High School graduate who attended the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

Robert Ozaki, CEO of The Queen Liliuokalani Trust, said he is pleased to see the interpretive center is close to completion. He said the center will be critical in preserving Hawaii's culture and giving the next generation a peek into the past.



The interpretive center sits on the edge of the historic preserve. (Hawaii 24/7 photo by Karin Stanton)

The center is being built in conjunction with the Ane Keohokalole Highway, also known as the Mid-Level Road.

The three-mile-long regional link is being constructed by Nan Hawaii Inc. of Honolulu, and will open a major new traffic corridor parallel to the Queen Kaahumanu Highway along the Kona Coast.

It will also provide access to hundreds of acres of state lands and Hawaiian Home Lands slated for affordable housing projects.

The new highway is being funded by President Barack Obama's federal stimulus package, the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009.

The highway construction is on time and on budget. Paving should start in early December, and is expected to last about eight weeks. Underground utilities are essentially completed and sidewalks are about halfway completed.

Landscaping has started, along with efforts to protect a dryland forest. Biologists are already propagating native Hawaiian plants to replace those taken in the construction.



Nicole Lui made the kukui leaf lei with kukui flower. The style of lei making is called hipu'u type of lei. No strings, no thread, all natural from the kukui nut tree. Lui presented the lei to Bob Ozaki, CEO of The Queen Liliuokalani Trust. (Hawaii 24/7 photo courtesy of Margaret Masunaga)

Video courtesy of the Office of the Mayor, County of Hawaii

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