

## City to boost spending for road fixes

POSTED: 01:30 a.m. HST, Feb 26, 2013 LAST UPDATED: 07:36 a.m. HST, Feb 26, 2013

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Mayor Kirk Caldwell and other city leaders Monday urged unprecedented spending to repave the city's most damaged and degraded streets through the next five years.

The \$150 million Caldwell and the City Council propose for street repaving next fiscal year would almost double what the city spent for such repairs last year. It would also far outpace the meager \$6 million or so the city spent in 2002, by comparison, according to Councilman Stanley Chang.

But to get that dramatic boost in paving funds, Chang, Caldwell and other supporters need the Council's approval.

"We need the commitment of the Council to keep the money in there," Caldwell said at a Makiki news conference, raising his voice to be heard above the rumble of trucks dumping asphalt on a badly worn quarter-mile of Kewalo Street. The funding, he said, would come from capital improvement dollars through issuing bonds.

Caldwell's road map calls for repaving about 1,520 lane-miles of city streets in the next five years — mostly neighborhood roads in the worst shape. It does not include major state roads such as Farrington, Kame-ha-meha and Pali highways — some of the island's most badly damaged arteries.

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"This is an enormous increase in the amount of work done," Caldwell said Monday. "It is certainly something that I will fight for and I will encourage my colleagues to fight for as well."

Councilwoman Ann Koba-ya-shi, chairwoman of the Budget Committee, said she would support the spending increases, but only if city officials can assure her they would be able to use all the money. In previous years the departments that handle road paving had trouble spending \$77 million and even lobbied against the increase to \$100 million for the current fiscal year, Koba-ya-shi said.

That increase was approved anyway.

"How are they going to do \$150 million?" she added.

The city Department of Design and Construction staff were hampered last year by a contractor that submitted the

lowest bid on multiple repaving jobs, Kobayashi said. The city was obligated to award the firm those jobs even though the firm lacked the personnel to complete them all at once, she said.

She could not recall the name of the firm Monday, but she said it hindered the department from spending its full annual budget. Kobayashi said she was curious to see whether the department could keep that low-bid issue from happening again.

An additional, dramatic increase in funds would be justified if all the dollars can go to badly needed repaving, Koba-ya-shi said. Under that scenario it would likely receive Council approval, she added.

Caldwell showed a list of several thousand blocks slated for repaving. (The list can also be viewed at [staradvertiser.com](http://staradvertiser.com).) Just when each block is fixed depends not only on how badly damaged it is, but how much traffic the road bears.

Caldwell asked residents to be patient when roadwork ramps up around the city. Crews would try to create as little disruption as possible, he said.

"It's part of what we have to face here," he added.

For years, city and state officials put off street and highway maintenance to pay for other projects. They have only recently made efforts to catch up after Oahu roads deteriorated so much that the city received one of the worst ratings for street conditions among major U.S. metropolitan areas.

"Road repaving is not real sexy," Caldwell said. "People want to talk about new things — new buildings and new parks, redesigning Waikiki. But it's the everyday things ... that a city is about. It's about sewage, it's about water, garbage pickup, and it's about road repaving. People feel the difference when you address the need."

The mayor was flanked by supportive construction company executives and union leaders who estimated the five-year effort would create between 75 and 125 new construction jobs in Hono-lulu. Caldwell said he met with engineers and union road workers two weeks ago to discuss his plan.

Nevada-based construction firm Road and Highway Builders LLC has been completing projects on Oahu for about a year, company Vice President Rick Thompson said Monday. A city commitment to more repaving would allow the firm to invest more equipment, materials and personnel in Hawaii, he said.

"This means a lot of work for our members as well as our contractors, and it will help our local economy," added Pane Mea-toga, district representative for Operating Engineers Union Local No. 3.

The city's Facility Maintenance and Design and Construction departments handle street repairs. Department heads are still working out the full scope and cost of the repairs, but Caldwell said they were confident they could execute a five-year plan under his proposed spending increases.

"Are we going to hit every goal? Are we going to be on time on every road? No," Caldwell said. "But ... we're committed. We're going to keep the pressure on this. These goals that we've set are achievable."

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