



UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII SYSTEM

Legislative Testimony

Testimony Presented Before the
Senate Committee on Transportation and Energy
And
Senate Committee on Higher Education
March 16, 2018 at 1:15 p.m.
By
Stephanie Nagata, Director
Office of Maunakea Management
University of Hawai'i at Hilo

HB 1767 HD2 – RELATED TO MOTOR VEHICLES

Chairs Inouye and Kahele, Vice Chairs Espero and Kim, and members of the committees:

My name is Stephanie Nagata, Director of the Office of Maunakea Management. Thank you for this opportunity to testify on behalf of this bill.

The Office of Maunakea Management (OMKM) supports this bill. HB1767 HD2 provides OMKM with a tool for providing safer vehicle access to the higher elevations of Maunakea, and indirectly, a safer environment for those visiting and working on Maunakea.

The use of two-wheel drive vehicles poses not only safety concerns, but environmental and maintenance issues. Drivers using vehicles engaged in low range, 4-wheel drive have better handling and control of their vehicle on the steep, gravel road and reduce their need to use their breaks and avoid overheating and losing break control. The use of 4-wheel drive also lessens the wear-and-tear of the gravel portion of the road, thus reducing the frequency and costs associated with maintaining the road.

The vast improvements to the Daniel K. Inouye Highway, commonly known as Saddle Road, has been a godsend to the residents of Hawai'i Island. It is a much safer and easier road to drive and has reduced the commute time between Hilo and Kona, and vice versa. However, the improved Saddle Road has resulted in an increase in vehicular traffic to the mountain. Visitors renting cars are no longer prohibited from driving across the Saddle Road in their two-wheel drive vehicles.

Two-wheel drive vehicles are not designed for driving on steep, bedrock and gravel roads, or at high altitudes. It is not uncommon for the Maunakea rangers to come across two-wheel drive vehicles stopped alongside the road with their hoods up, stalled from overheating or experiencing transmission problems. Rangers, in spite of instructing drivers to use low gear, continue to witness cars with their break lights on as they start and continue their descent down from the summit. Not only is there concern for the driver and their passengers, but there is concern about potential harm to others should a car lose the use of their breaks and hit bystanders or another vehicle.

OMKM appreciates the support this bill provides by enhancing safer travel to Maunakea.

Thank you again for this opportunity to testify on HB 1767 HD2.



HB1767 HD2
RELATING TO MOTOR VEHICLES
Senate Committee on Transportation and Energy
Senate Committee on Higher Education

March 16, 2018

1:15 p.m.

Room 225

The Office of Hawaiian Affairs (OHA) offers the following **COMMENTS** on HB1767 HD2, which would help to mitigate the substantial environmental, cultural, and public safety impacts of visitor overuse and vehicular traffic on sites of immense significance to Native Hawaiians and Hawai'i as a whole.

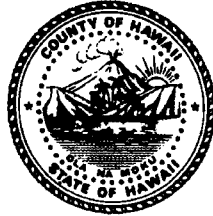
For years, concerns have been raised regarding the growing and largely unregulated number of visitors to Maunakea and Waipi'o Valley, sacred sites of immense significance to Native Hawaiians. Unfortunately, guidebooks, social media, and online websites have exponentially increased the number of people who seek to visit these and other wahi pana and wahi kapu of significance to the Native Hawaiian community. These places, and the unique and fragile ecosystems, resources, and sites they contain, are now continuously impacted in various ways by what may be thousands upon thousands of often uninformed visitors every year, including the combustion-engine vehicles that they use to access such places. As visitor numbers to these sites continue to grow, so does the threat of continuous and sometimes irreparable damage to their environmental and cultural integrity, from both irresponsible and inappropriate activity, as well as from general human overuse.

Notably, the largely unregulated vehicular access to the Maunakea summit and Waipi'o Valley floor has also resulted in serious public safety concerns, with a history of car accidents due to "brake fade" and other causes on the roads leading to them, including most recently two car crashes – one fatal – on the Mauna Kea Access Road, less than one year ago.

Accordingly, OHA appreciates the prohibitions on vehicular access by automobile types that may be unsafe to operate on the roadways accessing Maunakea's summit and Waipi'o Valley, and that uninformed visitors in particular may nonetheless choose to use in visiting these areas. Such a prohibition may be one potential means of mitigating the substantial and growing impacts of visitors and their vehicles on sites considered sacred by Native Hawaiians. OHA does understand that there is another measure being considered by the House, SB3090 SD2, that also addresses vehicular access to the summit of Maunakea, which the Committees may also wish to review for consistency.

Mahalo nui for the opportunity to testify on this measure.

VALERIE T. POINDEXTER
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HAWAI'I COUNTY COUNCIL

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March 13, 2018

Senate Committee on Transportation and Energy
Lorraine Inouye, Chair
Will Espero, Vice Chair

Email: seninouye@Capitol.hawaii.gov
Email: senespero@Capitol.hawaii.gov

Senate Committee on Higher Education
Kaiali'i, Kahele, Chair
Donna Mercado Kim, Vice Chair

Email: senkahele@Capitol.hawaii.gov
Email: senkim@Capitol.hawaii.gov

Subject: Testimony Supporting HB1767, HD2 Related to Motor Vehicles
Hearing: March 16, 1:15 p.m., Room 225

Dear Senators:

On behalf of myself and the constituents of Council District 1 in Hāmākua, County of Hawai'i, I would like to express our support of HB1767, HD2, and submit a brief testimony as follows:

HB1767, HD2 prohibits any vehicle, except a low-range, four-wheel drive vehicle, from being driven through or in Waipi'o Valley or the Mauna Kea Science Reserve, except under certain circumstances.

I introduced Resolution No. 485-18, which supported the original version of HB1767. The resolution passed Council at the February 7, 2018, Hawai'i County Council meeting. With that said, I support the amendments to HB1767, HD2 and I endorse any legislation that will increase the safety of visitors and residents of Waipi'o Valley.

I strongly support and urge the enactment of HB1767, HD2. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Valerie T. Poindexter", is written over a horizontal line.

Valerie T. Poindexter
Hawai'i County Council Chairwoman
District 1, Hāmākua

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SUPPORT SERVICES

177 Makaala St. Hilo, Hawaii, 96720

Phone (808) 974-4205 Fax (808) 974-4215

March 15, 2018

Aloha Chairs Inouye and Kahele, Vice Chairs Espero and Kim, Committee Members,

Mahalo for the opportunity to provide testimony in strong support of HB 1767 HD2:

Over the past 5-years or so, Saddle Road has been significantly improved. Rental car companies responded by removing restrictions that forbade rental cars on Saddle Road. These changes, combined with the ever increasing tourist population and the rise of social media, significantly increased the number of tourists going to the Visitor Information Station. Though rental companies continue to restrict their two-wheel drive vehicles from traveling further up Maunakea, many choose to ignore this restriction and continue on to the summit.

However, the Maunakea Summit Access Road above Halepohaku is very steep and wasn't built for use by two-wheel drive passenger vehicles. As the General Manager of Maunakea Observatories Support Services for the past seven years, I have personally seen the problems this has caused:

Two-wheel and all-wheel drive passenger vehicles (including two-wheel drive pick-up trucks & vans) are almost all equipped with an automatic transmission that isn't geared to be used in very steep terrain. Without the low-range gearing, drivers are forced to ride their brakes while descending from the summit. All too often, the brakes overheat and partially or completely fail. Most times, the driver is able to turn into the mauka roadside and stop with some vehicle damage and minor injury. Occasionally, the results are catastrophic.

Four-wheel drive passenger vehicles with low range are equipped for driving in steep terrain as the engine can be used to help brake the vehicle, allowing descent without overloading the brakes.

Visitor Information Station staff and Maunakea Rangers continually educate visitors about the dangers of driving a two-wheel drive car to the summit. However, many ignore this advice and drive their two-wheel drive passenger vehicles to the summit of Maunakea. The safety of kama'aina and visitors is our top priority and this legislation will prevent two-wheel drive passenger vehicles from being driven above Halepohaku.

Driving a two-wheel drive passenger vehicle uphill also increases the need for road grading and tends to create more dust than a four-wheel drive vehicle. Unlike a four-wheel drive, a two-wheel drive concentrates the drive force and has a tendency to lose traction and "chatter" or bounce slightly when going uphill on the gravel road. This causes dust and wash-boarding (a series of ridges that form on the gravel road surface), and requires staff to more frequently grade the road (now done twice weekly) to smooth out the road surface.

Mahalo for your consideration.

Sincerely,


Stewart Hunter
General Manager
shunter@ifa.hawaii.edu



To: Senator Lorraine Inouye, Chair Senate Committee on Transportation and Energy
Senator Kai Kahele, Chair Senate Committee on Higher Education
From: Dr. Doug Simons, Executive Director, Canada-France-Hawaii Telescope
Subj: Letter in Support of HB 1767 HD2 Relating to Waipio Valley; Mauna Kea; Roadway; Four-Wheel Drive Vehicles; Rental Motor Vehicles; Tour Operators
Date: 15 March 2018

Through this letter I would like to state my strong **support** for HB 1767, which restricts public vehicular access to Maunakea to only 4WD vehicles that have low-gear transmissions. At its core, this is a matter of public safety and 2WD vehicles, which frequent the Maunakea summit access road, in general lack the engine braking capacity needed to safely drive down Maunakea Access Road from the summit. This means 2WD vehicles rely heavily on the continual use of brakes, which can overheat and fail. Furthermore, 2WD vehicles lack traction on the drive up and rapidly erode the gravel section of the road, contributing to ruts and washboard road conditions. Maunakea Support Services regularly grades the gravel portion of the road, but the damage being done to the road, in large part by 2WD vehicles, makes even weekly road grading inadequate.

An unintended consequence of the new \$330M DK1 Hwy on Hawaii Island is that it is now possible for nearly anyone with a car to easily go up Maunakea Access Road. Each year nearly 300,000 people make that drive. Most stop at the Visitor Information Station at 9000 ft but many continue up to the summit, particularly during the evening to watch the sunset and of those, many do so in 2WD vehicles despite signs and Maunakea Rangers warning to the contrary. HB 1767 gives the Maunakea Rangers the much needed authority to enforce restrictions on 2WD traffic, for the benefit of all drivers on that challenging high altitude mountain road. Again, I strongly support HB 1767. It is badly needed and long overdue.

Aloha,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Doug Simons".

Dr. Douglas A. Simons
Executive Director
Canada-France-Hawaii Telescope Corp.

HB-1767-HD-2

Submitted on: 3/13/2018 3:26:02 PM

Testimony for TRE on 3/16/2018 1:15:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Present at Hearing
Paul Paiva	Individual	Support	No

Comments:

Aloha,

My name is Paul "Scotty" Paiva, Chief Maunakea Ranger, I am submitting this written testimony in support of HB 1767. The Mauna Kea Access Road is very steep, curvy, and the lower half is unpaved causing dangerous conditions for two-wheel drive vehicles. Two-wheel drive vehicles don't have the low gearing needed for the driver to keep a safe speed without using excessive brakes. I have witnessed brake lights from two-wheel drive vehicles all the way down the mountain. This means they were using their brakes all the way down the mountain. I have also witnessed vehicles with glowing red hot brakes at the Visitor Information Station.

Two-wheel drive vehicles also frequently get stuck in the loose and soft cinder because they lack sufficient traction and gearing causing traffic jams and hazards.

Another problem caused by two-wheel drive vehicles is they cause a washboard effect on gravel roads going up the mountain. This puts extra burden on the road crew who needs to grade the road more often and increasing the cost for road maintenance.

The washboard effect can also cause vehicles to lose control and traction from bouncing on the uneven road surface.

These are a few of the safety and fiscal reasons I support HB 1767.

Mahalo,

Paul "Scotty" Paiva

Chief Maunakea Ranger ppaiva@hawaii.edu

HB-1767-HD-2

Submitted on: 3/13/2018 3:10:14 PM

Testimony for TRE on 3/16/2018 1:15:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Present at Hearing
David S. De Luz, Jr.	Individual	Support	No

Comments:

Aloha!

The road down to Waipio Valley DEFINIELTY needs this restriction of having a 4WD with a low range feature.

Anyone other type of vehicle would be unsafe AND be a public hazard for others on this road.

I STRONGLY support this bill and would appreciate your considration.

Mahalo!

HB-1767-HD-2

Submitted on: 3/13/2018 10:17:35 PM

Testimony for TRE on 3/16/2018 1:15:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Present at Hearing
Rachel L. Kailianu	Individual	Support	Yes

Comments:

HB-1767-HD-2

Submitted on: 3/15/2018 9:40:38 AM

Testimony for TRE on 3/16/2018 1:15:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Present at Hearing
Ross Wilson Jr.	Individual	Support	No

Comments:

For public safety reasons, I support HB1767 HD2 that prohibits any vehicle, except four-wheel drive vehicles from being driven through or in Waipio Valley or the Mauna Kea Science Reserve.