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The Maui News and its news services

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PUBLIC TESTIMONY OPENS FOR OAHU PROJECT

HONOLULU - The state Land Use Commission has opened public hearings on Castle & Cooke's \$2.2 billion master-planned community of Koa Ridge in Central Oahu.

The company has asked the state for permission to convert 768 acres of land previously used to grow pineapple from agriculture to urban use. The land is located between Waipio and Mililani.

Plans call for 5,000 homes, a 28-acre medical campus, 150-room hotel, parks, two elementary schools and nearly 500,000 square feet of commercial space for retail, offices and light industrial businesses.

Testimony in Thursday's initial hearing was mostly in favor of the project. But some opponents say it would be a misuse of prime agricultural land.

The public hearings could take months to complete.

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TRANSPORTATION ADVOCATE BACKS RAIL

HONOLULU - The head of a national transportation advocacy group is pushing for Honolulu to start its planned \$5.4 billion commuter rail project and to resist alternatives that would delay it.

American Public Transportation Association President Bill Millar said Thursday that Honolulu's 20-mile elevated rail system would be faster and carry more people than a ground-level train.

Millar says delays in the project could cause Honolulu to lose more than \$1 billion in federal funding.

He appeared at Honolulu City Hall to respond to claims by the Hawaii chapter of the American Institute of Architects that building half the system at ground level would save money and preserve the skyline.

Millar is in Hawaii for the annual planning meeting of his group's business council.

Meanwhile, Honolulu Mayor Mufi Hannemann says he has reassured federal transportation officials that Honolulu's bus service won't be compromised by its commuter rail project.

Hannemann says that while in Washington this week, he met with Federal Transit Administration officials and addressed the agency's concern about rail projects that rely too heavily on federal funds that pay for bus service.

The mayor says he assured FTA Administrator Peter Rogoff that the city wouldn't compromise bus service. Hannemann says he told Rogoff that any funding that's currently dedicated to bus service should remain in place.

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