

ROAD LESS MAINTAINED

Ahh, rural roads. Hawaii's narrow, not so well paved byways through Upcountry, East Maui and other decidedly non-metropolitan areas of the island. There are hundreds of miles of them on Maui, many of which fall under county jurisdiction. But according to the the good folks at **The Road Information Program** (TRIP), a non-profit think tank in Washington, D.C., which sent me a copy of their latest report, titled *Rural Connections: Challenges and Opportunities in America's Heartland*, these roads (and bridges) suck.

"According to the TRIP report, in 2008, 29 percent of the state's major rural roads were rated in poor condition, the fifth highest share in the nation," said **Frank Moretti**, TRIP's director of research and policy in a Sept. 1 press release. "An additional 68 percent of Hawaii's major rural roads were rated in mediocre or fair condition. In 2010, 16 percent of Hawaii's rural bridges were rated as structurally deficient, the tenth highest percentage in the nation. And additional 35 percent of the state's rural bridges were functionally obsolete."

It gets worse: "In 2009, Hawaii's non-Interstate rural roads had a traffic fatality rate of 1.77 deaths for every 100 million vehicle miles of travel, compared to a fatality rate on all other roads of 0.89 deaths per 100 million vehicle roads of travel," states the press release. "Inadequate roadway safety design, longer emergency vehicle response times and the higher speeds traveled on rural roads are factors in the higher traffic fatality rate."

And that's pretty bad. Most of the rural roads throughout Hawaii fall under county jurisdiction (there are 169 miles of state roads on Maui, said state **Department of Transportation** spokesman **Daniel Meisenzahl**, but 450 miles of county roads). A spokesperson for the County of Maui didn't get back to me by press time.

As far as the bridges are concerned, Mei-

senzahl said a report last year identified 126 bridges across the state were deemed "structurally deficient." "Now that doesn't mean the bridge is about to collapse," Meisenzahl said. "What it does mean is that if the bridge was built today, it would be completely different because the standards today are different."

Considering that there are 750 state bridges total, that means roughly five percent of the bridges lack the sidewalks, lane widths and railings required by modern bridges. "The state recognizes that we have these bridges, and we're in the process of replacing them," said Meisenzahl. "We're very aware of the problem. But it will cost hundreds of millions of dollars to replace all of these bridges."

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