

Maalaea Harbor getting repairs

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Sunday, June 26, 2005 8:41 AM

WAILUKU – The state Department of Land and Natural Resources hopes to make major improvements so that Maalaea Harbor can be used for ferry service to Lanai.

“The ferry operators are hoping to get these improvements done, and they would like to operate the Maui-to-Lanai ferry using Maalaea,” said DLNR Chief Engineer Eric Hirano, who added that the harbor would be a more centrally located port for Lanai residents coming to Maui on business.

The project hinges on approval of a federal transportation grant to cover 80 percent of the estimated \$14.5 million cost. The state would have to put up \$2.9 million in matching funds to qualify.

Work would involve demolishing and replacing the harbor’s terminal building, improving the loading platform and installing new utilities to the harbor’s south breakwater.

The project includes no dredging or underwater work, Hirano said.

If the federal funds are approved, design of the project could start around the end of the year, and construction could start in 2007.

DLNR is also working on several other projects at Maalaea.

Design is under way for a project to repair electrical systems along the pier and install a sewage pump-out station.

But the \$770,000 approved is not nearly enough to pay for all the improvements that harbor users would want.

“What the boating community and the public wants there are multiple pump-out facilities,” Hirano said.

A preliminary cost estimate is well over \$1 million for the pump-out stations alone.

The department will concentrate on finishing the electrical work first, because of the availability of funds and because the exposed wiring is a safety issue, he said.

“It’s just something that needs to be done.”

In the mean time, DLNR will try to get a better tally on the cost for the pump-out stations so it can ask state lawmakers for the money next year.

DLNR is also spending \$850,000 to close its large-capacity cesspool at the harbor, to comply with federal environmental laws.

“I have so many projects going on at Maalaea Small Boat Harbor right now that I’m trying to coordinate and put everything together,” Hirano said.

Kayaker Dennis Fitzpatrick, who has helped organize “Pump Don’t Dump” rallies at the harbor to protest the dumping of sewage by tour boats, said the state should find a “temporary Band-Aid” to address the problem while looking for a permanent solution.

He said he’d heard about an underground storage tank and said it should be used to start pumping immediately.

“If they don’t do anything there’s going to be continued dumping of sewage on whales,” he said.

He agreed that multiple pump stations were needed to adequately serve the heavily trafficked harbor.

But he also said that enforcement of state law prohibiting the dumping of sewage within three miles of shore was a necessary part of the package.

“Until there’s enforcement, we know there’s not going to be any compliance,” he said.

At least two tour boat companies already are pumping out their sewage voluntarily, contacting with pump-truck operators to haul their wastes.

“All our vessels are 100 percent green now,” said Debbie Mitchell, executive administrator for Trilogy Excursions.

She said the company brought in a portable toilet and encouraged guests to use it before their cruise, and hired a pumping service to empty sewage from its tour boats at Lahaina and Maalaea Harbors.

“None of it goes in the water,” she said.

Anne Rillero of Pacific Whale Foundation said her company was currently pumping out the sewage on its Ocean Spirit tour boat.

It’s also widening its slip at the harbor so that it can pump out its other boats.

She said Pacific Whale Foundation had purchased an “eco-truck” that can haul biodiesel to its boats and pump out sewage.

“We also use it for recycling. It’s like a truck that does all the good stuff,” Rillero said.

Boater Kelly Ford of Kihei said Maalaea Harbor is long overdue for repairs. The loading ramp needs to be fixed and the breakwall is inadequate to protect the harbor from south swells, he said. Ford considered conditions unsafe for boaters.

“This harbor is falling apart,” he said. “It’s worse than people think. You have to be down here to really know how bad it is.”

Staff photographer Amanda Cowan contributed to this story. Ilima Loomis can be reached at iloomis@mauinews.com.

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