

HAWAII NEWS

Skyline: Waipahu station stands out amid automobile businesses

By [Andrew Gomes](#) • Today • Updated 10:19 am

EDITOR'S NOTE: The Honolulu Star-Advertiser is featuring each of the nine Skyline rail stations and surrounding communities stretching 11 miles from East Kapolei to Aloha Stadium. The series started Sunday and continues through Thursday. Passengers will begin riding Skyline on Friday.

Reminders of automobile transportation dominance are hard to miss approaching the city's fifth Skyline rail station, Pouhala, in Waipahu.

The primary section of this station nestles up to a Goodyear Auto Service business not far from an AutoZone parts store, two gas stations, a car wash, two car dealerships and a Hertz car rental station inside a Midas repair shop.

Buses, however, are what the city largely intends to connect rail riders with at this station.

The main link to the Pouhala station is the Waipahu Transit Center, a bus transfer hub with five bays for close to 20 express and regular bus routes adjacent to the rail line.



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It won't happen overnight, but rail is expected to drive away some of what the community-based Waipahu Town Action Plan describes as an "auto-oriented environment not conducive to pedestrians and bicyclists" that exists in the former sugar plantation town.

Russell Ryan expects such long-term transformation along with a more immediate boost in pedestrian traffic to the 75-year-old kamaaina family business he runs near the station with his wife, Monica Toguchi Ryan.

The couple operates Highway Inn, a restaurant that got its name from being prominently located along Farrington Highway.

As a former resident of London, where an extensive rail network exists, Russell Ryan is a big believer in such systems. So about seven years ago when he began searching to move Highway Inn from another site in Waipahu fronting the highway before an impending property lease expiration, Ryan was set on being close to a rail station.

“It’s a very good thing for a business to be situated close to the rail if your business involves foot traffic like ours does,” he said. “I think it’ll bring economic activity all along the line.”

The relocated Highway Inn opened in 2020 just steps from the Pouhala station, taking the place of a NAPA Auto Parts store next to Goodyear.

Besides more pedestrian traffic, Ryan said the elevated rail line in front of Highway Inn is an advertising conduit for the restaurant’s marquee sign visible to Skyline riders. Perhaps, he even hopes, the Pouhala station might become informally known one day as the Highway Inn station.

“Our restaurant is incredibly visible from the train and the station platform,” he said.



CINDY ELLEN RUSSELL / CRUSSELL@STARADVERTISER.COM

Pictured is the westbound view of the Pouhala (Waipahu Transit Center) station from inside Skyline.

Ryan also expects employment benefits that include some employees riding rail to work, and creating an expanded pool of potential new hires who don’t have a car or don’t want to deal with parking.

Many years from now Ryan expects additional synergies with more people riding rail and development of new housing and businesses around stations.

“People got to realize that we’re not building this for us,” he said. “We’re building it for future generations.”

City officials project that transit-oriented development zones within a half-mile radius around the Pouhala station and another station on the Ewa edge of Waipahu a little over a mile away will serve as a long-term magnet for 2,370 new homes.

Contemplated projects include redeveloping 326 senior housing units at two Hawaii Public Housing Authority properties in the area with up to 1,000 new affordable homes.

Kamehameha Schools, which owns 3.5 acres near the Pouhala station including land under a Times Supermarket, is advancing a plan to develop about 530 affordable-housing units on the site along with about 50,000 square feet of commercial space.

“This is truly transit-oriented development,” said trust spokesperson Aron Dote. “We’re expecting people to use rail and the bus line.”

Construction of the two-tower project named Keawalaui at Waipahu is projected to begin in 2025.

The city has encouraged more dense development in the area by rezoning 114 acres around the Pouhala station mainly for mixed use in place of zoning that had been restricted largely to either business, industrial or residential use.

To make TheBus connections with rail more convenient, the city upgraded the more than 20-year-old Waipahu Transit Center on Hikimoe Street about three years ago.

The city also has partially built a second entry and exit for the Pouhala station on the makai side of Farrington Highway after plans for the additional access were cut in 2013 to save money. A timetable for finishing this part of the station is uncertain.

Use of the Pouhala station when the full span of Skyline is running to Kakaako is projected by the Honolulu Authority for Rapid Transportation to be 10th-most out of 19 stations, with 3,520 daily passenger boardings. HART is not projecting station use for the introductory service segment set to start Friday.

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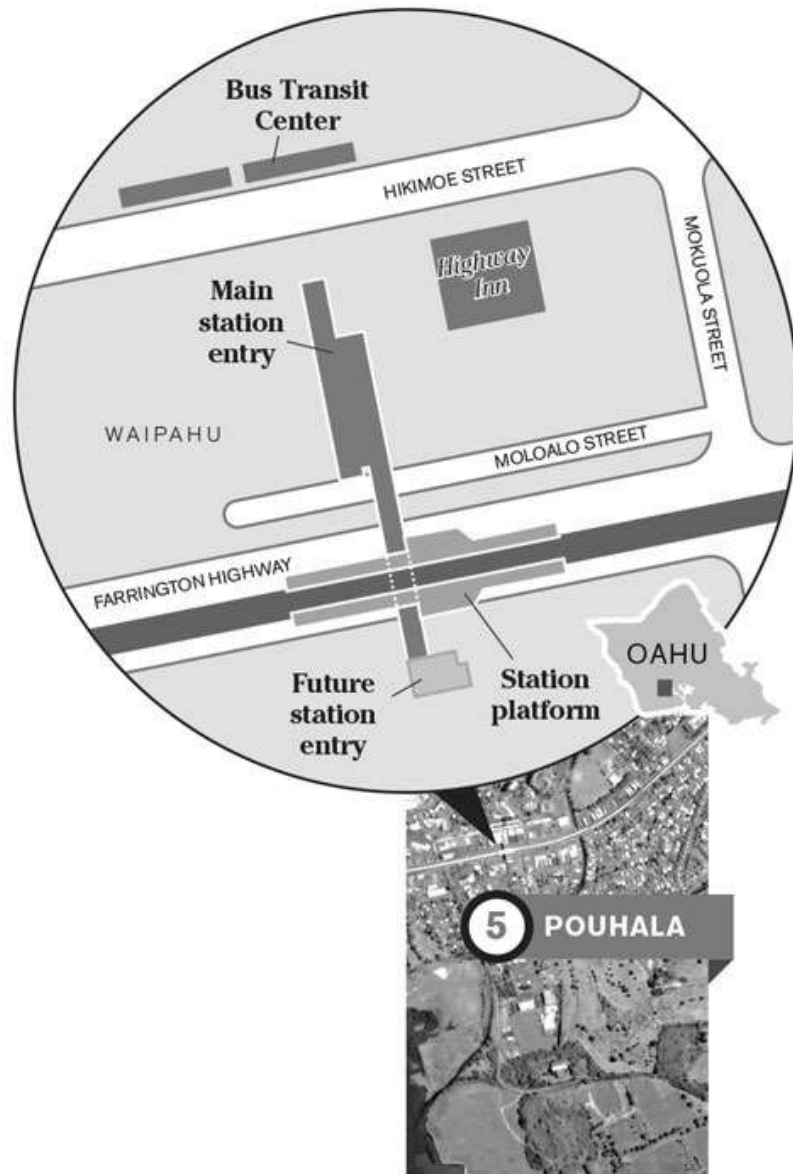


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Pouhala (Pandanus post or pillar). Pouhala was a historically important fishpond of the area and land division near Pearl Harbor. Today it is known as a 70-acre marsh between Waipahu Depot Road and West Loch that is a wetland habitat for birds.

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