

Regarding those Double Utility Poles

Have you noticed how many double utility poles have sprung up in recent years? Typically, this is caused when Hawaiian Electric installs a new pole adjacent to an old one and moves the electric service to the new pole, while the cable, phone lines and street light remain on the original pole. Since the last utility to relocate its service is responsible for removing the old pole, years often lapse before that utility gets around to it. In the meantime, we are left to look at two, sometimes three, adjacent poles marring our beautiful landscape.

There are more than 15,000 double poles in Hawaii today, more than a hundred are being created every month, and even after all the utilities relocate their services, some original poles remain uselessly in place. Once you realize how chronic is this situation, it is hard to look at utility poles the same way again.

I reached out to the Public Utilities Commission last summer to seek its help in stopping the proliferation of double poles. The PUC engaged with the Joint Pole Committee (there is such a thing) and reported that progress was being made, but it would take more time. To keep the pressure on, I introduced Senate Bill 3064, a bill that would require any utility who installs a pole within 10 feet of another pole to remove the original pole within 90 days.

SB 3064 was amended in committee and then approved by the Senate. The measure passed over to the House of Representatives and stalled in committee, but not before the utilities made clear their commitment to resolve this problem. Here follow samples of their testimony.

"Hawaiian Telcom understands the overall concern that inspired this measure and supports its purpose. Existing formal agreements between joint-pole owners dictate the standards and procedures for pole removal. These agreements are filed with, and approved by, the PUC. We acknowledge that current standards and procedures should be updated to address double poles, and pole owners are working diligently to finalize a solution."

"The (Hawaiian Electric) Companies agree that double pole removal is a very important issue that needs to be immediately addressed. The Companies and Hawaiian Telcom anticipate filing a joint application to the Public Utilities Commission by the end of this month seeking approval of several agreements...Until such filing is made, certain details of the agreements remain confidential under a nondisclosure agreement signed by both parties. However, we can share that there is a plan in place to identify, plan for, and commit to the transfer of equipment and the removal of double poles."

It will surely take several years to accomplish this task, but it looks like we may finally be turning the corner on the visual blight of double poles. Of course, time will tell how effective are the new policies, so we will continue to follow their progress.

My phone number is 586-7330. My email address is SenRiviere@capitol.hawaii.gov. Follow us on FaceBook or online at SenatorRiviere.com. Please visit us in Room 217 at the Capitol; or let's talk closer to home, maybe the next time we pass in the street. Mahalo.