

## Good News on Those Unsightly Telephone Poles

In my last article, I described the blight of double utility poles and my efforts since last year to work with the Public Utilities Commission and the utilities to halt their installation. Last month, the utilities testified before the state legislature that they were close to an agreement to begin solving this problem.

Since then, I received the following email from Hawaiian Electric:

*The Hawaiian Electric Companies and Hawaiian Telcom have agreed to transfer ownership and management of 120,000 jointly owned utility poles on O'ahu, Maui, Moloka'i, Lana'i and Hawaii Island to the electric utility, subject to approval by the Public Utilities Commission (PUC).*

*Today the two companies filed an application with the PUC (Docket No. 2018-0075) to approve the transfer.*

*The two companies' analysis shows the agreement will have no cost to customers and may provide savings over time in reduced maintenance expense. Other benefits of the agreement include:*

- *Eliminating thousands of unsightly "double poles." This occurs when a new pole is installed to carry power lines but telecommunication equipment remains on the adjacent old pole awaiting transfer by the telecom provider, sometimes for years. There are about 14,000 double poles statewide.*
- *Accelerating the deployment of new wireless communication technologies, like 5G, that rely on antennas and fiber attached to poles.*
- *Improving service by having a "one-stop" operation for handling customer inquiries and attachment requests as well as establishing a uniform approach to repair and maintenance.*

*First established in 1922 in an agreement between Hawaiian Electric and the Mutual Telephone Company, the shared pole arrangement gave both companies responsibility for maintaining poles, reducing costs to customers and eliminating the need for two sets of poles in many areas. Over time, other entities such as the state or county have joined to attach streetlights, and cable television and wireless communications carriers also rent space through separate license agreements with Hawaiian Telcom.*

*Under the proposed arrangement, Hawaiian Telcom will transfer ownership of shared poles to Hawaiian Electric in exchange for credit against past and future charges for attaching to poles.*

*If approved by regulators, Hawaiian Electric will be solely responsible for managing and maintaining the entire pole, including leasing space to communications carriers through its own license agreement. Hawaiian Telcom's continued presence on the poles will be provided by a similar license agreement with the utility.*

*The proposed approach has been successfully implemented by utilities such as San Diego Gas & Electric and CPS Energy.*

It is going to take some time before Hawaiian Electric removes that last double pole, but we should all be encouraged by this news.

Mahalo to both utilities, and especially to Hawaiian Electric for assuming responsibility of all the poles.