



5-14-90

Advertiser graphics by James Takamaya

## Hurdles for cable: environmentalists, and Mother Nature

The "preferred" route keeps changing.

It used to go through the Saddle between Mauna Loa and Mauna Kea, but the Army complained the overhead transmission wires might snag helicopters using Pohakuloa Training Area. So now the route passes north of Mauna Kea on its way to North Kohala, where it enters the sea.

From there, to its ultimate landfall in Waimanalo, the Hawaii Deep Water Cable would traverse 138 miles and the 6,300-foot-deep Alenuihaha Channel between the Big Island and Maui, making it the world's longest and deepest electrical transmission cable.

The scheme has drawn angry opposition from some environmental groups, including the Sierra Club and Hawaii Audubon Society, which cite potential damage to reefs and landing areas, including Maui's Ahiki-Kinai Natural Area Reserve.

A cable carrying power 120,000' leagues under the sea also would be vulnerable to submarine earthquakes and landslides, forcing Hawaiian Electric Co. to install an equal amount of oil-fired generation as backup, critics claim.

Not so, says HECO spokesman Scott Shirai.

At least two cables will make the interisland crossing, and a third may span Alenuihaha. HECO's request for proposals specified that the loss of one cable would not exceed the largest generating unit on Oahu, 146 megawatts.

That means that HECO would already have enough "spinning reserve" on Oahu to make for the loss of a cable, said Shirai.

From 1981 to 1988, with sup-

port from U.S. Sens. Daniel Inouye and Spark Matsunaga and Rep. Daniel Akaka, Congress approved \$23 million for cable research through the U.S. Energy Department. Another \$5 million came from the state.

The cable's designs and test lengths are the work of the Pirelli Cable Corp., an Italian company with U.S. headquarters in Union, N.J.

If large-scale geothermal gets the go-ahead, Pirelli stands to receive a contract worth at least \$400 million to complete at least 276 miles of cable.

Since it became the project's lead cable company in August 1983, Pirelli has made its interests known on Capitol Hill through a lobbying firm and thousands of dollars in campaign contributions and honoraria to key committee members, according to The Washington Post.

Still undecided is the timetable for installing the cables. If deemed feasible, the power plants would be phased in over 12 years beginning in 1993.

What about the danger from eruptions from Kilauea Volcano?

"They have to take their chances," says Richard Moore, a geologist with the U.S. Geological Survey on the Big Island from 1977 to 1987. "No eruption may occur in one spot for hundreds of years, but ... it might get buried the next year."

Moore, now based in Denver, said geologists are waiting to see what happens after the current seven-year eruption ends. "Will activity migrate uprift from there or downrift?" he asks.

— Jim Borg