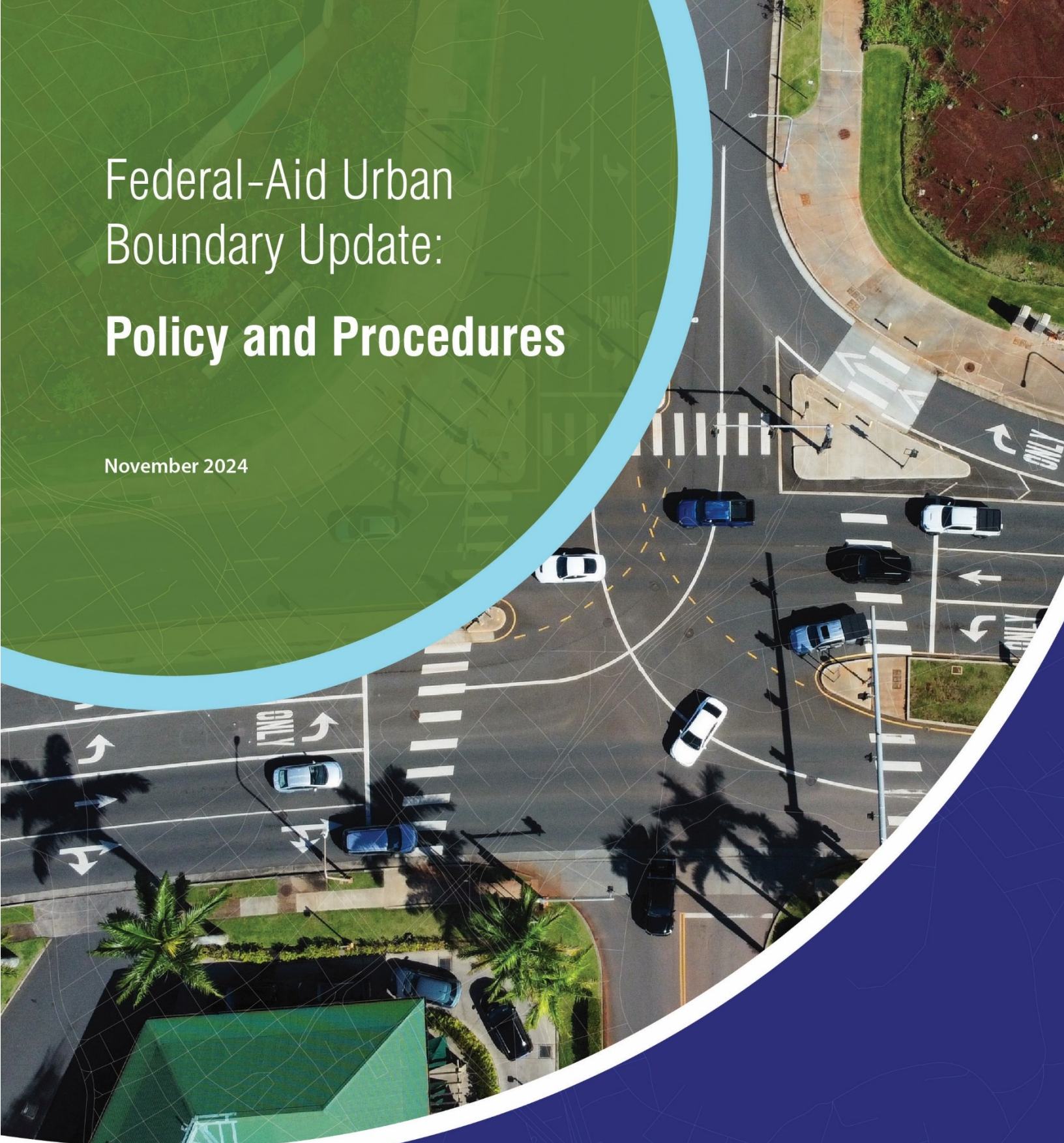


Federal-Aid Urban Boundary Update: Policy and Procedures

November 2024



Prepared for:
State of Hawaii
Department of Transportation
Highways Planning Branch



U.S. Department
of Transportation
**Federal Highway
Administration**

Hawaii Federal-Aid Division

May 9th, 2025

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In Reply Refer To:
HDA-HI

Edwin H. Sniffen
Director of Transportation for Highways
Hawaii Department of Transportation
869 Punchbowl Street
Honolulu, HI 96813

Subject: Federal Aid Urban Boundary Update Approval

Dear Mr. Sniffen,

Thank you for your letter, HWY-PS 24-2.35182 dated December 13, 2024.

The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) has reviewed the proposed readjustments to the 2020 Census Urban Boundaries as described in GIS shapefiles received on January 16, 2025, and the Urban Boundary Update Report received on April 15, 2025. As a result of our review, we find the 2024 Urban Boundary Readjustments to be consistent with 23 U.S.C. 101(a)(35), 23 CFR 1.2, 23 CFR 470.105, and FHWA's Functional Classification Guidelines, and approve per 23 CFR 1.7.

The readjustment to the 2020 Census Designated Urban Boundaries is effective immediately and remains in effect until new urban boundary data is released through the 2030 Decennial Census process.

Sincerely,

**RICHELLE M
TAKARA**
Richelle M. Takara, P.E.
Division Administrator

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Cc: Patrick Tom, Project Manager



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APPENDICES

- Appendix A: Census Urban Areas FAQs, dated February 2023
- Appendix B: Boundary Adjustment Proposal Justification Template
- Appendix C: 2024 Federal-Aid Urban Area Boundary Adjustment Justification
- Appendix D: 2024 Federal-Aid Urban Area Boundary Maps



Background

What are Urban Areas?

The U.S. Department of Commerce's Census Bureau uses the term **Urban Area**, as redefined following the 2020 decennial Census. The Census Bureau bases the designation of Urban Areas primarily on housing unit density or population density measured at the census block level. To qualify as an Urban Area, an area must encompass at least 2,000 housing units or at least 5,000 people. The Census Bureau categorizes areas outside the Urban Areas as Rural Areas.

Following the 2020 Census, three key changes to the Census Bureau's Urban Area criteria and designation were made from the previous 2010 Census, including:

- Increasing the minimum population threshold to qualify as urban from 2,500 to 5,000, with an alternative to qualify based on a minimum housing unit threshold of 2,000;
- Using housing unit density instead of population density; and
- No longer distinguishing between Urbanized Areas and Urban Clusters; all areas, regardless of population size, are distinguished as "Urban Areas"

Census-designated Urban Areas should not be confused with municipal boundaries or Urban Growth Boundaries – those are locally designated land use areas, which may or may not align with the Census-designated Urban Areas.

The Urban Areas defined using the 2020 Census data are the most recent; the 2024 Hawai'i Urban Boundary and Functional Classification Update will be based on 2020 Census information. Future updates should be based on the most recent year of available census data.

What are Federal-Aid Urban Areas?

As stated under 23 U.S.C. 101(a)(35), the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) defines an "urban area" as an area with a population of 5,000 or more, and an "urbanized area" (23 U.S.C. 101(a)(36)) as areas with a population of 50,000 or more. The FHWA also refers to urban areas with populations between 5,000 and 49,999 as small urban areas. Federal transportation legislation¹ allows responsible state and local officials in cooperation with each other, and subject to approval by the Secretary of Transportation, to adjust the Census-designated Urban Area boundaries outward, as long as they encompass, at a minimum, the entire Urban Area (of population 5,000 and above) designated by the Census Bureau.

¹ 23 U.S.C. 101(a)(35) – (46) and 49 U.S.C. 5302(23) – (24)



The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) uses the term **Federal-Aid Urban Area (FAUA)** to distinguish the adjusted Urban Area boundaries allowed *for transportation purposes* from those designated by the Census Bureau. These differences are presented in Tables 1 and 2 below.

Table 1: Census Bureau Urban Area Types Defined by Population Range

Agency	Definition	Population Range
Census Bureau	Urban Area	At least 5,000 persons or 2,000 housing units

Table 2: FHWA Urban Area Types Defined by Population Range

Agency	Definition	Population Range	Allowed Urban Area Boundary Adjustments
FHWA	Urban Area	5,000+	Yes
	Small Urban Area	5,000 – 49,999	Yes
	Urbanized Area	50,000+	Yes

The term “adjusted urban area boundaries” will refer to the FHWA boundary adjustment process in all areas of 5,000 population and above.

Why do Federal-Aid Urban Areas Matter?

FHWA lists several programs that are impacted by Urban Area/Federal-Aid Urban Area boundaries:

- *Highway Functional Classification* – Roadway facilities may have different design criteria based on urban or rural location, although classifications are not strictly applied according to an urban versus rural boundary designation.
- *Highway Performance Monitoring System (HPMS) Reporting* – Some statistics are categorized according to urban and rural location.
- *Critical Freight Corridors*: The National Highway Freight Program (NHFP) uses the urbanized area definition in 23 U.S.C. 101(a)(36), which includes adjusted urbanized areas, for the designation of critical urban freight corridors (CUFCs) and critical rural freight corridors (CRFCs).



- *Surface Transportation Block Grant (STBG) Program Apportionment Formula* – Apportionment of STBG funds within the state (not how much total funding the state receives) is to be obligated in the following areas, in proportion to their relative shares of the State’s population:
 - In urbanized areas of the State with an urbanized area population of over 200,000,
 - In urbanized areas of the State with an urbanized area population of not less than 50,000 and not more than 200,000,
 - In urban areas of the State with a population not less than 5,000 and not more than 49,999, and
 - In other areas of the State with a population less than 5,000.
- *STBG Special Rule for Areas Less Than 50,000* – Allows States to use up to 15% of STBG amounts suballocated for a fiscal year for use in areas with a population of not more than 49,999 on functionally classified rural minor collectors or local roads, or critical rural freight corridors.
- *Control of Outdoor Advertising* – Placement of signage depends on whether the location is in an urban or rural area.

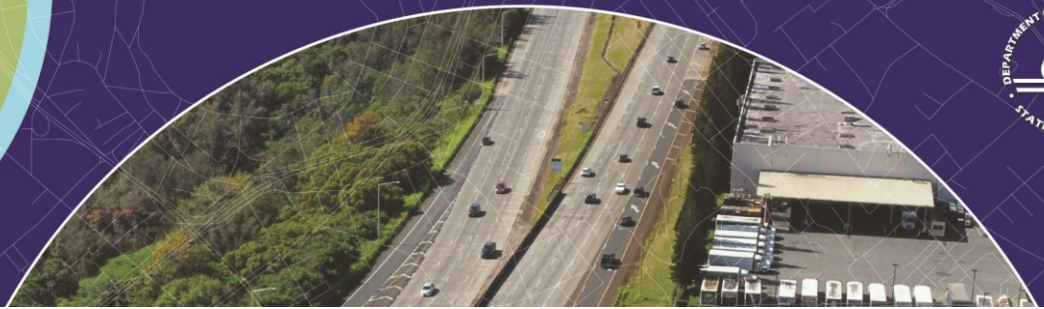
There is no federal requirement for states or Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) to adjust Census-designated Urban Areas. They may choose to use the Census-designated Urban Areas without adjustment. However, some states and MPOs choose to adjust Census-designated Urban Area boundaries to smooth out irregularities, maintain administrative continuity of peripheral routes, or to encompass fringe areas having residential, commercial, industrial and/or national defense significance. Consistent with federal policy, boundaries may also be adjusted to encompass significant ports, transit facilities, or other elements critical to the transportation system.

Hawaii’s 2024 Urban Boundary Update will be undertaken by the HDOT to ensure that the Census-designated Urban Area boundaries are free of irregularities and include relevant areas of residential, commercial, industrial, defense and transportation importance.

FHWA guidance advises that states should update their federal-aid boundaries within six months to one year following the decennial census by the U.S. Census Bureau. Urban boundaries can be adjusted and/or updated more frequently, as the need arises.

Hawai‘i’s Urban Boundary Update Process

The proposed 2024 urban boundary update process is consistent with FHWA guidance and FHWA Census Issues; Census Urban Areas FAQs dated February 2023, which are included in Appendix A. This process will also be used for any future urban boundary updates and to evaluate urban boundary update requests and adjustments.



The urban boundary update process includes the following seven steps, which are described in greater detail below:

- (1) Develop Base Map for Urban Area Analysis
- (2) Map the Current Bureau of Census Boundaries
- (3) Apply Criteria to Census Boundary Edges
- (4) Propose Boundary Adjustments
- (5) Local Government Concurrence
- (6) HDOT Concurrence and Acceptance
- (7) Submittal to FHWA Division Office for approval

STEP 1. Develop Base Map for Urban Area Analysis

A comprehensive base map is critical for understanding the spatial relationships among the transportation system, land use, and geographic or topographic features. The urban area analysis compares the Census-designated urban areas to base map features.

The base map for urban area analysis shall be created in Geographic Information Systems (GIS) software consistent with HDOT's preferred platform, such as ArcGIS Pro.

The base map for analysis of Hawai'i's urban boundaries should include the following:

- Prominent public highways and streets
- Current functional classification of streets
- Major bus routes
- Major transit stations or terminals
- Airports
- Rail line and stations
- Harbors and ports
- State urban, rural, agricultural and conservation district boundaries
- Hydrography
- Floodway/floodplain
- Schools
- Hospitals
- Shopping centers
- Major beaches and parks



- Defense/military facilities
- Large employers and employment centers
- Land use (commercial, industrial, residential)
- Major freight routes
- Planned transportation facilities (only those with committed funds and likely to be constructed in the next four years – consistent with the Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP))
- Planned transportation facilities that are of regional significance (identified in long-range transportation plans, general plans, or community development plans)
- Public transportation facilities included in permitted developments

STEP 2. Map Current Bureau of Census Boundaries

Once the base map is completed, the next step is to overlay the current U.S. Bureau of Census Urban Area boundary over the base map. It is important to use the most recent data from the U.S. Census Bureau, which is available in GIS format at <https://www.census.gov/geographies/mapping-files/time-series/geo/tiger-line-file.2020.html#list-tab-IEYPBIOVNICXVKSG6R>. Also, it is critical to recognize that Census-designated Urban Areas are often different from urban areas designated by local jurisdictions or the State Office of Planning and Sustainable Development.

For the 2024 update, the most recent available Census-designated Urban Area boundary information is from year 2020. This forms the current basis for the Federal-Aid Urban Boundary (FAUB) update. Future updates shall be based on the most recent year of available census data.

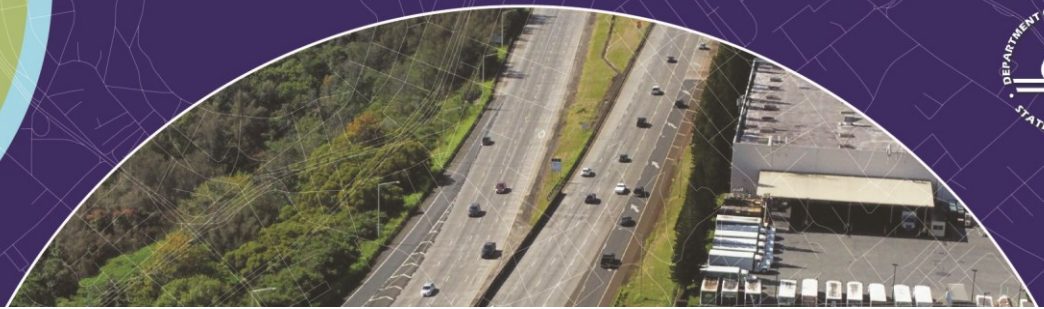
STEP 3. Apply Criteria to Census Boundary Edges

For the 2024 update, all Census-designated boundary edges will be reviewed against the criteria described below. The proposed boundary change adjustment shall be reviewed against the criteria described below for subsequent updates or boundary adjustment applications.

The criteria are listed in no order of significance or importance.

Hawai'i Federal-Aid Urban Boundary Adjustment Criteria:

1. The boundary adjustment encompasses the entire Urban Area as designated by the Census Bureau.
 - a. Recognize that these areas may or may not reflect geographic or political boundaries.
 - b. Only the Urban Areas designated by the Census Bureau that have a population of 5,000 or more should be included in the Federal-Aid Urban Boundary. For the 2024 update, the only 2020 Census-designated Urban Area that does not meet the 5,000 population threshold is the Princeville Urban Area, therefore it has not been included in the 2024 Proposed Federal-Aid Urban Boundary (see Appendix D).



2. The boundary adjustment incorporates areas of residential significance
 - a. Residential areas of medium- to high-density served by public roads
3. The boundary adjustment incorporates areas of commercial significance
 - a. Areas of commercial importance served by public roads
4. The boundary adjustment incorporates areas of industrial significance
 - a. Areas of industrial importance served by public roads
5. The boundary adjustment incorporates areas of national defense significance
 - a. Including terminals and access roads, if within a reasonable distance of the Urban Area
6. The boundary adjustment incorporates areas of transportation significance
 - a. Interchanges or major cross-roads
 - b. Routes important for freight travel
 - c. Routes important for national defense
 - d. Transit centers, stations, major service routes, or terminals
 - e. Ports or harbors
 - f. Airports
 - g. Boundaries should not be modified to accommodate a single project
7. The boundary adjustment better aligns with topographic or geographic characteristics
 - a. Natural boundaries (water bodies; steep slopes)
 - b. Forest reserves and/or conservation boundaries
 - c. Human-constructed boundaries (roadways; dikes; canals)
8. The boundary adjustment addresses irregularities in the current Census-designated boundary
 - a. Partial right-of-way, such as one half of a road but not the other
 - b. Inclusion of an area without including a roadway to access that area
 - c. Lack of tie to real features on the ground
 - d. Address administrative continuity
 - e. Other irregularities that could be addressed through boundary smoothing
9. The boundary adjustment includes areas of growth not captured by the most recent census update
 - a. Areas of population or employment growth since 2020
 - b. Consider traffic analysis zone (TAZ) boundaries, recognizing not all TAZ boundaries will be appropriate for the urban boundary
 - c. Include areas of planned growth as defined by statewide and regional planning documents



STEP 4. Propose Boundary Adjustments

Once it is determined that the proposed boundary adjustment would meet more than one of the criteria described in Step 3, a boundary adjustment proposal will be developed.

For the 2024 update, the HDOT project team will use the criteria to guide a comprehensive review of all boundary edges. For any boundary edges determined necessary to adjust, the HDOT project team will develop an overall boundary adjustment proposal consistent with the process described in Step 4.

The boundary adjustment proposal shall include:

1. A map delineating the proposed boundary location. The map should be of a scale necessary to show all prominent highways and streets, all fixed transit right-of-way facilities, all major bus routes, and political boundaries (municipal limits). The map shall also show the current Census-designated Urban Area boundary in order to display the change.
2. Justification for the adjustment. Justification shall follow the template included in Appendix B of this memorandum. The justification includes the date of the request, name/entity of the applicant, boundary adjustment location (jurisdiction and description), and rationale for adjustment (response to the criteria outlined in Step 3).

The justification for the 2024 update is included in Appendix C of this memorandum and the changes are reflected in the proposed 2024 federal-aid urban boundary maps in Appendix D.

3. All urban boundary changes shall be submitted to FHWA Division Administrator in one packet with coversheet for signature approval.

STEP 5. Local Government Concurrence

Boundary adjustment proposals should be submitted to the relevant local government(s) to request concurrence. The relevant local government is the jurisdiction(s) in which the proposed boundary adjustment lies (City, Town, County or MPO) as well as the local transit authority, if applicable.

Concurrence represents a local jurisdiction's agreement with the proposed change. Concurrence can be reflected by the local jurisdiction's participation in a decennial census update or a local jurisdiction's request for the boundary change.

STEP 6. HDOT Concurrence and Acceptance

Boundary adjustment proposals must be submitted to HDOT Highways Planning. HDOT Highways Planning will review the proposal and either provide (1) concurrence and acceptance by signing the boundary adjustment proposal map; or (2) a letter of non-concurrence, outlining the reasons for non-concurrence. Generally, reasons for non-concurrence include not appropriately addressing the boundary adjustment criteria or a lack of local government concurrence.



STEP 7. Submittal to FHWA Division Office for Approval

A final application packet is then submitted by HDOT to the FHWA Division Office in a mutually agreed upon format (PDF), including:

- Boundary adjustment map and justification
- HDOT concurrence and acceptance signature

FHWA approval shall be indicated by signature of the Division Administrator on the application cover sheet of the packet of all approved changes.



Appendix A

Census Urban Areas FAQs, dated February, 2023

2020 Census Urban Areas FAQs

Updated February 2023

Release Schedule

Q: When will the 2020 Census Urban Areas be announced?

A: Release schedule for products:

December 29, 2022:

- Federal Register Notice with list of 2020 Census Urban Areas with their 2020 Census population, housing units, and land area, as well as separate tables of this same information.

January 2023:

- TIGERweb service updated with 2020 Census Urban Areas
- TIGER/Line Shapefiles
- TIGER/Line Geodatabases
- Census Geocoder updated with 2020 Census Urban Areas

February 2023:

- 2020 Census Urban Areas Wall Map
- Relationship Files

Later in 2023:

- Cartographic Boundary Files – May 2023
- Additional maps

Federal Register

Q: When were the final 2020 Census Urban Area criteria published in the *Federal Register*?

A: The criteria for defining 2020 Census Urban Areas were published in the *Federal Register* on Thursday, March 24, 2022., Final criteria clarifications will be published in the **2020 Census Qualifying Urban Areas and Final Criteria Clarifications** *Federal Register* Notice on Thursday, December 29, 2022.

Q: Where can I find the *Federal Register* Notice for the 2020 Census urban area final criteria?

A: <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-2022-03-24/pdf/2022-06180.pdf>

Q: Where can I find the *Federal Register* Notice containing 2020 Census Urban Area final criteria clarifications?

A: <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/geography/guidance/geo-areas/urban-rural.html>

Q: When were the proposed 2020 Census Urban Area criteria published in the *Federal Register*?

A: The proposed 2020 Census Urban Area criteria were published in the *Federal Register* on February 19, 2021.

Q: Where can I find the proposed 2020 Census Urban Area criteria *Federal Register* Notice?

A: <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2021/02/19/2021-03412/urban-areas-for-the-2020-census-proposed-criteria>

Urban Areas Criteria

Q: What is the definition of an urban area?

A: Urban areas represent densely developed territory, and encompass residential, commercial, and other nonresidential urban land uses. Each urban area must encompass at least 2,000 housing units or at least 5,000 people. This is a change from the previous minimum of 2,500 people which had been in place since the 1910 Census.

Urban areas are defined primarily based on housing unit density measured at the census block level. Three housing unit densities are applied during the delineation process:

- Initial urban core: at least 425 housing units per square mile. Based on the national average of 2.6 people per occupied housing unit, this density threshold is similar to the 1,000 people per square mile used in 2000 and 2010 when delineating initial urban cores.
- Remainder of urban area: at least 200 housing units per square mile. This is similar to the 500 people per square mile density used for the 2000 and 2010 Censuses, based on the national average of 2.6 people per occupied housing unit.
- At least one high-density nucleus of at least 1,275 housing units per square mile required for qualification. This ensures that each urban area contains a high-density nucleus typical of what one would expect to find within an urban area. In addition to the change in minimum thresholds for qualification and the change to use of housing unit density, the Census Bureau also will no longer distinguish between urbanized areas of 50,000 or more people and urban clusters of less than 50,000 people.

Q: Can you tell us if the population for our urban area is above or below 50,000?

A: The population of each 2020 Census Urban Area is in the **2020 Census Qualifying Urban Areas and Final Criteria Clarifications** *Federal Register* Notice published December 29, 2022 and available on the Census Bureau's Urban and Rural website: <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/geography/guidance/geo-areas/urban-rural.html>.

Q: Why was the change made from the original proposed minimum qualification thresholds of 4,000 housing units or 10,000 people, to the final thresholds of 2,000 housing units or 5,000 people? Was it available for public comment? If so, what were the objections in the public comment?

A: This change was in response to public comment and concerns that the increase from the 2,500-people threshold of the past 110 years (the 2,500-people threshold was adopted in 1910) to 10,000 people or 4,000 housing units was too high and would result in loss of statistical data and loss of statistical comparability for those communities (data will still be available for all incorporated places and census designated places regardless of population size). We have periodically received comments from data users and rural analysts that our 2,500-people threshold was too low, especially when compared to minimum thresholds for urban areas used by other federal agencies. Lowering the threshold to 2,000 housing units or 5,000 people represents a compromise between those concerned about loss of data and those who have expressed concerns that our urban area threshold was too low and out of alignment with thresholds used by other agencies.

Q: Why was the originally proposed density of 385 housing units per square mile raised to 425 housing units per square mile?

A: There are three housing unit density thresholds for the final 2020 UA criteria. The change from 385 to 425 resulted from responses to various aspects of the criteria and our research in response to public comments. Some commenters noted that we utilized two population density thresholds (500 and 1,000 people per square mile, or PPSM) in previous decades and expressed concern that sole reliance on the proposed 385 housing units per square mile (HPSM) threshold (which was equivalent to 1,000 PPSM) would result in underbounding of some urban areas, especially when census blocks on the fringe of an urban area contained urban land uses, but had relatively large land areas, resulting in lower densities. Others expressed concern that exclusion of such blocks from an urban area resulted in too many noncontiguous pieces of qualifying urban territory. To address these concerns, we introduced the “low-density fill” criterion, which utilizes a 200 HPSM threshold to account for irregularly shaped census blocks on the fringe of an urban area that contain urban development, but because of relatively larger land area, have lower population densities. The “low-density fill” criterion also minimizes the number of noncontiguous UA pieces. Based on continued research and review of settlement patterns, we decided to adopt a higher threshold of 425 HPSM for delineation of initial cores in order to avoid initially extending too far into rural territory and then utilize the lower 200 HPSM threshold to fill in gaps. The third density threshold—1,275 HPSM—is utilized to ensure that each urban area contains at least one densely settled nucleus typical of what one would expect for an urban area.

Q: How will the classification of census blocks as urban or rural differ from 2010?

A: There are two main changes to the criteria that affect the classification of blocks as urban or rural. First, we are using census blocks as the only “geographic building block” throughout the entire delineation, whereas for the 2010 Census delineation process census tracts were utilized in the initial stage and then individual census blocks were analyzed and added to the qualifying census tracts. The use of census tracts at the initial stage improved processing of data, but led to the inclusion of some territory with typically rural land uses; that is, the overall population density of the census tract was high

enough to qualify for inclusion in an urban area, with the result that low-density census blocks containing rural land uses were defined as urban. The second change is that we will not be including low-density census blocks that form the hop and jump corridors (resulting in noncontiguous, multi-piece urban areas). Those low-density census block hop and jump connections were included for the 2010 Census as well as in previous decades. Both of these changes will result in blocks no longer qualifying as urban, but will have little impact on the total population/housing unit counts of the urban areas.

Q: How will urban area names change for the 2020 Census, will additional names be added on to the 2010 Urban Area names?

A: A number of 2020 Census Urban Areas have additional place names added because of the inclusion of housing unit counts as the secondary naming criteria. This was designed to provide more accurate naming in seasonal communities such as beach towns and mountain resorts, and more accurately reflect the known names of the urban areas overall. In most cases the primary name stayed the same as that from 2010, but there are cases where additional names were added for 2020.

Q: Why does the Census Bureau review and make changes to urban area criteria?

A: Since 1950, when the urbanized area concept was introduced, the Census Bureau has periodically reviewed and revised the criteria for delineating urban areas and introduced conceptual and methodological changes to ensure that the urban-rural classification keeps pace with changes in settlement patterns, development, and with changes in theoretical and practical approaches to interpreting and understanding the definition and extent of urbanization. This assures that the definitions of, and data for, Census Bureau-defined urban areas reflect changes in the nature of settlement as well as the needs of researchers and analysts when conceptualizing and reporting on the urban-rural landscape and urban-rural settlement. Fundamentally, we are delineating boundaries of a concept—urbanization—that can be seen on the landscape and changes over time as new development occurs and density of settlement increases, but also as changes in terms of the way in data users, researchers, and decision-makers perceive and interpret what is “urban” and what is “rural.” Periodic review of the urban-rural classification and criteria ensures its continued usefulness and relevance for statistical data tabulation and analysis, and ensures that the delineation process utilizes the best possible data, procedures, and methodologies.

Q: Is it true that the Census Bureau is no longer defining urbanized areas?

A: No. The Census Bureau will no longer identify an individual urban area as either an "urbanized area" or an "urban cluster", but we will refer to all qualified areas as “urban areas” regardless of population size. We will publish population and housing counts for each urban area when we announce results of the 2020 Census Urban Area delineation. Data users and programs will be able to use those counts and subsequent American Community Survey estimates to categorize urban areas according to population size.

Urban-Rural Classification

Q: Why does the Census Bureau delineate urban areas?

A: The Census Bureau delineates urban and rural areas for statistical purposes; that is, to tabulate and present data for the urban and rural population, housing, and territory within the United States, Puerto Rico, and the Island Areas. The Census Bureau's urban areas represent densely developed territory and encompass residential, commercial, and other non-residential urban land uses. The Census Bureau's urban and rural classification provides an important baseline for analyzing changes in the distribution and characteristics of urban and rural populations. The Census Bureau's delineation of urban areas also supports the Office of Management and Budget's delineation of metropolitan and micropolitan statistical areas. Urban areas of 50,000 or more people form the urban cores of metropolitan statistical areas; urban areas of at least 10,000 and less than 50,000 people form the urban cores of micropolitan statistical areas.

Q: How does the Census Bureau define "urban" and "rural?"

A: The Census Bureau's urban-rural classification is fundamentally a delineation of geographical areas, identifying both individual urban areas and the rural portion of the nation. The Census Bureau's urban areas represent densely developed territory, and encompass residential, commercial, and other nonresidential urban land uses. For the 2020 Census, an urban area will comprise a densely settled core of census blocks that meet minimum housing unit density requirements, along with adjacent territory containing non-residential urban land uses as well as territory with low population density included to link outlying densely settled territory with the densely settled core. To qualify as an urban area, the territory identified according to criteria must encompass at least 2,000 housing units or at least 5,000 people. "Rural" encompasses all population, housing, and territory not included within any urban area. The specific criteria used to define urban areas for the 2020 Census were published in the Federal Register of March 24, 2022. Final criteria clarifications will be published in the **2020 Census Qualifying Urban Areas and Final Criteria Clarifications** *Federal Register* notice on Thursday, December 29, 2022 as well as separate tables on <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/geography/guidance/geo-areas/urban-rural.html>.

Q: Were there changes to the urban area delineation criteria for the 2020 Census?

A: Yes. A description of differences between the 2020 Census Urban Area criteria and 2010 Census Urban Area criteria are available on our website. Changes include:

- Raising the minimum threshold for qualification as an urban area to 2,000 housing units or 5,000 people.
- Use of primarily housing unit density instead of population density when delineating urban areas.
- No longer including low-density hop and jump corridor blocks in the urban area (resulting in noncontiguous urban areas).

- Use of Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics Origin-Destination Employment Statistics (LODES) commuting data to determine whether to split agglomerations of continuous urban development and if so, where to draw the boundary.

Q: What are hops and jumps?

A: “Hops” and “jumps” provide a means for connecting outlying densely settled territory with the main portion of the urban area. A hop provides a connection from one urban area core to other qualifying urban territory along a road connection of 0.5 miles or less in length; multiple hops may be made along any given road corridor. This criterion recognizes that alternating patterns of residential development and non-residential development are a typical feature of urban landscapes. A jump provides a connection from one urban area core to other qualifying urban territory along a road connection that is greater than 0.5 miles, but less than or equal to 1.5 miles in length; only one jump may be made along any given road connection. The jump concept has been part of the urban area delineation process since the 1950 Census, providing a means for recognizing that urbanization may be offset by intervening areas that have not yet been developed. The Census Bureau changed the maximum jump distance from 1.5 miles to 2.5 miles with the Census 2000 criteria and retained the 2.5-mile distance in the 2010 Census criteria. The Census Bureau returned to the 1.5-mile maximum distance with the 2020 Census criteria.

Q: How often does the Census Bureau update the boundaries of urban areas?

A: The Census Bureau reviews and updates urban area boundaries every ten years, following the decennial census. Census blocks provide the “building blocks” for applying housing unit density and other measures and delineating each urban area. The use of housing unit density at the census block level provides the opportunity to update urban areas between decennial censuses based on address/housing unit counts contained in the Census Bureau’s Master Address File, which is updated annually. At this time, however, the Census Bureau has not made specific plans to update urban areas between censuses.

Q: How do urban areas compare to the Office of Management and Budget’s metropolitan and micropolitan statistical areas?

A: Urban areas form the urban cores of metropolitan and micropolitan statistical areas, respectively. Each metropolitan statistical area will contain at least one urban area of 50,000 or more people; each micropolitan statistical area will contain at least one urban area of at least 10,000 and less than 50,000 people. Metropolitan and micropolitan statistical areas represent the county-based functional regions associated with urban centers (hence, the generic term “core based statistical areas”).

Q: When did the Census Bureau begin defining urban and rural areas?

A: The Census Bureau first defined urban places in reports following the 1880 and 1890 Censuses. At that time, the Census Bureau identified as urban any incorporated place that had a minimum population

of either 4,000 or 8,000, depending on the report. The Census Bureau adopted the current minimum population threshold of 2,500 for the 1910 Census; any incorporated place that contained at least 2,500 people within its boundaries was considered urban. All territory outside urban places, regardless of population density, was considered rural. The Census Bureau began identifying densely populated urbanized areas of 50,000 or more population with the 1950 Census, taking into account the increased presence of densely settled suburban development in the vicinity of large cities. Outside urbanized areas, the Census Bureau continued to identify as urban any incorporated place or census designated place of at least 2,500 and less than 50,000 people. The Census Bureau introduced the urban cluster concept for the 2000 Census, replacing urban places located outside urbanized areas. Urban clusters were defined based on the same criteria as urbanized areas, but represented areas containing at least 2,500 and less than 50,000 people. Starting with the 2020 Census, the Census Bureau ceased distinguishing between urbanized areas and urban clusters. “Rural” continues to be defined as any population, housing, or territory outside urban areas.

Q: How has the Census Bureau’s urban-rural definition changed over time?

A: From the 1910 Census through the 1940 Census, the Census Bureau defined “urban” as any incorporated place that contained at least 2,500 people within its boundaries. Additional criteria were applied to classify certain New England towns and other areas as urban. This accounted for selected geographic areas that had urban characteristics but were not identified as incorporated places by the Census Bureau. Increasing suburbanization, particularly outside the boundaries of large incorporated places led the Census Bureau to adopt the urbanized area concept for the 1950 Census. At that time, the Census Bureau formally recognized that densely settled communities outside the boundaries of large incorporated municipalities were just as “urban” as the densely settled population inside those boundaries. The Census Bureau adopted a number of changes to the urban area definition and delineation criteria for the 2000 Census, notably, identifying urban clusters of at least 2,500 and less than 50,000 peoples, defined using the same density-based criteria as urbanized areas. The Census Bureau adopted two key changes for the 2020 Census: 1) raising the minimum threshold for qualification as an urban area to at least 2,000 housing units or at least 5,000 people and 2) using primarily housing unit density to identifying qualifying census blocks instead of population density.

Other topics

Q: Who uses the Census Bureau’s urban and rural definitions?

A: There are a variety of ways in which the Census Bureau’s urban and rural definitions are used:

- Data users and researchers interested in analyzing data for urban and rural population and housing use the Census Bureau urban and rural areas, and data tabulated for those areas.
- Analysts use urban area data to study patterns of urbanization, suburban growth and development, and urban/rural land area change.
- Various federal and state agencies use the Census Bureau’s urban and rural definitions as the basis for their own urban and rural definitions and settlement classifications for use in tabulating and presenting statistical data. The National Center for Education Statistics uses the Census Bureau’s urban and rural definitions in its locale codes classification. The U.S. Department of Agriculture uses the Census Bureau’s urban-rural classification as the basis for

various urban and rural classifications used to analyze and report on demographic and economic patterns in rural areas.

- Other government agencies use the Census Bureau's urban and rural definitions to determine program eligibility and in their funding formulas. For example, the Federal Highways Administration uses Census Bureau urban areas of 50,000 or more population to establish Metropolitan Planning Organizations. For rural health programs, a clinic qualifies as a rural health clinic if it is located outside the boundaries of any Census Bureau urban area.

Q: Does the Census Bureau allow local governments and other groups to participate in the delineation of urban area boundaries?

A: No. The Census Bureau's urban and rural area definitions provide a baseline for a wide variety of data users, researchers, and analysts; it is important to our statistical data users that we define urban areas in a nationally consistent and objective manner. In addition, although the Census Bureau does not take into account the needs of specific non-statistical programs, we are aware of the potential programmatic advantages or disadvantages deriving from the size of an urban area and urban/rural status. For that reason also, it is important that we define urban areas in an objective manner, applying the same criteria and delineation methodology throughout the United States, Puerto Rico, and the Island Areas. Prior to each decennial census, the Census Bureau publishes in the *Federal Register* proposed criteria for delineating urban areas for public review and comment, in addition to meeting with various data user and stakeholder groups to ensure that the urban area concept and criteria continue to meet users' needs and expectations, while maintaining continuity with previous decades' definitions. The final criteria adopted for application with decennial census and other data to delineate urban areas reflects the comments received through the *Federal Register* comment process.

Q: Is there an appeals process if I disagree with the location of an urban area boundary?

A: The Census Bureau does not have an appeals process for their urban areas. We will work with tribal, federal, state, or local agencies as well as stakeholders, as appropriate, to ensure understanding of our classification and delineation of specific urban areas. The Census Bureau applies published criteria with statistical and other publicly available data to identify a nationally consistent set of urban areas, defined in as objective a manner as possible. Prior to each decennial census, the Census Bureau publishes in the *Federal Register* proposed criteria for delineating urban areas for public review and comment. The final criteria adopted for application to decennial census and other data to delineate urban areas reflect the comments received through the *Federal Register* comment process. Because of the numerous and varied use of the Census Bureau's urban-rural classification, many conflicting even within a single community, the specific definitions are not able to be challenged, rather the specific uses of the Census Bureau's urban-rural classification must be challenged to determine if their use is appropriate.

Q: How will my area's classification affect my funding?

A: Program eligibility and funding formulas are determined by the federal and state agencies making determining eligibility and providing funding. For information about how the new urban and rural

definitions may affect your area's funding, please contact the respective grant-making agencies. The Census Bureau will work with tribal, federal, state, or local agencies as well as stakeholders, as appropriate, to ensure understanding of our classification and the definition of specific urban areas.

Q: Where do I find the 2020 Census Urban Area TIGER/Line Shapefile?

A: The 2020 Census Urban Area TIGER/Line Shapefile is located here:

<https://www.census.gov/geographies/mapping-files/time-series/geo/tiger-line-file.html> via the FTP option. There are currently two ways to access the file:

- On the 2023 tab, select the FTP Archive by Layer option, select the UAC20 folder, and then download the tl_rd22_us_uac20.zip.
- On the 2020 tab, select the FTP Archive option, select the UAC folder, and then download the tl_2020_us_uac20.zip file.

Q: The 2020 Census Urban Area TIGER/Line Shapefile does not contain housing and population counts for the Urban Areas. Where do I find this information?

A: The 2020 Census Urban Area population and housing data is located here:

<https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/geography/guidance/geo-areas/urban-rural.html> Scroll down to: "List of 2020 Census Urban Areas", Select the first option: "A list of all 2020 Census Urban Areas for the U.S., Puerto Rico, and Island Areas sorted by Urban Area Census (UACE) code [<1.0 MB]"

These files can be joined to the 2020 Census Urban Area TIGER/Line Shapefile using Geographic Information System (GIS) software.

Q: How can I find out which Census tabulation blocks are urban and which are rural?

A: An urban/rural flag is available on 2020 tabulation block TIGER/Line Shapefiles located here:

<https://www.census.gov/geographies/mapping-files/time-series/geo/tiger-line-file.html>.

The Urban Area Tabblock20 TIGER/Line Shapefiles can be downloaded for each State, Puerto Rico and Island areas via the FTP option. There are currently two ways to access the files:

- On the 2023 tab, using the FTP Archive by Layer option, select the TABBLOCK20 folder, and then download the tl_rd22_##_tabblock20.zip where ## is the FIPS code for the state of interest.
- On the 2020 tab:
 - Using the Web Interface, Select year: 2020 and Select a layer type: Blocks and then select the state(s) of interest.
 - Using the the FTP Archive option, select the TABBLOCKS20 folder, and then download the tl_2020_##_tabblock20.zip file where ## is the FIPS code for the state of interest.

The urban area attributes within the tabblock20 layer are:

- UR20: "U" = Urban, "R" = Rural
- UACE2020: If UR20 = U, then the urban area code will be provided in this field otherwise the field is null
- UATYPE20: "U" = Urban, Null = Not Urban



Appendix B

Boundary Adjustment Proposal Justification Template



State of Hawai'i Federal-Aid Urban Boundary Adjustment Justification Form

Instructions: Fill out the form with complete information. All proposed urban boundary adjustments must address the adjustment criteria included below.

All applications for boundary adjustment must also include a map delineating the proposed boundary location. The map shall be of a scale necessary to show all prominent highways and streets, all fixed transit right-of-way facilities, all major bus routes, and political boundaries (municipal limits). The map shall also show the current Census-designated urban area boundary in order to display the change. Maps shall also include a signature block space for local concurrence signatures, HDOT concurrence signatures and FHWA Division Administrator signature approval.

Date	Applicant	Adjustment Location (Jurisdiction and Written Description)	Rationale/Response to Criteria

Hawai'i Federal-Aid Urban Boundary Adjustment Criteria:

1. The boundary adjustment encompasses the entire Urban Area as designated by the Census Bureau.
 - a. Recognize that these areas may or may not reflect geographic or political boundaries.
 - b. Only the Urban Areas designated by the Census Bureau that have a population of 5,000 or more should be included in the Federal-Aid Urban Boundary.
2. The boundary adjustment incorporates areas of residential significance
 - a. Residential areas of medium- to high-density served by public roads
3. The boundary adjustment incorporates areas of commercial significance
 - a. Areas of commercial importance served by public roads
4. The boundary adjustment incorporates areas of industrial significance
 - a. Areas of industrial importance served by public roads
5. The boundary adjustment incorporates areas of national defense significance
 - a. Including terminals and access roads, if within a reasonable distance of the Urban Area
6. The boundary adjustment incorporates areas of transportation significance
 - a. Interchanges or major cross-roads
 - b. Routes important for freight travel



- c. Routes important for national defense
- d. Transit centers, stations, major service routes, or terminals
- e. Ports or harbors
- f. Airports
- g. Boundaries should not be modified to accommodate a single project
7. The boundary adjustment better aligns with topographic or geographic characteristics
 - a. Natural boundaries (water bodies; steep slopes)
 - b. Forest reserves and/or conservation boundaries
 - c. Human-constructed boundaries (roadways; dikes; canals)
8. The boundary adjustment addresses irregularities in the current Census-designated boundary
 - a. Partial right-of-way, such as one half of a road but not the other
 - b. Inclusion of an area without including a roadway to access that area
 - c. Lack of tie to real features on the ground
 - d. Address administrative continuity
 - e. Other irregularities that could be addressed through boundary smoothing
9. The boundary adjustment includes areas of growth not captured by the most recent census update
 - a. Areas of population or employment growth since 2020
 - b. Consider traffic analysis zone (TAZ) boundaries, recognizing not all TAZ boundaries will be appropriate for the urban boundary
 - c. Include areas of planned growth as defined by statewide and regional planning documents



Appendix C

2024 Federal-Aid Urban Area Boundary Adjustment Justification



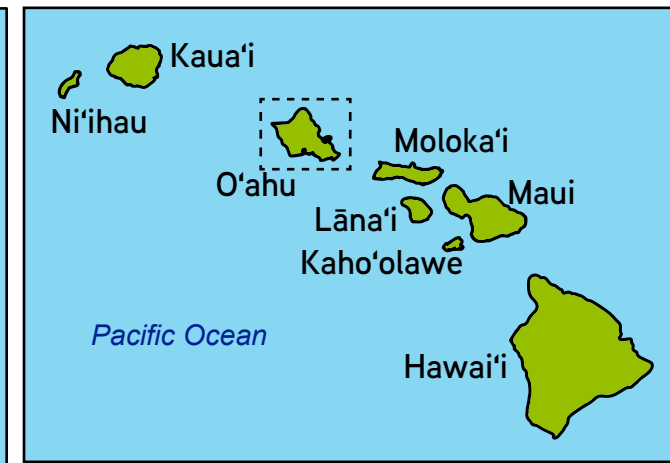
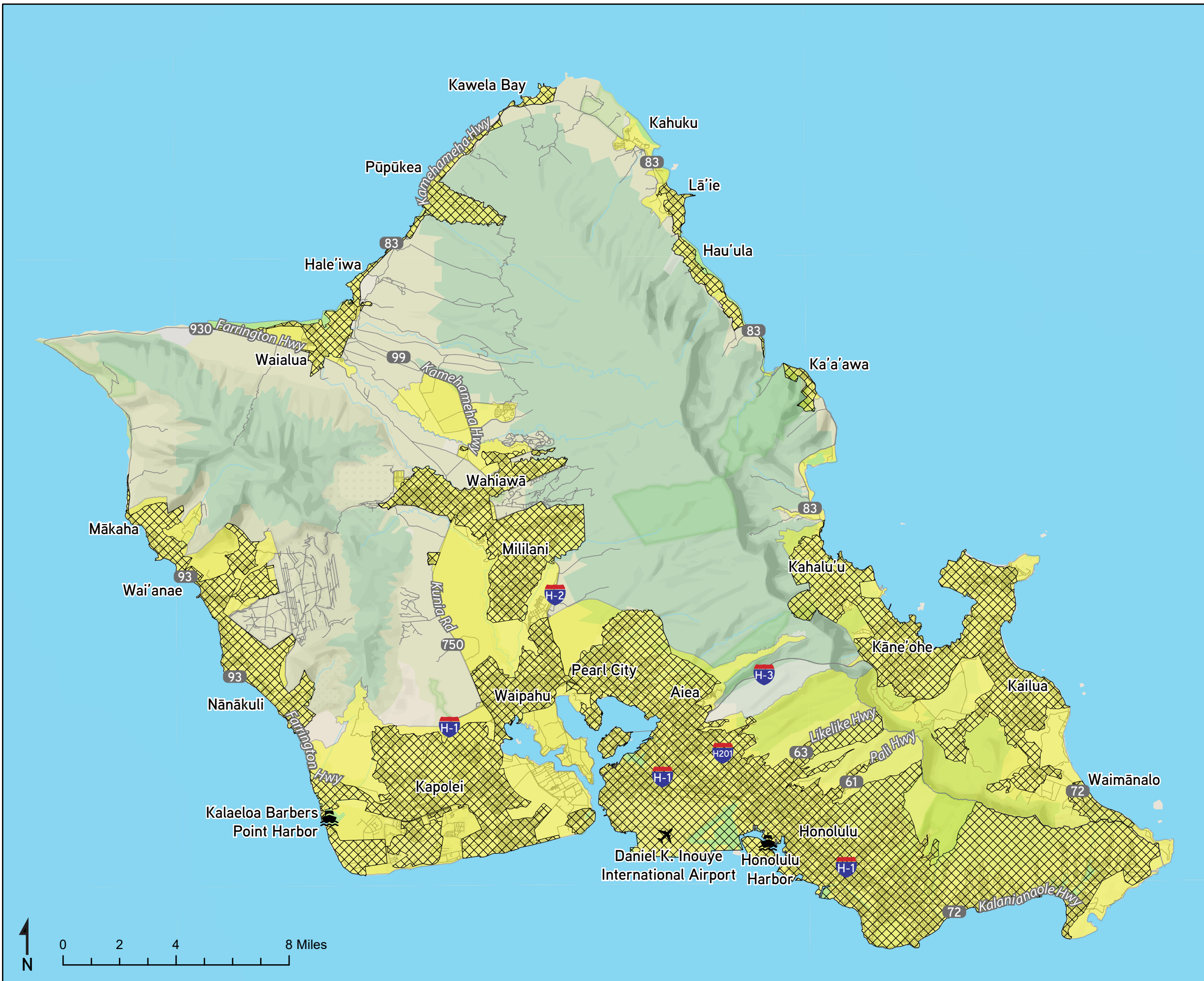
2024 Federal-Aid Urban Area Boundary Adjustment Justification

Applicant	Map	Urban Area	Changes/Response to Criteria
HDOT	County of Kauai	Kekaha Urban Area	Federal-Aid Urban Boundary (FAUB) adjusted to accommodate the change to the 2020 Census Urban Area.
HDOT	County of Kauai	Kapa'a Urban Area	FAUB adjusted to accommodate the change to the 2020 Census Urban Area.
HDOT	City and County of Honolulu	Pūpūkea Urban Area	FAUB adjusted to accommodate the change to the 2020 Census Urban Area.
HDOT	City and County of Honolulu	Honolulu Urban Area	FAUB adjusted to accommodate the change to the 2020 Census Urban Area and expanded to fill in gaps and smooth out the boundary edges to include Kunia Road (Urban Principal Arterial).
HDOT	City and County of Honolulu	Lā'ie-Hau'ula Urban Area	FAUB adjusted to accommodate the change to the 2020 Census Urban Area.
HDOT	County of Maui	Lahaina-Nāpili-Honokōwai Urban Area	FAUB adjusted to accommodate the change to the 2020 Census Urban Area.
HDOT	County of Maui	Kahului-Wailuku	FAUB adjusted to accommodate the change to the 2020 Census Urban Area.
HDOT	County of Maui	Pukalani-Ha'ikū-Pa'uwela-Makawao Urban Area	FAUB adjusted to accommodate the change to the 2020 Census Urban Area.
HDOT	County of Hawaii	Hilo Urban Area	FAUB adjusted to accommodate the change to the 2020 Census Urban Area.
HDOT	All Counties and City	All Urban Areas	FAUB adjusted to keep consistency in functional classification, HPMS reporting, and critical freight corridors.



Appendix D






2024 Federal-Aid Urban Boundary Maps

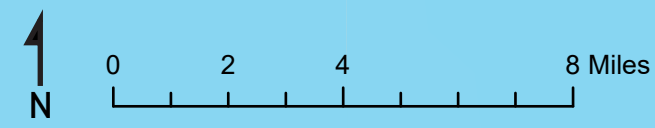


**Federal-Aid Urban Area Boundary
City and County of Honolulu**

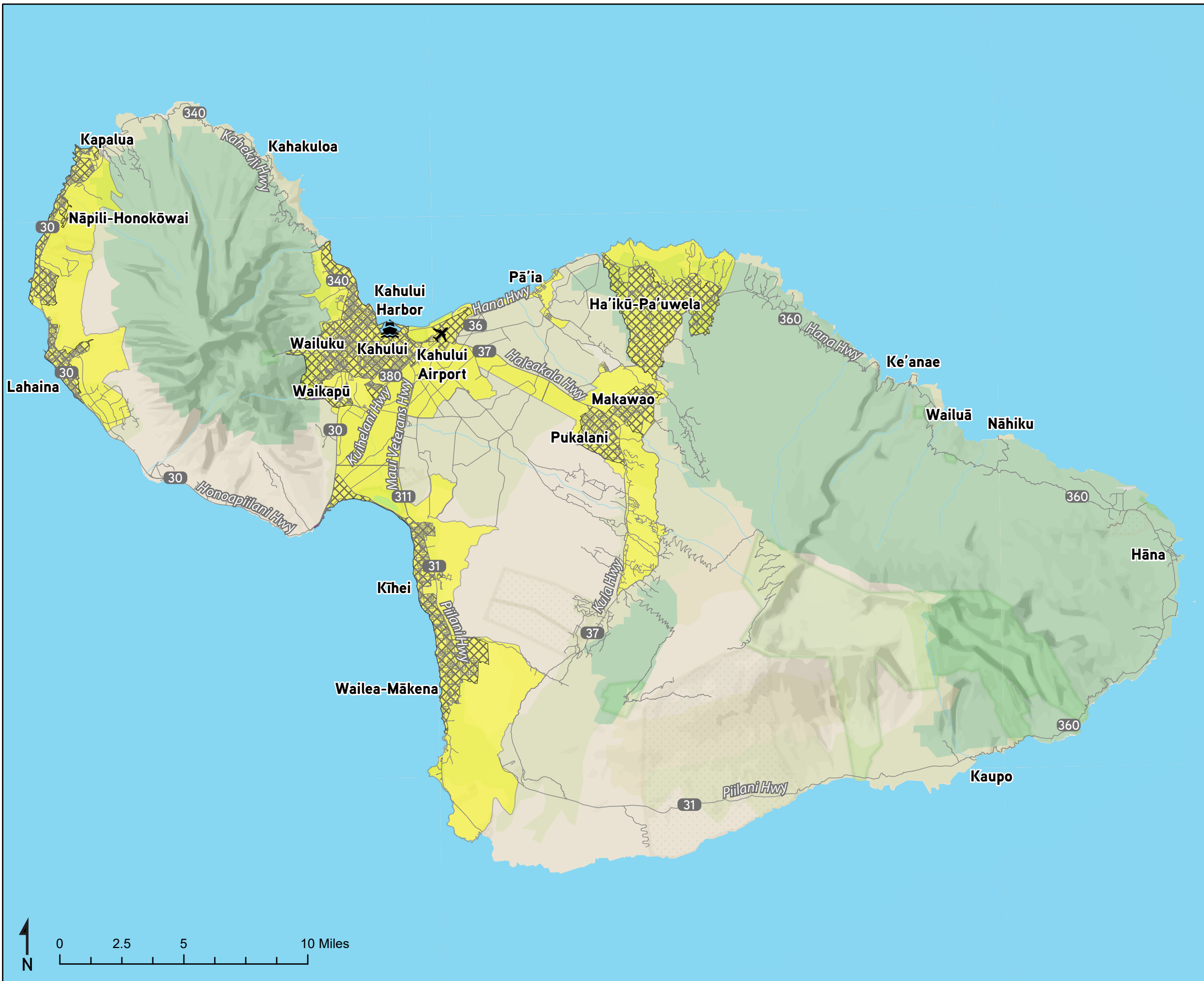
November 2024

Legend






-  Airports
-  Commercial Harbors
-  Roads
-  2020 FHWA Urban Area
-  2024 Proposed Federal-Aid Urban Boundary

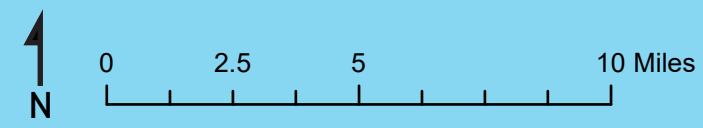


Sources:
1. Roads - City and County of Honolulu

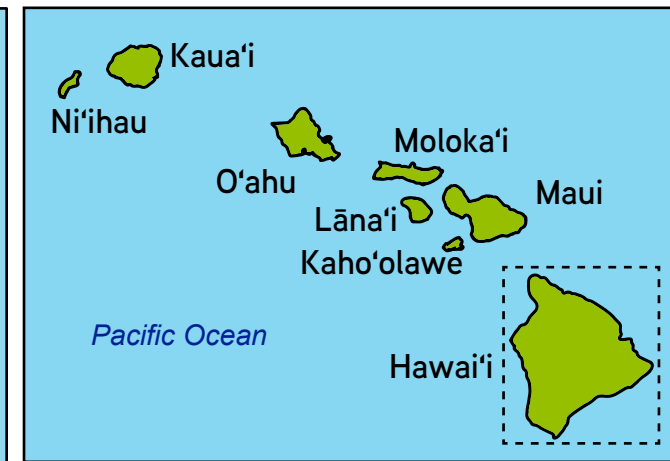


**Federal-Aid Urban Area Boundary
County of Maui**
November 2024

- Legend**
-  Airports
 -  Commercial Harbors
 -  Roads
 -  2020 FHWA Urban Area
 -  2024 Proposed Federal-Aid Urban Boundary








Sources:
1. Roads - County of Maui

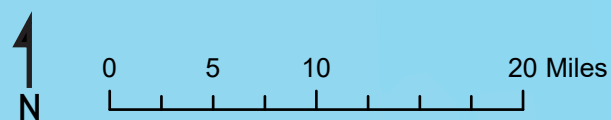


Federal-Aid Urban Area Boundary County of Hawai'i

November 2024

Legend

-  Airports
-  Commercial Harbors
-  Roads
-  2020 FHWA Urban Area
-  2024 Proposed Federal-Aid Urban Boundary



Sources:
1. Roads - County of Hawai'i