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Colwood looks for fast fix to open bridge

By [Amy Dove - Goldstream News Gazette](#)

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Colwood is looking for a temporary solution to a big problem.

The bridge at Esquimalt Lagoon was closed two weeks ago, first to northbound traffic and shortly after to vehicle traffic altogether. Holes have formed under the abutments that connect the bridge to the road, creating the potential for collapse. The bridge is aging, but the real problem is the natural erosion of Coburg Peninsula, and at its tip, Gotha Spit.

“Gotha Spit is ‘goner spit’ because it is no longer there,” said Mayor Dave Saunders.

That means commuters and sight-seers have to stick to the main roads to navigate the area, while Colwood Fire Department is clocking an extra two minutes on response time to Fort Rodd Hill and the surrounding area. The closure will also impact a large number of annual events, including Canada Day and other festivals.

Saunders is volunteering his excavator to repair the abutment, but the City is looking for support to pay for materials. UnaVera, the developer of Essencia, has contributed \$20,000 and he is in talks with two other developers, Saunders said.

The beach level has dropped below the base of the north abutment and support material is leaching out. To plug the holes and replace some material would cost roughly \$20,000 but

the same work is likely needed on the other side of the bridge, said city engineer Michael Baxter. A total bridge repair is likely to cost \$650,000.

Staff have been tasked with finding short-term cost effective options for keeping the bridge open for at least a couple of years.

Long-term, the whole area needs to be looked at with any solutions funded by all levels of government, Saunders said. The federal and provincial governments, along with Colwood, own sections of the peninsula.

A public meeting is planned to explain the situation and possible solutions, although no date has been set.

Fixing the bridge without addressing erosion is as good as throwing money out to sea, said Coun. Shaun Wysiecki. A 2008 report details solutions to mitigate the erosion, ranging from \$250,000 to \$12 million.

“Change is the constant on this one and we have a decision to make on how hard we want to fight mother nature,” said Coun. Judith Cullington.

Council directed staff last year to apply for grant money and determine what City land could be sold to subsidize the bridge repairs. Grant applications were unsuccessful, but “no steps were taken to identify land that could actually be sold,” said city administrator Chris Pease. Developer contributions won’t materialize until their projects break ground.

Staff were questioned why federal gas tax money was not being used to fix the bridge.

Colwood has more than \$700,000 in gas tax funds. That money is restricted to projects that reduce greenhouse gas emissions. A study is needed to determine if the bridge route reduces GHG as it is “not 100 per cent clear,” Baxter said. That study would cost between \$5,000 to \$10,000, funded by taxpayers.

By his own calculations, the drive time from the peninsula using the bridge to Island Highway versus Metchosin Road is roughly five kilometres shorter, said Coun. Brian Tucknott, implying that gas tax could be used to save the structure.

Colwood is arranging a meeting with the Union of British Columbia Municipalities to clarify gas tax spending.

“To say everyone is confused on the gas tax is an understatement,” Saunders said.

In the meantime, Colwood is looking at ways of making alternative access to the lagoon better known.

The closure is already affecting visitors to the Aquattro development, which has units for sale, said developer Peter Daniel. In a letter to council, he stated: “This action in our view will impact our ability to market and cause us to delay construction with its addition of new homes to the City tax base as a consequence.”

The Esquimalt Lagoon bridge remains closed to vehicle traffic indefinitely, although it is open to pedestrians and cyclists.

reporter@goldstreamgazette.com

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