

Goldstream News Gazette

## Esquimalt Lagoon bridge completely closed to traffic



Coun. Judith Cullington inspects the north abutment of Esquimalt Lagoon bridge. Colwood closed the bridge to vehicle traffic Wednesday after erosion compromised the substructure of the bridge.

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Continuing erosion and reckless drivers have closed Esquimalt Lagoon bridge completely.

Colwood restricted traffic on the bridge to southbound only Jan. 26, but with so many drivers continuing to cross the bridge from both directions RCMP and City bylaw recommended closing the structure completely Feb. 3. "It's just not safe to leave it open," said City engineer Michael Baxter.

The bridge was probably only days away from a full closure due to erosion regardless, Baxter said. The abutments, which connect the bridge to the road, are eroding underneath the pedestrian crossing. Since last week, similar issues have been recorded on the other side of the bridge. "West of the south side, rocks are starting to fall away (as well)," Baxter said.

"If you go to the west side of the north abutment there is a hole under the asphalt you could probably crawl into," Baxter said, noting the bridge itself is sound. "What we don't know is whether there is a similar hole developing under the asphalt itself."

The same thing happened two years ago, requiring a temporary fix. At that time staff noticed a hole forming in the asphalt and when they took hammers to it, a much larger hole appeared, Baxter said. With that in mind, the risk is too great to continue to let traffic move over the bridge, he added.

"It's progressing all the time, it doesn't matter what the weather is," he said. "There is just too much risk."

Coburg Peninsula, which buffers Esquimalt Lagoon from the ocean, is also eroding. The area is in constant flux, with the beach naturally changing in mass, but the current situation is putting the bridge at further risk. Council agreed last week the area needs to be looked at holistically as there is no point replacing a bridge if it has no where to go.

The bridge is closed indefinitely to vehicles, although pedestrians and cyclists can still use the bridge.

Council requested staff contact the federal and provincial government to request emergency funding assistance, as well as look for funding and solutions on what can be done regarding erosion and bridge repairs. An early estimate for work to address the bridge itself, the abutments and erosion is estimated at around \$10 million.

A report is expected back to council in a month.

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