

# Lagoon bridge unites and divides community



The Esquimalt Lagoon bridge re-opened in July after five months as a dead-end, but the jury is still out if the the span should be preserved or closed in the long run.

By [Sam Van Schie - Goldstream News Gazette](#)

Published: **August 27, 2010 4:00 PM**

Updated: **August 27, 2010 4:34 PM**

When the Esquimalt Lagoon bridge closed for five weeks of structural repairs, Dieter Gerhard thought it would be a major inconvenience.

He runs the Birds of a Feather bed-and-breakfast with his wife and works in Victoria. Commuting between downtown for work and his home-business near the lagoon, Gerhard prefers a direct route over the Coburg Peninsula. He also recommend this scenic drive to his visitors at the B&B.

When the bridge was closed, the only way to his house was down Metchosin Road.

"Since I wasn't driving on it everyday, I'd go out and walk along the lagoon for enjoyment instead," Gerhard said. "It was nice when there wasn't a lot of vehicle traffic. It was more like a park."

Now he wishes there was a way he could have both: the convenience of the bridge and the calmness of a dead-end road.

Before re-opening the bridge on July 16, the City of Colwood reduced the speed limit and painted double yellow lines on the road over the peninsula to calm traffic.

But David Sinclair, another resident living near the lagoon, said people still use the straight stretch of road as a speedway. He hears cars gunning their engines at night and sees the impact of careless drivers during his morning walks along the lagoon.

"I see many geese hit by a cars, it's a common occurrence," he said, stressing that the lagoon is a migratory bird sanctuary. "The birds try to cross from one pool of water to the other, they don't know to watch for cars."

Sinclair wouldn't mind if the 100-year-old bridge was closed permanently. But the city is moving in the opposite direction.

The recent bridge upgrade was temporary solution to safety concerns caused by natural erosion to the sea wall, which will continue to eat away at the shoreline and eventually the roadway if the city doesn't fund a costly intervention. Colwood city staff are currently preparing a report with a recommended solution. Mayor David Saunders said closing the bridge isn't something council is considering.

"We hear complaints about the lagoon — people racing, people partying there — but I hear more positive comments, and I think the majority of residents want it open," Saunders said. "It's a fine balance trying to manage the use."

The Coast Collective art centre noticed a reduction in the number of people coming from Victoria to take art classes when the bridge was closed.

"We had regular members who didn't want to drive the extra distance for a class," said Terri Rodstron, a founding director at Coast Collective.

Emergency vehicles also rely on the bridge for speedy access to the Fort Rod Hill area.

Insp. Mark Fisher, West Shore RCMP detachment commander, said the road is an important access route through Colwood.

"The public has an expectation that we're going to be able to respond in a timely manner, and we need these routes to get around fast," Fisher said.

The current bridge does nothing for fire response times. Its weight restrictions are too low to support the fire trucks passing over it. Alternative routes add about 90 seconds to response times in some areas east of the lagoon. In fire-time that's huge.

"Fires double in size every minute," Fire chief Russ Cameron explained. "Every second truly counts."

When the station receives a call on Ocean Boulevard, the road runs over the bridge, two trucks are dispatched to look for the fire, for fear that if they'd sent just one it could end up on wrong side of the bridge and need to drive all the way around.

"We've found ways to work around not using the bridge," Cameron said. "We've learned to live without it."

[news@goldstreamgazette.com](mailto:news@goldstreamgazette.com)