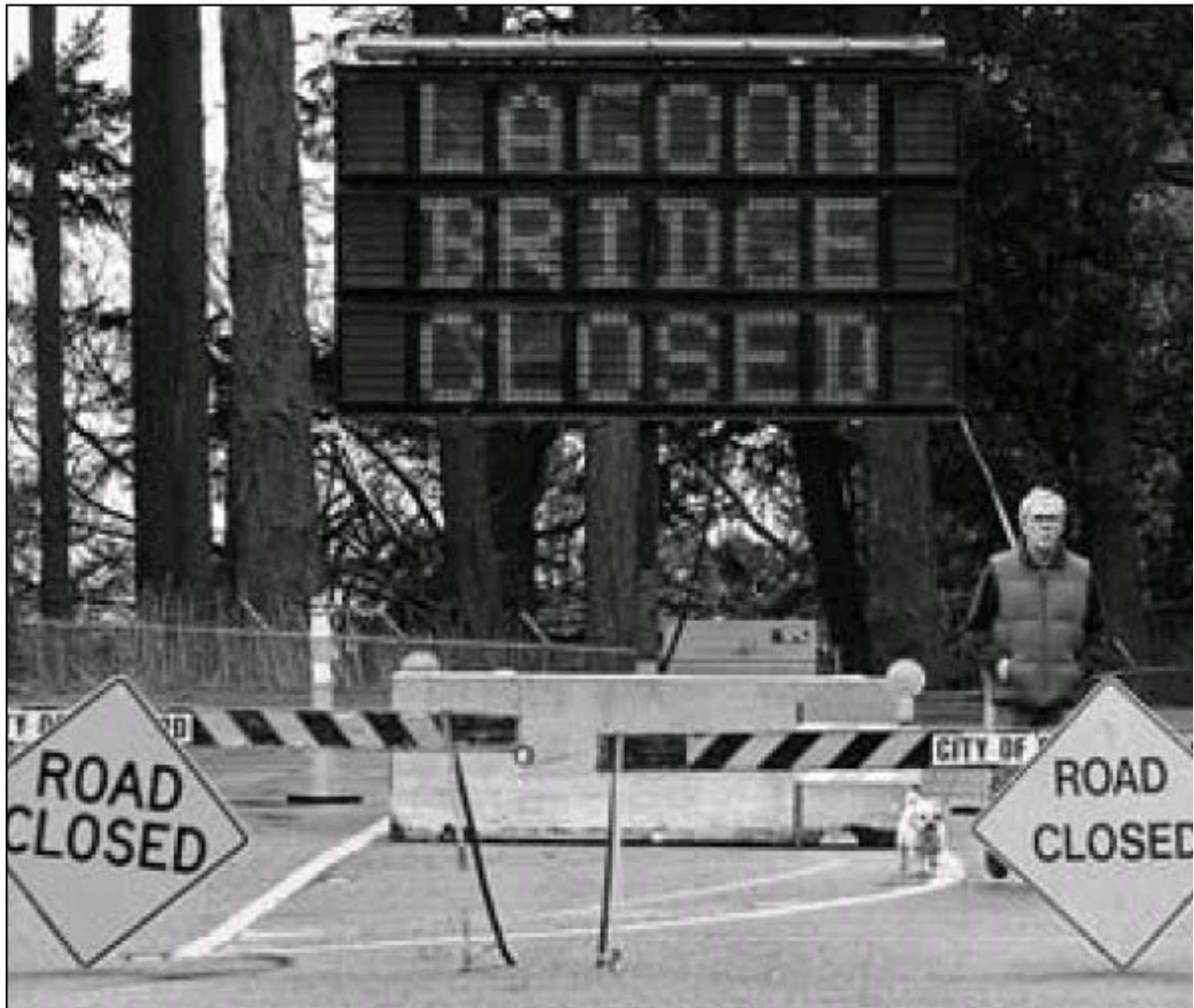


Article rank | 10 Feb 2010 | Times Colonist | **BILL CLEVERLEY** | Times Colonist
bcleverley@tc.canwest.com

Long bridge closure worries councillor

City staff accused of seeking to permanently cut off vehicle access

It could be weeks at the earliest before the bridge at Esquimalt Lagoon is reopened, prompting at least one councillor to charge city staff with deliberately stalling in an effort to have it closed permanently to vehicles.



ADRIAN LAM, TIMES COLONIST

The bridge is closed because its approaches are being eroded by tidal action.

Colwood closed the bridge at Esquimalt Lagoon last week after tidal action undermined its approaches, making it unsafe for vehicles.

Coun. Brian Tucknott called an engineering staff report on the possible use of gas-tax funds to repair it a DTOF — Designed to Fail — report. “The entire document was designed to find reasons for not saving the bridge,” Tucknott said.

“I think an immediate temporary fix is required and at that point, when the bridge is re-opened, I think we have to revisit the entire protection of the peninsula as the first step.”

A temporary fix of the approaches might be possible for a relatively small amount of money — perhaps as little as \$20,000, says city chief engineer Michael Baxter, who’s pursuing ideas in conjunction with Stantec engineering and will report back to council in two weeks.

But that repair wouldn’t address larger issues, such as the fact the pilings are being eaten by marine worms and have to be repaired at an estimated cost of \$650,000.

If that was done, it could leave the municipality with a shiny new bridge to nowhere because the Coburg Peninsula — the spit of land forming Esquimalt Lagoon to which the bridge is linked — is literally being washed away by the tides.

That’s a problem that could cost in the neighbourhood of \$12 million to stop.

Councillors decided Monday on a number of initiatives, including providing better signage for those wanting access to Esquimalt Lagoon while the bridge is closed, and holding a public meeting to gauge public willingness to fix and reopen the bridge and pursue saving the spit.

Ocean Boulevard will also be renamed Ocean Boulevard North and Ocean Boulevard South to better direct emergency vehicles.

Whether or not the bridge is fixed, the gulf between councillors seems to be widening.

Coun. Ernie Robertson, critical of what he calls “the green kook agenda” driving Colwood’s council, has charged that the bridge closure resulted from the municipality’s transportation and infrastructure committee not following earlier council direction to make repairs.

He maintains Coun. Judith Cullington, who chairs the committee, supports special-interest groups that want to see the bridge closed permanently to cars, turning the spit into a park with only one way in or out.

Cullington wears the “green” label proudly, but says she’s more “middle of the road” than “kook.”

She said the question is not as simple as whether to repair the bridge but has to be considered in light of the ever-shrinking Coburg Peninsula, which is no longer being built up by material washing down from the now-closed Lehigh gravel pit off Metchosin Road.

“How much public money do you put into something that Mother Nature is working very hard to take away? Are there engineering solutions? Absolutely. Is that the right choice for this shoreline? I don’t know the answer to that,” said Cullington.

About 3,500 vehicles a day typically use the bridge via Ocean Boulevard as an alternative to Metchosin and Sooke roads.

The bridge remains open to pedestrians and cyclists.