

Repair of Esquimalt Lagoon bridge to begin

Crossing closed to vehicles since February because of erosion

By David Karp, Times Colonist July 4, 2010

Esquimalt Lagoon bridge: Work will involve rebuilding the northern approach

Photograph by: Darren Stone, timescolonist.com

Work will begin tomorrow to repair the 80-year-old Esquimalt Lagoon bridge so it can once again be used by vehicles.

The bridge, which continues Ocean Boulevard across the lagoon in Colwood, has been closed to vehicle traffic since February because the spit of the Coburg Peninsula the bridge sits on is eroding.

"We lost over 200 feet of foreshore last year," said Colwood Mayor David Saunders.

"If you look at the aerial photographs from 30, 40 -- even 10 -- years ago, the amount of erosion is just dramatic."

In the earlier parts of the 20th century, sand and gravel were dumped onto the lagoon's beach from a nearby mine, expanding the peninsula. But that dumping stopped around 1970 and since then, the sand and gravel has been slowly washing away.

The bridge was reduced to one-way vehicle traffic in January and closed shortly thereafter because of a sinkhole, although it's remained open to pedestrians and cyclists. It was reopened briefly to one-way traffic during the naval fleet review to ease heavy traffic flow.

"A lot of the people coming from Metchosin would use the lagoon as a means to get to Ocean Boulevard and out onto Sooke Road," said Saunders. "Now everybody is using Metchosin Road ... and starting to plug up our infrastructure."

The latest construction project, which involves rebuilding the northern approach to the bridge, should take about a week to complete if all goes smoothly, said Saunders. The \$60,000 project to

repair the north approach to the bridge is funded by private donations, including \$20,000 from the developers of the Essencia village along the lagoon.

"I just put out a call to people that I know, and they came on board," said Saunders, who is lending his own excavator and backhoe to the project.

The bridge will be closed to pedestrians and cyclists while construction takes place.

How long the bridge can stay open after the repairs is unclear. In 2004, the bridge deck was replaced for \$340,000. It has undergone several smaller repairs since then.

"We are doing our best to maintain our bridge," said Saunders. "But we can't guarantee that the foreshore won't be eroded next winter."

City council has been examining permanent solutions for the bridge. Colwood held a public meeting in June to discuss options. But so far, no decision on the bridge's future has been made.

"We have hired professionals to look at it," said Saunders. "Those fixes range anywhere from \$500,000 to \$12 million. We don't want to spend a huge amount of money until we know what the entire fix is."

One option would be to permanently close the bridge to vehicles, something Saunders said about half the residents he's heard from support.

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