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Protecting Goldstream Park *Better Alternatives to Highway Expansion*

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The 2024 BC Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure budget includes \$162 million to widen 1.7 kilometres of Highway 1 through Goldstream Park to accommodate wider shoulders and add more traffic barriers ([Malahat Safety Improvements, 2024](#)). The project requires blasting rock, cutting down more than 700 trees that shade SELEK-TEL- (Goldstream River), building a retaining wall that will intrude into the river's bank, and replacing a trailside trail with a cantilevered metal walkway. Total costs are likely to be much higher due to the project's complexity and construction inflation.

This project is wasteful, unfair and environmentally harmful. There are better ways to improve travel and reduce crash on this corridor. A multimodal solution – improving public transit services on the corridor – would provide far more benefits with far less total costs. Currently the #66 route between Victoria and Duncan makes only four daily trips with \$10 one-way fares, and the #70 route between Duncan and Nanaimo makes only seven daily trips with \$7.50 one-way fares. Because service is infrequent and expensive transit serves less than 1% of trips on that corridor. In contrast, the #61 bus between Sooke and Victoria has 43 daily trips with \$2.5 fares. Because service is frequent and affordable, 22% of peak period trips are by public transit.

This project is also environmentally and culturally harmful. Blasting, destroying 700 shade trees, building a river bank retaining wall, and replacing a natural riverside trail it with a cantilevered metal walkway destroy and disrupt critical habitat. Motor vehicle traffic, including electric vehicles, is harmful because of harmful pollutants it introduces a chemical known as 6PPD-quinone that is particularly toxic to salmon ([Chadwick 2024](#)).

More frequent and affordable #66 and #70 bus service would cost less and cause less environmental damage than the proposed highway project, and provide far more benefits. Wider shoulders and more traffic barriers would reduce some types of crashes and drivers' stress but provide few other benefits. In contrast, reducing 22% of peak-period vehicle traffic would reduce crashes and driver stress plus improve mobility for non-drivers, reduce vehicle costs, reduce congestion, reduce road and parking facility costs, or reduce energy consumption and pollution emissions. It would provide these benefits throughout the entire corridor, not just 1.7 kilometers or highway, and benefit non-drivers as well as drivers.

Comparing Benefits

Planning Objectives	Highway Project	Frequent Bus Service
Traffic safety	✓	✓
Reduce driver stress	✓	✓
Independent mobility for non-drivers		✓
Vehicle savings and affordability		✓
Reduced congestion		✓
Infrastructure savings		✓
Parking cost savings		✓
Energy savings and emission reductions		✓

Wider shoulders and more traffic barriers provide few benefits (✓). They reduce crashes and driver stress on that stretch of highway. Frequent and affordable transit services provide far more benefits and benefit far more people.

As a result, frequent and affordable bus service on the entire corridor helps achieve MoTI strategic goals far better than 1.7 kilometers of highway expansion ([Eby 2022](#)).

As Denise Nadeau explains in a recent article, "[Standing With Salmon and WSÁNEĆ People](#)." Every Tuesday morning, 10:00 a.m. to noon since February 2023 local First Nations people have held a public protest against it at Gold Stream Park. The WSÁNEĆ Leadership Council (WLC) has convinced the government to pause the project while they do their own engineering study of road safety and the climate challenges to the river.

There is still time for the government to shift from highway expansion to multimodal solutions.

References

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