

Water commission unanimously opposes Malahat detour in watershed

Posted by Joan Russow

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BY [Jeff Bell](#) / Times Colonist

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sooke-lake007110.jpg

Sooke Lake Reservoir, from the top of the dam's spillway. February 2019
tograph By CAPITAL REGIONAL DISTRICT

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Members of the Regional Water Supply Commission have unanimously opposed the idea of building an emergency Malahat detour route through water-supply lands or park wilderness.

The detour route has been discussed as a possible solution to traffic incidents that block the Malahat.

Councillors trying to block a Malahat bypass from going through watershed

About a dozen members of the public spoke to the issue at the commission's Wednesday meeting, all of them against the alternate thoroughfare.

"The flow of traffic should be done within the Malahat corridor," speaker Thomas Hackney said.

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“There is no need to look outside that.”

map - Greater Victoria water supply area
Alison Spriggs told the commission that it should stand up for protective measures that have been taken in the past.

“There are solutions to the congestion and the bad driving on the Malahat that don’t involve punching an emergency road through the heart of this precious, protected area,” she said. “Point-to-point cameras have been mentioned, expanded commuter-bus services — all good solutions. Green and clean.”

Torrance Coste, who is part of a local group called the Wilderness Committee, said some communities on Vancouver Island have encroachment-related issues with their water supply that don’t come up in the Capital Regional District.

“Everyone who lives and works in this city is so lucky to have a protected watershed,” he said. “This is a tremendously rare gift that was given to them through the foresight and leadership of past CRD directors and through the advocacy of citizens who championed the additions of further buffer zones.

“To squander the gift that we have in the Sooke Hills would be a mistake that will haunt us forever.”

Jean Siemens urged the commission to reject the detour route and “choose to be on the right side of history.”

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Commission member and Victoria Coun. Jeremy Loveday, who introduced the motion to oppose the route, said he and his colleagues have one job to do. “That it is to protect our water supply,” he said. “I think it’s important that the Water Supply Commission goes on record at this early hour opposing any construction in the watershed.”

Loveday said the commission should send “a very clear message” that climate is changing, the chance of drought and forest fires is increasing “and that makes protecting our water supply more important than ever.”

The quality of local water should be maintained for generations to come, he said.

In addition to opposing a detour route, the commission voted to recommend that the CRD board take the same position. That comes after the CRD board took an in-camera vote last week to have staff form a working group with the Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure to examine options for a Malahat detour.

Loveday said prior to the meeting that the motion doesn’t run counter to the CRD being part of the working group because the CRD has yet to take a position on any route.

The final motion also included a request that CRD chairman Colin Plant, a Saanich councillor, write to the premier, the ministers of environment and transportation and MLAs advising that t

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