



North Cowichan Mayor & Council
Via email

October 10, 2023

Re: Safety concern re access to the Somenos Marsh Open Air Classroom parking lot

Dear Mayor & Council

On behalf of the SMWS Board of Directors I would again draw your attention to the dangerous situation created when the Ministry of Highways installed a no-post barrier on the east side of the TransCanada Highway just before the entry into the Somenos Marsh Open Air Classroom parking lot. Where there was once enough room for vehicles to pull over and decelerate before entering the parking lot, the deceleration length is now significantly reduced, causing vehicles wanting to access the Open Air Classroom parking lot to brake sharply and turn in amid accelerating traffic. The exit to the Open Air Classroom has also become more dangerous as there used to be more room to exit and accelerate before entering the highway lane. Exiting has also become more hazardous due to the entrance no-post barriers that now block the line of a sight when looking south for oncoming traffic.

The issue begins at the Beverly Street and Trans-Canada Highway intersection when cars heading north accelerate rapidly. The parking lot access is just after a bend in the highway where some vehicles are already travelling at, and sometimes beyond the 80km/hr limit, putting decelerating vehicles at risk and increasing the chance of unsafe lane changes as accelerating drivers respond aggressively to a slower moving vehicle.

Myself, and other board members, met with North Cowichan staff (John De Hoop) and Ministry of Highways staff (Don Legault)) on site June 2022 to discuss the parking lot access safety issue but, as reported in our June 16th, 2021, letter to council, "The end result of the meeting was that there is little that MoTI could do to resolve the unsafe access without constructing a proper deceleration lane leading into the OAC parking lot. If they were to do that, then they would also want to build a proper acceleration lane out of the parking lot. MoTI representatives suggested that this would be a major and expensive undertaking and would need a budget allocation in the future".

Last year access safety improvements were slated to go ahead as part of the North Cowichan new hospital waterline project but fell through when funding was not received for the pipeline.

In the meantime, the risks are increasing as the number of cars on the highway is increasing, as are the number of visitors slowing down to turn into the Open Air Classroom to park.

We would like to suggest a return to the suggestion we presented in our June 2022 letter that the cheapest and easiest solution, since the access no-post barrier has up to 3' of asphalt behind it, would be to push the barrier back 3 feet to the edge of the asphalt allowing a wider and longer deceleration lane and safer access to the Open Air Classroom parking lot. Adding to this solution, a sign could be placed before the parking lot access warning drivers of the upcoming access and decelerating vehicles.

Since our previous efforts in 2021, and 2022, encouraging Ministry of Highways staff to improve the safety of this access, have not been successful, we are hoping the Council would consider writing a letter to the Ministry of Highways encouraging the temporary solution that we have suggested and to request the Ministry to expedite the budget allocation needed to properly address this safety issue that could one day result in a very serious collision at this site.

Sincerely

Paul Fletcher, Executive Director, SMWS