

April 12, 2011

Hwy 19A Upgrade allows appropriate access for emergency vehicle response, City Manager says

Campbell River's City Manager Andy Laidlaw made a presentation at the Apr. 12 Council meeting confirming that the City's Hwy 19A upgrade allows adequate passing room for emergency vehicles.

"Concerns had been expressed about emergency vehicles being able to navigate along this route, which prompted an extensive evaluation of the upgrade," Laidlaw said during his presentation. "After reviewing the elements of the design, its objectives, discussions and correspondence with engineers and first responders, it is clear to me that the objectives set out for the Highway 19A redevelopment have been achieved."

The upgrade for this route is a progressive standard that manages issues of speeding, pedestrian access to the beach, cycling opportunities, community safety and improved community aesthetics, Laidlaw said. *"These are benefits that are achieved 24/7. The issue of emergency response was considered in the design, but was not pre-eminent."*

Access for continuous high-speed emergency vehicle response was never part of the plan the Hwy 19A upgrade, the City Manager added. *"While the road was not constructed to provide for emergency vehicles to pass at high speed, Fire, RCMP, Ambulance and independent traffic engineers have all confirmed that the road standard is not an impediment,"* he emphasized.

The evaluation looked at how this route compares with similar roadways in other communities, and independent traffic engineer Richard Drdul, reconfirmed the road standard, Laidlaw said. *"The City has been advised that this two-lane divided roadway is a popular configuration throughout North America,"* Laidlaw said, *"and that its popularity indicates it is not an impediment to emergency vehicles."*

"In the unlikely event that a large vehicle is stalled in the lane, or is wider than the curb lane, emergency vehicles have the option of mounting the low, hard-surface median to get around the vehicle, which our local fire chief and ambulance personnel agree is a viable option," Laidlaw explained.

Laidlaw's presentation outlined that the Hwy 19A upgrade was designed with extensive public consultation, with meetings including emergency response representatives. The community goals for this route included improved access for pedestrians and bicycles and slower passenger vehicle traffic. *"This is not a designated truck route, which means large trucks are prohibited from using this road, unless they're making local deliveries,"* Laidlaw said. *"As well, the speed limit was lowered to 50 km/hr for community safety issues."*

The route review also took into consideration the option of removing a section of the median. *"The evaluation clarifies that such a change would not fully remedy the concerns expressed. The roadway is the same width throughout the corridor, and all technical engineering specifications for road width have been met or exceeded,"* Laidlaw said.

"In my view, Council serves the City's best interest by maintaining what we've achieved with these improved amenities," he concluded.

The Hwy 19A upgrade was built on time and on budget and meets the needs it was designed to address – for public safety and many other community values, Laidlaw concluded.

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