

BRINNON FIRE DEPARTMENT
PO Box 42
Brinnon, WA 98320



QUILCENE FIRE RESCUE
PO Box 433
Quilcene, WA 98376

March 29, 2023

Steve Roark
Regional Administrator, WSDOT
PO Box 47440
Tumwater, WA 98504-7440

Re: Proposed Traffic Safety Measures on Highway 101 in Quilcene and
Brinnon to Mitigate Elevated Risk from 2023 Hood Canal Bridge Closures

Dear Mr. Roark

Thank you for your efforts in planning for the upcoming summer 2023 closures of the Hood Canal Bridge on Highway 104 and the impact it will have on the ability of our region's Fire Districts to provide EMS and fire response and transport to our citizens. Chief Bret Black of East Jefferson Fire Rescue provided a letter to you dated March 21, 2023 that discussed area concerns about the impact of closures on transport capabilities. We appreciate Chief Black providing that input and we endorse his stated concerns, which will not be repeated here for brevity.

We add as an additional observation that our local area fire districts will necessarily rely heavily on medivac helicopter transport during periods of bridge closures. We request that a policy be adopted by WSDOT that bridge construction closures not be permitted to occur on days when there are weather conditions that possibly prevent helicopter flights. We ask that Jefferson County Fire District 2 (Quilcene Fire Rescue) and Jefferson County Fire District 4 (Brinnon Fire Department) continue to be included in discussions about and planning related to effectively providing EMS and Fire Services during the upcoming bridge closures.

This letter also addresses a concern that is specific to Quilcene Fire Rescue and Brinnon Fire Department. Our towns will see a substantially increased risk of vehicle and pedestrian accidents due to the greatly elevated traffic along Highway 101 during bridge closures. Highway 101, which is already a heavily traveled route that sees frequent injury-causing accidents in our Districts, will be the main corridor for traffic to and from the Olympic peninsula during bridge closures.

The Annual Average Daily Traffic (AADT) traveling on Highway 101 through Quilcene and Brinnon during 2022 was approximately **3,100 vehicles** as determined from the WSDOT Traffic Count Database accessed at [Traffic Count Database System \(TCDS\) \(ms2soft.com\)](https://www.wsdot.wa.gov/traffic-count-database-system). Specifically, a 2022 AADT of 3,129 was determined for Highway 101 at

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the point of crossing the Big Quilcene River just South of Quilcene (Loc ID CS07573) and a 2022 AADT of 3,112 was determined for Highway 101 at its intersection with Brinnon Lane in Brinnon (Loc ID CS06832).

Highway 101 is unfortunately the site of frequent accidents as reflected in State records accessed at [WSDOT - Crash Data Portal \(wa.gov\)](https://www.wa.gov/transportation/crash-data-portal). During 2022, these records reflect **35 crashes** involving motor vehicle drivers occurred on the stretch of Highway 101 between its intersection with Highway 104 to the North and the Jefferson/Mason County line to the South. Of these, one crash involved a fatality, three crashes involved suspected serious injuries, six crashes involved suspected minor injuries, and an additional five crashes involved possible injuries.

The planned closures of the Hood Canal Bridge during summer weekends will greatly increase traffic along Highway 101 through Quilcene and Brinnon. The AADT across the bridge during 2022 was **17,634 vehicles**, as determined from the WA DOT Traffic Count Database accessed at [Traffic Count Database System \(TCDS\) \(ms2soft.com\)](https://www.wa.gov/transportation/traffic-count-database), of which 7% were buses and heavy trucks. Moreover, the daily traffic totals are significantly higher during the summer tourist season. Looking at data for just Saturdays and Sundays in July 2022, the Daily Traffic across the bridge was approximately **24,000 vehicles** per day.

While a small number of travelers to and from the Olympic peninsula will manage to find space on a ferry to Port Townsend, closure of the bridge will force the majority of vehicles to divert along Highway 101 through Jefferson County. Thus every summer weekend day that the bridge is closed, traffic up and down Highway 101 through Quilcene and Brinnon will potentially increase by **nearly 700%** (based on the AADT) or even **as high as almost 900%** (based on the summer weekend DT) relative to normal traffic.

It is safe to assume that the resulting motor vehicle accidents will increase proportionately, as will the number of injuries and potential fatalities. Highway 101 runs directly past the retail/commercial storefronts of each of our towns and also passes directly in front of Quilcene schools, necessarily interacting with frequent pedestrian and local vehicle traffic. Excessive speeding through our towns is a perpetual hazard that will undoubtedly be worsened by impatient detoured drivers.

To partially mitigate this risk, we respectfully request that the WSDOT provide speed control devices to reduce speed and maintain driver awareness at key points along this stretch of highway. Specifically, at the North and South entrances to "downtown" Quilcene, and at the North and South entrances to "downtown" Brinnon, we request that WSDOT install speed limit signs that include radar detectors and electronic "Your Speed" displays. We also request that these installations be made permanent, as the safety

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risks resulting from increased bridge closure traffic will be an exacerbation of safety hazards that already exist year-round.

Drivers passing through Brinnon on Highway 101 also frequently encounter the resident elk herd. Since 2017, there have been 15 elk hit by vehicles in Brinnon, resulting in injury to people, damage to vehicles, and death to the elk. The frequency of these collisions will likely increase due to the elevated traffic resulting from the bridge closures. Permanent installation of flashing warning signs cautioning of the presence of elk at either end of the elk territory in Brinnon is requested to mitigate this chronic risk that will be enhanced by bridge closures.

We look forward to discussing this request with you and to taking steps collaboratively to help keep our communities safe.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Tim McKern".

Chief Tim McKern
Quilcene Fire Rescue
chief@qfr2.org
360-765-3333

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Tim Manly".

Chief Tim Manly
Brinnon Fire Department
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360-796-4450