

This is KPTZ 91.9 FM in Port Townsend. I'm Jim Burke, with your local news and commentary for Tuesday, November 21, 2023.

In the past two weeks, there were two major accidents on State Route 104 at the intersection with Paradise Bay Road which is right at the west end of the Hood Canal Bridge. Both accidents closed highway 104 for an hour. The most recent occurred just after 2pm, Tuesday the 14th, when an 83-year-old man from Nordland in a Dodge Ram pickup attempted a left turn onto 104 from Paradise Bay Road and hit a GMC Sierra head on. The Ram truck came to rest in the westbound lane and the second vehicle, which was headed west off the bridge, came to rest on the opposite shoulder. The driver of the Ram truck was airlifted to Harborview, the passenger in the truck, an 82-year-old woman, was transported to St. Michaels in Silverdale. The Washington State Patrol report was updated today to say the woman in the truck has died as a result of her injuries. The driver of the GMC Sierra was transported to Jefferson Healthcare Hospital in Port Townsend. No drugs or alcohol were involved and all three people in these two vehicles were wearing seatbelts.

This next related bit is from the *PT Leader*: SR 104 is the only highway on or off the north Olympic Peninsula. Each day nearly 17,000 vehicles use it to cross the Hood Canal Bridge. Since January 2018 there have been 247 accidents on that 10-mile stretch of SR 104 based on the Washington State Patrol database. Of those 248 accidents now, 80 had injuries, 24 of which were serious or fatal.

The intersection of Paradise Bay Road and State Route 104 closest to the Hood Canal Bridge is the most dangerous. In six years, it's had 79 accidents, 11 of those with serious injuries or fatalities. In the same period there were 51 accidents at the junction at State Route 19 and Beaver Valley Road.

In 2019 following a crash study, the state claimed it had to make changes, and planned to begin this past spring with construction of two large roundabouts to slow traffic and allow for safe entrances and exits at Paradise Bay Road and State Route 19 at a cost \$4 million. Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) announced in March there would be a delay due to "difficulty getting environmental permits." But it's been more than just permits holding things up. WSDOT spokesperson Mark Krulish admitted in an email that other emergency projects on the peninsula have taken precedence including, most recently, the Fish Barrier Removal projects (more on that later). Following last spring's announced delay, a new timetable for the project was posted. It said the call for bids would be in fall of this year, but now the timeline on its website has changed to January of 2024. Construction – already delayed by one year – was to begin in winter or spring of 2024. However, delaying the call for bids on the construction contract will delay the project further.

So, as there won't be a roundabout at the west end of the Hood Canal Bridge anytime soon, this reporter reminds you again to please be careful out there!

In a related story from DOT, it was a busy summer in Jefferson County opening habitats for local fish. Two big projects, one on US 101 and the other on State Route 104 and State Route 19, have wrapped up. Contractors working for the Washington State DOT began in February to replace a culvert beneath US 101 at Leland Creek near Quilcene with a new bridge. The roadway at the Leland Creek site reopened to two-way traffic on Thursday, Nov. 19. Crews are currently finishing up landscaping. It should be completed by mid-December except for some railing that will be installed in January.

Crews also replaced culverts at two unnamed tributaries to Leland Creek further north on US 101 with new box culverts. As part of that work, the roadway was closed between Leland Valley Road and Leland Cut Off Road for 19 days. In total, 14 miles of new habitat is now open for Chinook, coho salmon, steelhead, and bull trout.

Up near Port Ludlow, WSDOT contractors began replacing two more culverts – one at Shine Creek on State Route 104 and one at Swansonville Creek on State Route 19. At both locations, 18-foot-wide, three-sided culverts replaced much smaller culverts. Removing the two barriers resulted in 5 more miles of new habitat gain at the two sites. Workers completed that project on Friday, November 10.

These projects are part of WSDOT's program to remove barriers to fish under state highways. WSDOT would like to thank the community and travelers for their patience this past summer. There will be more work ahead in 2024.

KPTZ 91.9 FM brings you local news Monday through Friday at noon and 5pm and at noon on Saturday. You can reach out to us at news@kptz.org. This is Jim Burke. Thanks for listening.