

COLONIST

Wednesday, March 27, 2024

Victoria, British Columbia

Rain. High 11. Low 8. Details, A12

timescolonist.com

Sharing an Easter feast at Our Place



Jason Laidman, right, Victoria police deputy chief administration, dishes up an Easter Lunch at Our Place with help from Victoria Coun. Dave Thompson, left, and Bruce Williams, centre, CEO of the Greater Victoria Chamber of Commerce, on Tuesday. Our Place was set to welcome more than 600 people in need for a turkey feast and a special visit from the Easter Bunny at the society's Pandora Avenue facility. DARREN STONE, TIMES COLONIST

New bus fee in Saanich School District will fund student tracking system

JEFF BELL

A new \$25 registration fee and a \$100 late-registration fee for Saanich School District bus riders will help pay for a new tracking system that lets parents know where their children are during bus trips.

The Sooke School District uses the safety measure on its buses, and similar systems have performed well at other districts in the province.

The idea of charging a ridership fee was discussed but never made it to the stage of being a motion before the Saanich School Board, said district superintendent Dave Eberwein. "They felt that with the financial situation for many families out there, we wanted to do a registration fee instead."

The software-based tracking system will operate by having students use an electronic card to swipe through a device when they get on and off a bus, he said.

"Parents will know exactly if they're on the bus, where the bus is located on its route, etc.'

The system will be in effect for the 2024-25 school year.

Eberwein said the district's bus system has had a substanial increase in ridership in this school year, with about 2,700 of 7,300 district students signed up. "So a large proportion of students are registered."

He said one positive outcome with the new system is an expected drop in the number of "ghost riders" — those who have registered for bus service but don't use it. That leads to space having to be held until it is confirmed that a student will not be riding the



School District No. 63 (Saanich) buses at the district yard on Keating Cross Road. DARREN STONE, TIMES COLONIST

bus, Eberwein said.

The fact that the newly approved registration fee is nominal will hopefully be an incentive for parents with "a genuine interest" in having their

children take the bus, he said. Eberwein said anyone with financial

issues won't have to pay. Bus registration starts on Monday, and all district parents received a reminder of that just before spring

break, he said. Late registration comes into effect after May 31, while registrations received after July 31 might not be processed until after the school year

begins in September. Among parameters for parents to note, district policy has walking limits of 2.5 kilometres for kindergarten-Grade 5 students and 4.8 kilometres for those in Grade 6-12, so buses do not generally run inside those distances from a given school.

Eberwein noted that the district brought its first two electric buses into the system in February, part of a continuing program started by the province in 2021.

Meanwhile, the Sooke School Board has begun looking at possibly reinstating a fee for bus travel due to the financial hit to the district from rapid

growth and inflation. The district already has a \$25 "safety fee" that is used to support the

tracking system. Bus fees were last charged there in

2016 at \$225 per rider per year. The issue will be back before the

board in April.

The Gulf Islands School District is the other district in the region with a bus system; it doesn't have a ridership

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CROSSWORDS B8

HELEN CHESNUT **B9**

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Safeguards said to be in place to protect Victoria bridges

DARRON KLOSTER

Times Colonist

Large ship strikes on Victoria's main bridge are highly unlikely because of strict federal transport rules and safely measures in place around the span, says a structural engineer.

Jonathan Huggett, who was the project manager of Victoria's Johnson Street Bridge, said Tuesday the Victoria Harbour master requires front and rear tugs to guide all large ships and barges passing through Victoria Harbour and under the bridge. Their weights are restricted to 8,000 tonnes and speeds are closely

Like others around the world Tuesday, Huggett watched news of a massive cargo ship that lost power and struck a bridge in Baltimore, Maryland, causing the 2.6-kilometre span to col-

lapse. "My first reaction was 'where are the tugs, and why was it travelling so fast," Huggett said in an interview.

The structural engineer said 100,000-tonne ships like the one in Baltimore, even after losing power, "still have enormous energy and there's very little you can do to stop it ... it's better to deflect it because it takes less effort.'

He said the type of shipping in Victoria is vastly different. The traffic includes smaller ships and ferries going in for repairs at Point Hope Maritime shipyard and barges carrying aggregates to a cement plant or scrap steel from a recycling yard on the Upper Harbour.

But bridges here have been hit.

Huggett said since the Johnson Street Bridge officially opened on March 31, 2018, there have been only two "minor incidents," where a tug passing under without the span raised miscalculated its height and damaged a mast with telecom equipment, and a barge travelling out that banged off a pontoon deflector on the north side. Both operators paid for the minor damages

The old Blue Bridge suffered ship impacts in

1958 and 2011. Fendering, or deflection structures to protect the bridge, was an issue as overall costs ballooned to more than \$105 million for the new Johnson Street Bridge.

The concrete piers from the old Blue Bridge were used to build fenders on the south side the bridge. On the north side, pilings were put in to support small pontoon fendering to bump offcourse vessels back into the bridge channel.

The fendering performed as it should three years ago when a barge made contact, said Huggett, adding the fender was damaged but replaced at the operator's cost.

Huggett said Victoria Harbour is small and most shipping destinations like Point Hope and the aggregates yards are in close proximity.

In 2015 the city paid for simulator exercises at the Pacific Maritime Institute in Seattle for all possible shipping traffic under different scenarios in relation to the bridge. "We even tried to crash into the bridge, but couldn't," said Huggett.

>See SAFETY, A2

> Bridge collapses in Baltimore after ship that lost

Eric Akis offers a beginner's guide to Easter ham >B7

BRIDGE

BUSINESS

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