



PORT NEWS

Spring 2007

The Exit 64 Congestion Challenge

by Michael McElwee, Port Executive Director



Michael McElwee

Traffic congestion at Exit 64 is a frequent topic of public comment. Most who live or work in Hood River contend with traffic jams at the eastbound off-ramp, on Highway 35 from Button Junction and the toll booth. The backups are not only an inconvenience, they create hazards and they

impact the local economy. The Port and the City realize the importance of this problem and are taking steps to help resolve it. We are also seeking immediate assistance from the Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT) because the Exit 64 interchange is a state responsibility.

The Challenge: As Hood River and Bingen/White Salmon have grown, so too has vehicular traffic between our communities. Bridge traffic has increased 4-6% in each of the last three years. Congestion occurs more frequently and for longer duration, sometimes unexpectedly. Northbound and southbound traffic counts are now almost equal during the evening commute as similar numbers of people travel home from work to Hood River and White Salmon.

South of the bridge, the local street network is unable to handle traffic demands at peak times. The situation is worse in summer months as tourism travel increases. Local motorists that use the Exit 64 off-ramp, where traffic backs up and can impede travel lanes on I-84, exacerbate the problem. As growth continues, traffic demand is likely to increase in the future. We must develop a strategy to keep traffic moving.

Key Issues: Though many factors contribute, there are three major components to the congestion challenge:

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Delta Management Plan a cooperative effort

Twenty-six new acres of waterfront property.

That doesn't sound like a bad thing. Yet the growing delta at the mouth of the Hood River creates particular dangers for swimmers and congestion for windsport users. Good measures to play by: come, enjoy, follow the rules, and exercise caution.

There may be a larger sandy shoreline on which to explore or recreate, but the forces that created this mass were powerful and unforgiving. Not only does silt now encroach on the Marina Park and Event Site beaches, underwater surfaces and currents have changed, in some cases dramatically.

"Windsurfers, kites, powerboaters, swimmers and sailors will have to continue to cooperate as we have in the past," stresses Tod Hilstad, Rear Commodore of the Hood River Yacht Club. "If we look out for one another, respect each others' rights, and make sure to communicate both on and off the water, we'll be able to share the area safely."

The obvious outcome of the larger delta is a smaller distance between the Event Site and Spit that will likely result in congestion and potential conflicts among windsurfers and kiteboarders. Proposed solutions to these issues have been discussed and adopted as the Delta Management Plan by the Port of Hood River, the Waterfront Recreation Committee (WRC), the Columbia Gorge Windsurfing Association (CGWA), the Columbia Gorge Kiteboarding Association (CGKA), the Hood River Yacht Club (HRYC), and other groups. Self-policing by various user groups is the cornerstone of the Delta Management Plan.

"We want everyone to have fun, to enjoy what we have out there, but to be safe," reminds Port Commission President Sherry Bohn. "It is not a place to avoid. The key is cooperation. The new delta will not go away soon, but everyone can have access. I am happy all the organizations are working together and are communicating with their members."

Information, recommendations, and warnings for user groups and the general public follow.

Reminders for all users

- Heightened awareness of potential hazards, especially underwater drop offs and strong currents.
- Pool elevation affects the size of the sandbar. Even minimal changes in water level can result in big changes to the size of the delta and the amount of debris under or above water. The water level is subject to frequent change, daily and even hourly. Use caution.
- Some danger zones may be marked to designate caution areas, debris, shallow water, steep drop offs, and swift currents, but changing river and water level conditions make it impossible to note all potential hazards.

- Hood River County Sheriff's boat requires a 500' clearance when its lights are on, and may be traveling at high speeds.
- Repeat violators of the Delta Management Plan and Port regulations may be banned from the waterfront property. "Self-policing by all user groups is mandatory to avoid an accident, however the agreement and water access policies will be useless without some enforcement," expresses Bruce Peterson, CGWA board member. "I think it is safe to assume that a couple of 'bad apples' have the potential to ruin the cooperative effort already put forth."

New dangers posed for swimmers

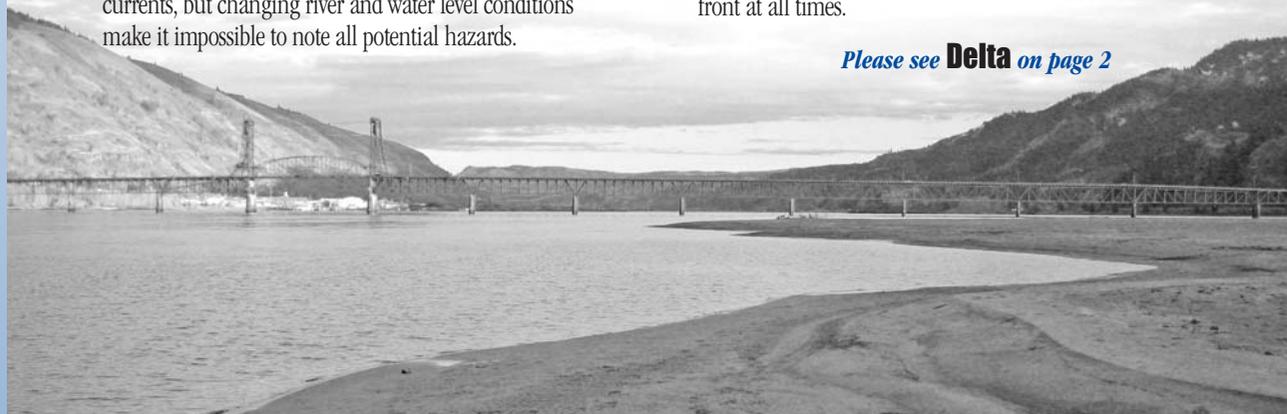
- No safe swimming areas are specified at the Hood River waterfront. "Swim at your own risk" is the policy at all beach areas. No lifeguards are on duty. Be aware. Watch your children carefully. Floatation devices are recommended.
- The west side of the delta (at the Event Site) is the safer side from which to approach the sandbar, where there are fewer drop offs and more mild currents.
- The most dangerous areas to swim are where the Hood River funnels through the delta, and the north and east sides of the sandbar. Currents are swift and water may quickly turn deep.



Congestion expected at Event Site

- Windsurfers can expect increased congestion at the Event Site due to the sandbar's spread west. A safety zone north of the Event Site, marked in northern corners by buoys, is a 5 mph zone, and no jibing area. Kites are not permitted in this safety zone. This zone is effective in both high and low water conditions year-round. CGWA plans to spearhead education and self-enforcement of the area. "If everyone follows the rules, there shouldn't be a problem" reports Tim Mayer, CGWA board member. "There isn't any more room on the inside for screaming hero jibes or huge air on kites. We'll have to be a lot more cautious going in and out of this area."
- Parking is prohibited at the Event Site curb marked "Fire Lane - Tow Away." This area is dedicated to emergency responders that require access to the waterfront at all times.

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Kiteboarding area expanded by Delta

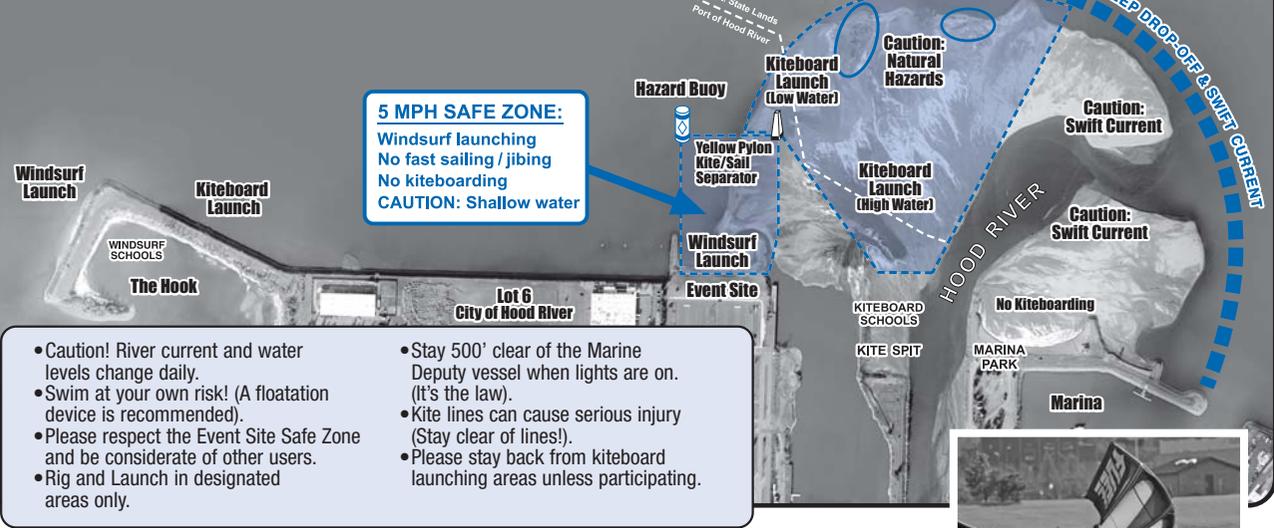
- Kite launching is permitted at the Spit and the Hook only. No kite launching is allowed at the Event Site, Marina, or other waterfront property. No kite pumping or gear allowed at the Event Site beach.
- Kiteboarders and their equipment must stay north of the Safety Zone buoys marking the northern corners of the Event Site.
- Kiteboarders accessing the sandbar will need to be mindful of the risk they project downwind to other beach users, and should realize the risks of their sport may not be understood by other waterfront users.
- Part of the new delta is owned by Oregon Department of State Lands (DSL). DSL supports local management of the area, however reserves the authority to close down an area to public use if conflicts, misbehavior or damages are not controlled.

Delta impacts for boaters minor

- The marina entrance channel is still clear; traffic in and out should not be affected.
- Boaters should be careful around the Spit and near the banks of the river as shallow spots may exist where there was deep water before.

Hood River Waterfront Access Zones

A coordinated water access plan between the Port of Hood River, the Columbia Gorge Windsurfing and Kiteboarding Associations. Designated water access zones are in effect regardless of river levels.



- Caution! River current and water levels change daily.
- Swim at your own risk! (A floatation device is recommended).
- Please respect the Event Site Safe Zone and be considerate of other users.
- Rig and Launch in designated areas only.
- Stay 500' clear of the Marine Deputy vessel when lights are on. (It's the law).
- Kite lines can cause serious injury (Stay clear of lines!).
- Please stay back from kiteboard launching areas unless participating.

- Boaters are encouraged to keep watch for swimmers who may be in trouble.
- Water is shallow in the 'bowl' area to the south and west of the Event Site buoy and east of Wells Island (the area off the Hook and Lot 6). This area appears to have lost several feet of depth. "In spring it should be around 15 to 20 feet deep, but when we were there in early March it was an average of 12 feet," claims Tamara Rogers, Vice Commodore of the HRYC. Rogers also noted there is a large submerged log almost due south of the Event Site buoy about 50 to 70 meters toward the beach. Boaters should watch out for it and other debris in and around the sandbar.



The Delta Management Plan is intended to coordinate shared access of the Hood River waterfront for windsurfers and kiteboarders. The plan is a joint effort between the CGWA, CGKA, and the Port of Hood River.



Understanding the Changing delta

Highlights of presentations by Flowing Solutions

Shock and amazement were common reactions to the shoaling of the Hood River delta last fall, but study demonstrates we should not be surprised. The Port of Hood River retained the services of Flowing Solutions to evaluate the enlarged Hood River delta. Andrew Jansky, Principal of Flowing Solutions, presented findings this spring to the Port and Waterfront Recreation Committee to enhance understanding of the Hood River delta.

The sandbar has existed for many years, pre- and post-Bonneville Dam, as shown by numerous historical photos. Floods in 1996 and 2006 significantly impacted the delta's current size. Similar patterns of delta change occurred along the Columbia River at other tributaries during these weather events.

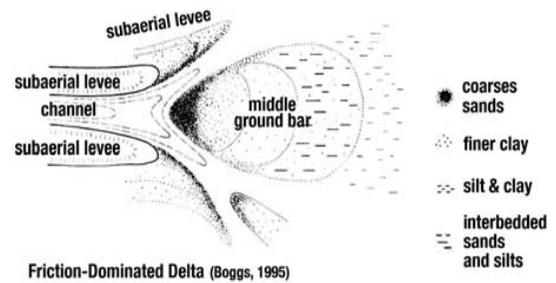
Deltas are often caused by the flow of a faster moving river where it meets a slower moving body of water. Many sand moving forces exist on the more rapidly moving river, and where the river flow and basin meet, the existing shallow area produces what is called a "friction-dominated delta" (illustrated above right). Features

associated with this type of delta include subaqueous levees, middle ground bars, and bifurcated channels. This situation describes the delta where the faster moving Hood River meets the Columbia.

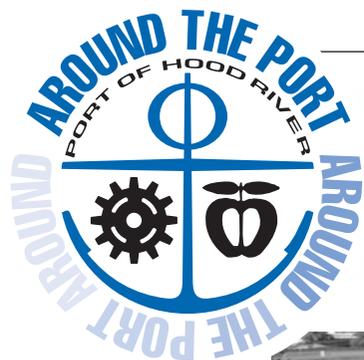
"The delta is searching for equilibrium, which is an evolving process," according to Jansky. "Weather and flooding event frequency is hard to predict, so we have little knowledge about what will happen in the future."

The additional 750,000 cubic yards piled onto the delta by extreme flooding events mean waterfront users must rethink waterfront activities. With the 26 acres of additional land at the delta come recreation opportunities and management issues, with safety and separation of

uses most important. Jansky recommends user group coordination and education on safety measures, which the Port and various user groups are embracing.



Images to the left illustrate the difference in land above water at the 76 foot Bonneville Pool level (left) and at 79 feet (right).



We've moved...

The Port of Hood River office is now located at the Marina Center building (former Mid-Columbia Marina) just west of the Bridge Toll Plaza – Address: **1000 E. Port Marina Drive**

 **Linda Hull**, formerly the Port's Executive Assistant, was recently promoted to Operations Manager. Hull has been with the Port for seven years. She will continue to manage and supervise administrative and Commission services, the Port's web site, and documentation. In addition, Hull will be responsible for operations of the Port's waterfront recreation facilities, concessions, vendors, signage, and other operational activities. "Although it looks like this year might present some challenges, I look forward to working with CGWA, CGKA and the schools operating on the waterfront so that everyone has a fun, enjoyable, and safe time," Hull comments.



 The Port of Hood River contracted with **Thiel Landscape Architecture** of Hood River for a conceptual streetscape design plan for new North Second Street. Landscape installation is provided by Alford Landscape Services, Inc., with a May 31 target completion date. A double row of trees will line each side of the street and indigenous, "water-wise" plants, native grasses and groundcovers will be planted at the north and south entrances of Second Street.

 **Bear Mountain Forest Products, Inc.**, is leasing approximately one-third of Luhr-Jensen and Sons building on the Hood River waterfront through December 31, 2007. Bear Mountain, maker of wood stove pellets and logs, BBQ pellets, and dry den animal bedding, was founded in Hood River in 1988, and relocated to Cascade Locks in 1991. For years the company supplied Luhr-Jensen with smoker chips for its smoker products. Bear Mountain acquired the Smokehouse Little Chief and Big Chief Electric Smokers through this relationship. "We have known Phil Jensen and his crew for years while we've supplied smoke chips and chunks for the smokers," explained Stan Elliot, sales and marketing manager for Bear Mountain Forest Products. "Our purchase was a nice way to keep this part of the business in the Gorge." The company employs 100 workers, 25 of them at the Hood River location.



 The Port of Hood River **DAKINE** has entered into an agreement with **Dakine Hawaii, Inc.**, regarding the potential sale and development of the Expo Center. Schematic architectural services are now underway, provided by Hennebery Eddy, Inc., a Portland architecture firm.

| 2007 Park Fees | |
|---|-----------------------|
| Event Site | Spit |
| Daily Parking.....\$5 | Daily Parking.....\$2 |
| Weekly Pass.....\$25 | |
| Annual Pass - Good at Event Site & Spit.....\$50 | |
| Overlength Weekly Pass.....\$50 | |
| Overlength Annual Pass.....\$100 | |
| Overlength (over 22 feet) not allowed at the Spit | |

Port Park Rules & Regs

The Port of Hood River encourages park patrons to follow all posted rules and regulations.

- **Dogs must be on leash at all times (except one hour after sunrise and one hour before sunset at the Hook and the Spit).**
- **Please pick up after your pet to help keep our beaches, grass and walkways clean.**
- **No littering**
- **No fireworks**
- **Boat launching only in designated areas**
- **No overnight camping**



For complete Port park regulations, visit **www.portofhoodriver.com** online, and link to Ordinance 22.

Port looks forward at delta issues

Though the Port of Hood River acknowledges the delta is likely here to stay, the Commission and staff continue to study, plan and analyze possible actions to mitigate its impact on the economy and recreation.

"The Port Commission will have to take a look at what we can do to enhance recreational opportunities," reports Port Commission president Sherry Bohn. "Should we sculpt the sandbar? Fill in groins of the Event Site? We'll have to take a hard look at all our options by mid-summer, so if necessary we can apply for permits that could be granted prior to the next in-water-work timeframe." To aid in the protection of fish and wildlife, in-water work in the Columbia River/Lake Bonneville must occur between November 15 and March 15.

To date, no actions are planned, though it is generally acknowledged windsurfing and swimming have been most compromised, as has access to the Cruise Ship Dock and Nichols Basin.

Though Bohn says the Port Commission is committed to enhancing recreation, she doubts it will make the decision to dredge the delta due to the likelihood of recurring flooding, and the cost/benefit ratio.

"We need to be proactive and forward-thinking, however, along the same lines as the forward-thinking commission that decided to build the Event Site," Bohn reflects. "Much has changed about recreation in Hood River, but times are tougher now and there's less funding available for these types of projects."

What is the Port doing now?

- The Port will monitor water quality in the Nichols Boat Basin throughout the summer and into fall. Oregon Department of Environmental Quality found in February there posed no health risks for water recreationalists, however the Port wants to monitor any change in status that may result from the pool becoming stagnant with shoaling.
- The Port has requested aid from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Planning Assistance to States (PAS) funds to evaluate the costs, benefits and options, and define

a scope of work for removing the delta caused by recent flooding.

- The Port has contacted legislators and the Corps to earmark funds for a study of the Hood River watershed, with hopes of predicting future flows and determining feasibility of restoring function to more historical headwaters system, while addressing issues such as erosion and sedimentation downstream.

PORT DIRECTORY

Commissioners

Sherry Bohn Don Hosford Kathy Watson
Fred Duckwall Hoby Streich

Executive Director - Michael McElwee
Contact

Telephone.....(541) 386-1645
Fax.....(541) 386-1395
Email.....porthr@gorge.net

www.portofhoodriver.com
Newsletter Production - Pageworks Design, Inc.

Big changes ahead in Toll Plaza Improvement Project

As the Hood River Interstate Bridge Toll Plaza Improvement Project enters its final stretch, the two most exciting elements of the project will occur: the new bridge toll booth will be installed, followed by the opening of four tolling lanes.

The new pre-fabricated toll booth is expected to arrive from Michigan on June 4, with installation taking place over the next three weeks. That means the new Toll Plaza should be open late June.

“As soon as all four lanes are operational, we’ll allow the outside lanes to be used for ‘tickets only’ while we’re in the testing phase for the electronic tolling system,” announces Linda Shames. Temporary ticket collection structures will house bridge employees.

Initial plans are to open ticket only lanes from 7:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. “The hours could change if we find traffic doesn’t warrant that stretch of time. We’ll start out with more time than we need and scale back if necessary,” Shames relays. Having four lanes open should ease the bridge queuing during summer crunch hours.

The electronic tolling system and tolling software will be installed during this period, with testing for the new system beginning in July. The Port’s goal is for electronic tolling lanes to be fully operational sometime in September. Education on the new system will begin in local media this summer, and complete information will be available on the Port’s web site.

BRIDGE CONSTRUCTION

Night closures end May 24 for completion of bridge liftspan repair and overlay of deck approaches. Full night closures are Monday through Thursday nights from 10:30 p.m. to 5:00 a.m. The bridge will be open on Friday, Saturday and Sunday evenings.

To subscribe to the Port’s Email Notification List for updates on bridge construction and possible delays, log on to the Port’s web site:

www.portofhoodriver.com

Bridge construction information is also available by phoning

541-386-1645

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Hood River, OR 97031

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• **Recent construction activity at the bridge.**

Congestion at the toll booth has increased, especially in the last two months as the temporary toll booth reduced queuing distance. Congestion has been particularly bad when lane closures are required because of construction—replacing the bridge lights, lift span repairs and paving. And there have been unexpected traffic surges, vehicle breakdowns and atypical vehicles that slow traffic.

• **The Exit 64 interchange is substandard.**

Limited sight distances under I-84 increase times for vehicle turns and accident potential. Both roadway widths and lane capacity are far below minimum requirements. The four-way stop at Port Marina Drive causes significant delays for northbound bridge traffic because it is un-signalized and allows 12 separate turning movements.

• **Increasing numbers of local commuters use I-84.**

During most times of the day, this local access does not present a problem; however, when combined with rush hour traffic from Button Junction, the off-ramp exceeds capacity and backups occur on I-84. Adding to the problem: the distance between Exits 63 and 64 is significantly less than federal standards. The freeway entrance ramp at one interchange is the exit ramp of the next.

Solutions: We know that the current road system at Exit 64 is inadequate to handle peak traffic demand. Solutions will require the involvement of all those who use, manage and maintain the roads in the area. This includes the Port

and City of Hood River, local motorists and most importantly, the Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT). The Port, City, ODOT and City Police and Fire Departments met to analyze the issues and are taking specific steps to solve this congestion challenge:

Near Term

- The Port will continue to waive tolls when traffic is backed up to the four-way stop. Unfortunately, these waivers have limited impact to congestion on I-84. Nonetheless, we will implement the waiver policy more consistently. Communications with the toll booth is now coordinated so that the Port is aware of area road emergencies and can anticipate toll waivers.
- The \$2.5 million project to construct a new, four-lane toll plaza will be complete in June. The automated system will be fully operational in September. We expect the capacity of the toll booth will almost double to 650 cars per hour when complete.
- ODOT is considering rush hour closures of the eastbound on-ramp at Exit 63, temporary signage alerting motorists on I-84 to congestion, rush hour flagging of the key intersections below Exit 64 and temporary traffic control below the Button Junction Bridge. The Port and City will continue to urge proactive steps from ODOT since Exit 64 is under state jurisdiction.
- Motorists can also help by limiting use of I-84 for local travel, particularly during afternoon commute hours. Taking the alternate route through Button Junction can help alleviate the backups on the Exit 64 off-ramp.

- The City and Port have requested that ODOT allow installation of a 3-way stop or temporary signals at the eastbound off-ramp to I-84. This step could dramatically increase the efficiency of the intersection.

Long Term

- ODOT is now in the process of engineering a new interchange at Exit 64 that will provide four travel lanes and fully signalized intersections. This project is expected to be complete by early 2010. It will significantly increase the capacity of the interchange and local road system. Unfortunately, this project is three years away.

If all these steps are implemented, it will probably not remove congestion at Exit 64 completely. Exit 64 is a “pinch point” where a complex network of roads merges. Emergencies and unforeseen transportation factors will inevitably cause delays at times. We may need to recognize that the days of congestion-free travel are probably gone as the communities of Hood River and White Salmon grow denser, rush hour commutes become more defined, and linkages become more pronounced. In the end, solutions will require active participation of all jurisdictions, businesses and the traveling public.

The Port, ODOT and City of Hood River welcome your input and ideas at any time about this significant challenge for our communities.