

Bremerton's Warren Avenue Bridge

Contributed Mike Saunders, Puget Sound Regional Branch Archivist

By the middle of the 20th century the City of Bremerton found itself in chronic gridlock on working days. The city occupies a majestic setting on the west side of Puget Sound on Sinclair Inlet. Sinclair Inlet provided the access and egress necessary for the Naval Shipyard that served as the city's primary economic engine since 1891.



That same setting also restricted access to and from the city, particularly the Port Washington Narrows which connects Sinclair and Dyes Inlets in a waterway that runs all the way to Silverdale. The Port Washington Narrows separated downtown Bremerton from other Naval facilities to the north and emerging residential areas on the Manette Peninsula.

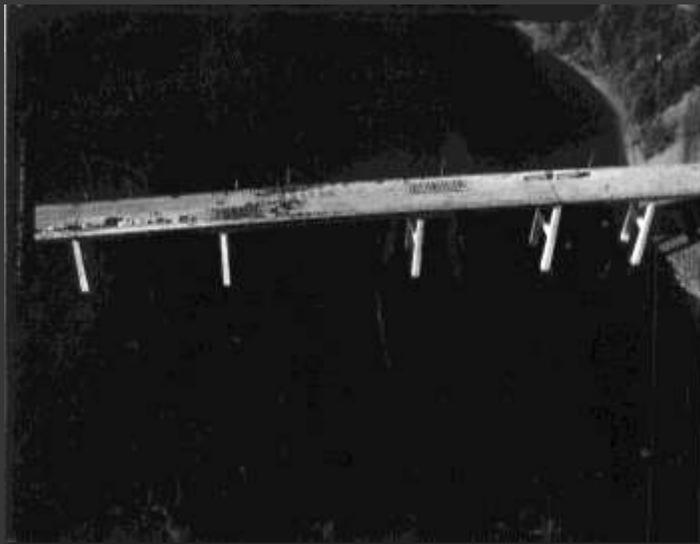


A private, two-lane toll bridge (the Manette Bridge) was built over the Port Washington Narrows in 1930. It was taken over by the State of Washington in 1938 and the tolls were removed in 1940. Prior to the United States' entry into World War II, Bremerton had a population of 15,000. By the early 1950s the population had grown to 35,000. The combined population in communities on the other side of the Port Washington Narrows had grown to 25,000. By the early 1950s this

single, two-lane bridge was routinely carrying traffic loads of 17,000 vehicles per day. The Naval Shipyard, by its own count, generated more than 4,400 vehicle trips over the bridge per day. Bremerton was in gridlock on most working days.

In 1954, the city and the local business community began to develop a proposal for a new four-lane bridge to span the Port Washington Narrows from Warren Avenue. Warren Avenue was chosen because it was already a four-lane arterial and connected directly with one of the main entrances to the shipyard. The project was funded by bonds that were paid off by tolls levied on cars crossing both the Warren Avenue and Manette Bridges. This was enabled by a statute passed by the Legislature in 1955 authorizing the Toll Bridge

Authority to construct toll bridges on secondary highways and local roads. The Warren Avenue Bridge was completed in 1959. The tolls on both bridges were removed in the late 1960s when the bridge bonds were paid off.



In the end, the Warren Avenue Bridge not only relieved gridlock in Bremerton, it connected the City directly with Olympic College and spurred development and growth of Manette, East Bremerton, Tracyton, Brownsville and Silverdale.

The information generated by this project, including proposals, maps, photographs, news clippings and reports, can be found in the City of Bremerton

Public Works Department Records held at the Puget sound Branch archives in Bellevue.

Photos:

- 1 – Bremerton Commute, 1940s
- 2 – Bremerton, Aerial before Warren Ave. Bridge
- 3 – Bridge Construction, pilings
- 4 – Bridge Construction, aerial