



Public Statement

Captain Neil Weaver
Government and Media Relations

Chris Loftis, Communications Director

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Office (360) 596-4013

Cell (360) 485-3983

Chris.Loftis@wsp.wa.gov

Statement from Chief John R. Batiste on the Need for Occasional Roadway Closures

We have heard from many frustrated citizens regarding the traffic disruptions caused by the temporary closures of the freeway due to protests. First, let me say thank you for reaching out to us. We are public servants responsible for safety and the enforcement of our state's laws and while we always try to satisfy the legitimate concerns of those we serve, in this case I'm afraid our response will not be totally satisfying to all.

In a time that requires care and flexibility, we are exercising the safest means possible to avoid injuries or worse to motorists, protesters, WSDOT personnel and our troopers by closing the roadway as needed and separating protestors from vehicular traffic. With no effective way of stopping large crowds from entering its lengthy borders, temporarily shutting the roadway is our best measure to avoid the dangerous mixture of freeway speed, vehicles, and pedestrians and to end the disruptions as quickly as possible.

We understand and share your frustration, but while keeping traffic flowing on our interstates and state roadways is one of our primary objectives, our primary responsibility is maintaining public safety with safe roads. We also understand and share the shock of the events in Minneapolis that have generated so much rightful indignation across our country and have demanded that we in law enforcement make careful and authentic assessments of our police tactics and relationships with communities of color.

In this unique environment of prolonged and daily protests, our responsibility to keep people safe extends to those who might be endangered by protests on the roadways as well as those who peacefully use the freeway for making public statements. Our response must remain flexible and we clearly understand how maddening this inconvenience can be. But due to the extreme volatility of the current environment, the impact of the pandemic on our court and jail systems, and our iron-clad commitment to use force only when it is necessary, reasonable, and proportionate to the situation, we are limited in our safe and appropriate response options.

We need everyone's assistance by extending to each other patience and grace as we all find the best ways to address these unprecedented challenges our country and state now face.

Again, thank you for reaching out to us. Your expressed concerns will help inform our way forward.

Chief John R. Batiste
Washington State Patrol
"Service with Humility"

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