

## COVID-19 – Transportation Update – May 2020

### ISSUE

This report discusses the safety considerations for people walking and cycling being considered at this time, in addition to the planned monitoring and reporting on this issue through the duration of the COVID-19 pandemic.

### BACKGROUND

City Council, at its Special Meeting on April 15, 2020, considered an update on the COVID-19 pandemic response and resolved:

“That the Administration provide a report outlining the balance of safety considerations for people walking and on bikes being considered at this time, in addition to the planned monitoring and reporting on this issue through the duration of the COVID-19 pandemic.”

The Government of Canada published ‘Coronavirus disease (COVID-19): Prevention and risks’ on their website. The advisement includes:

“In an effort to prevent the spread of COVID-19 within communities and across the country, all Canadians are advised to:

- stay at home unless you have to go to work
  - talk to your employer about working at home if possible
- avoid all non-essential trips in your community
- do not gather in groups
- limit contact with people at higher risk, such as older adults and those in poor health
- go outside to exercise but stay close to home
- if you leave your home, always keep a distance of at least 2 arms lengths (approximately 2 metres) from others
  - household contacts (people you live with) do not need to distance from each other unless they are sick or have travelled in the last 14 days”

The Government of Saskatchewan published ‘COVID-19 Mitigation Measures’ on April 14, 2020. Highlights of this document include:

“Mass Gathering

- Gatherings, indoors or outdoors, of more than 10 people are prohibited. This includes gatherings of non-residents in private homes. Workplaces are exempt from the restriction in indoor and outdoor gatherings of 10 or more people. A distance of 2 metres between individuals in the workplace shall be maintained, unless workers are unable to for safety reasons.
- Limit public outings to essential needs only such as groceries, prescription pick up, etc.”

## **CURRENT STATUS**

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the following has been completed (more details provided in Appendix 1):

### 1. Structure Crossings

- Closed walkways on bridge structures with walkways on one side, potential for high pedestrian volume, and insufficient width for 2 metre physical distancing.
- Added signage requesting access to one person at a time on or in the structure for pedestrian overpasses and underpasses, shared pathways, and bridges with only one walkway.
- Added signage to restrict movement to one-way per side for walkways on bridge structures with walkways on both sides.
- Added signage on walkways to respect social distancing on bridge structures with walkways on one side and of sufficient width (3.0 metres).

### 2. Pedestrian Push Buttons

- Adjustments have been made to traffic signals at 259 intersections to eliminate the need for pedestrians to use the push buttons to receive the walk signal.
- Adjustment have also been made to five pedestrian traffic signals near the Royal University Hospital and St. Paul's Hospital.
- Supplementary signage has been installed to notify people that the buttons are no longer required to receive the walk signal.
- The push buttons will remain in place for activation of the audible signal for people with reduced vision.
- The acknowledged trade-off of this change is that vehicular traffic flow is no longer maximized.

### 3. Communications

- The City's Daily COVID-19 Public Service Announcements (PSAs) include updates on changes to how transportation infrastructure is operating as well as instructions.
- A campaign has been running on the City's social media platforms (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram) to promote social distancing on the public right-of-way and pathways. The messaging also asks motorists, pedestrians and cyclists to keep an eye out for one another; for pedestrians to wear visible colours; and to watch for important signage on pathways and at pedestrian crossings.

### 4. Jurisdictional Scan

Actions other jurisdictions are considering or have implemented to assist with social distancing are being monitored. Further details are provided in Appendix 2.

Of note is that Canadian cities implementing street closures to provide additional space for active transportation have higher population densities than Saskatoon.

5. Outdoor Crowding in Public Spaces Committee:

Transportation, along with Saskatchewan Healthy Authority, University of Saskatchewan, Meewasin Valley Authority, Saskatoon Police Service, Parks, Facilities, Communications, and Emergency Management Organization (EMO), have recently struck a committee to address crowding in public spaces. The initial focus of the committee has been on joint communications, leveraging activities such as the Park Ambassador program, and the sharing of information and ideas.

## **DISCUSSION/ANALYSIS**

### Balance of Safety Considerations for People Walking and on Bikes

1. Behaviour on Downtown Bridges

The behaviour of users of the Traffic, Broadway, and University bridges is being observed. These are potential pinch-points notably if pedestrians and cyclists using the walkways are going the wrong-way. Also a consideration is that the 'Re-Open Saskatchewan' provincial plan, combined with warmer weather, will most likely result in an increase of pedestrian and cyclist traffic.

2. Behaviour on City Streets

Also being monitored, albeit subjectively, is behaviour on city streets and specifically where people are walking. During the pandemic, the common behaviour observed by oncoming pedestrians is to move to either side of the sidewalk and into the boulevard or temporarily into the parking lane. This provides social distancing and seemingly works fine. There have been anecdotal reports of people walking on the street for extended periods. If pedestrians wish to walk on the street, or are required to walk on the street where there are no sidewalks, the legal position is adjacent to the curb on the left side of the street (Appendix 3).

There are no plans in place to close any streets or driving lanes. This is not recommended as an option in consideration of:

- It seemingly will invite people to gather, in contravention with government advisement.
- Choosing which streets would be considered.
- Maintaining access for emergency services.
- The cost to install, maintain and remove the closures.
- The potential inequity unless every neighbourhood had streets closed.

3. Personal Responsibility

Each individual is responsible for their own safety and everyone is an emergency responder to COVID-19. Each person can contribute through their choices to the

impact of the pandemic in Saskatoon. It is important that people follow the direction of the provincial state of emergency to stay at home unless it is an essential trip or exercising in their neighbourhood, maintain physical distance from others, follow protocols if they are showing signs of COVID-19, and protect our vulnerable citizens.

The Saskatoon EMO continues to encourage residents to be prepared for emergency events by having a 72-hour plan, an emergency go kit, and a family communication plan. During the COVID-19 outbreak, as an emergency responder to this event, every resident must make their own best decisions about safety. The City and Province of Saskatchewan can implement as many safe guards as possible, but every resident must take personal ownership for their safety. There may be times when residents need to make a decision for their own safety to not use a street, dog park, or business that is busy. Everyone must work together and share the responsibility on the community response to COVID-19.

#### 4. Planned Monitoring

The monitoring plan is as follows:

- Count pedestrian and cyclists as follows:
  - University Bridge: Tuesday, Thursday, 3:30 – 5:00 pm
  - Broadway Bridge: Monday, Wednesday, Friday, 3:30 – 5:00 pm; and Saturday, 2:00 – 3:30 pm
  - Traffic Bridge: Tuesday, Thursday, 3:30 – 5:00 pm; and Saturday, 2:00 – 3:30 pm
- The data collected will note total activity, wrong way movements, issues with spacing, and comments on behaviour.
- Count occurrences of people walking on Saskatchewan Crescent between the University and Broadway bridges on Thursdays from 7:00 – 8:00 pm; and Saturday 3:30 – 4:30 pm.

#### Reporting

Updates on changes made to the transportation infrastructure will be included in the City's PSAs.

The data collected as part of the monitoring program will be published on the City's website, as well as shared with Meewasin Valley Authority, University of Saskatchewan, Saskatoon Police Service, Saskatchewan Health Authority, the City's EMO and other civic departments such as the Park Ambassadors.

#### **IMPLICATIONS**

As a result of this report, there are no policy, privacy, legal, social, or environmental implications identified at this time. The financial cost to implement the changes made to date is approximately \$25,000.

## **NEXT STEPS**

Begin the revised monitoring and reporting process.

Continue to:

- Participate in discussions with other jurisdictions regarding COVID-19 mitigation.
- Monitor best practices published by other jurisdictions and industry.
- Participate in the committee working to address outdoor crowding in public spaces.
- Share monitoring data with the Park Ambassadors and multi-jurisdictional Outdoor Crowding in Public Spaces Committee.

## **APPENDICES**

1. Changes to Structure Crossings
2. Jurisdictional Scan
3. Pedestrian on Street Rules

Report Approval

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