

Pedestrian Underpasses – April 2021 Update

ISSUE

This report provides an update on potential approaches to mitigate the public safety concerns associated with the pedestrian underpasses that exists in all Saskatoon neighbourhoods.

BACKGROUND

At its Regular Business Meeting held on March 17, 2008, City Council received the following inquiry from former Councillor M. Heidt:

“Regarding the last couple of acts of violence at these locations, would the Administration please look at closing one of two, or all tunnels, and/or the costs to put cameras in the tunnels at Transit Bus Malls.

Would the Administration identify the funding source if the camera option would provide a deterrent.”

The Planning and Operations Committee on December 13, 2011, considered a report on the safety of pedestrian underpasses. Recommendations were included from previous reviews conducted in 2005 and 2008 by Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED), along with the costs and issues involved regarding foot patrols and video monitoring. The Committee resolved, in part:

“1) that the matter be referred to the Administration for a further report with respect to the establishment of a time line and priority list for the outstanding recommendations of the Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design review of existing pedestrian underpasses, including the Confederation Park Plaza/Vancouver Avenue location, including consultation with community associations and mall management; and”

At its Regular Business Meeting held on April 27, 2015, City Council received as information a report regarding Safety of Pedestrian Tunnels. The report included the following information:

- There are eight pedestrian underpasses:
 - Vancouver Avenue/Confederation Mall (beneath Circle Drive West)
 - 29th Street West/Mackie Crescent (beneath Circle Drive West)
 - Edmonton Avenue/Marlborough Crescent (beneath Circle Drive West)
 - Rossmo Road/Forestry Farm (beneath Attridge Drive)
 - 11th Street/11th Street (beneath Idylwyld Drive)
 - 33rd Street/10th Avenue (beneath CP Main Line)
 - Spinks Drive/Lindsay Drive (beneath Circle Drive East)
 - Clancy Drive/18th Street (beneath Circle Drive West)

- An evaluation of underpass closures was provided by reviewing the impact to walking time (based on an adult travelling at an average walking speed) and connectivity:
 - Vancouver Avenue/Confederation Mall – 16 minutes
 - 29th Street West/Mackie Crescent – 12 minutes
 - Edmonton Avenue/Marlborough Crescent – 5 minutes
- Monitoring options were reviewed (all costs mentioned below are in 2015 dollars):
 - Foot patrols – require full-time security staff, no set-up costs, monitoring costs estimated at \$158,000 per year
 - Active monitoring – series of cameras with full-time personnel monitoring the video feeds, set-up costs of \$25,000 per underpass, monitoring cost of \$210,240 per underpass
 - Passive monitoring – series of cameras recording video onto a server, set-up costs of \$25,000 per underpass, monitoring cost is minimal
- Engagement completed at that time:
 - Seven Community Associations – either association board meetings or annual general meetings
 - Feedback included: little concerns using the underpasses during the day and in the evenings; primary concerns were litter and graffiti; signs with contact numbers would be useful; naming underpasses not useful; concerns over drainage in a few specific locations
- Safety/Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED)
 - CPTED reviews were done in 2005 and 2008 outlining a number of short-term and long-term recommendations (all now completed)

In 2019 a concern was brought forward to the Saskatoon Board of Police Commissioners that the three pedestrian underpasses beneath Circle Drive connecting Mount Royal with Confederation Mall and Massey Place are contributing to public safety issues. The Board of Commissioners directed the Saskatoon Police Service to provide a report and analysis on these underpasses. At its meeting held on February 20, 2020, the Board of Police Commissioners received an initial report, and the Board requested that the analysis of occurrences in the report be linked to the specific underpasses that they occurred in.

At its meeting held on June 18, 2020, the Board of Police Commissioners received the follow up report that summarized the analysis of occurrences regarding pedestrian underpasses and included the following information:

- The focus of the report was three pedestrian underpasses beneath Circle Drive connecting Mount Royal with Confederation Mall and Massey Place, and one connecting Fairhaven with Meadowgreen.
- An analysis of the past five years of occurrences at these pedestrian underpasses was provided.
- The majority of reported issues stem from the underpass that connects the Confederation Mall to the 300 block of Vancouver Avenue.

- The key findings were:
 - The underpass that connects the 300 block of Vancouver Avenue North to the Confederation Mall had the highest number of events with 52% of reported incidents over the five-year period.
 - This underpass also had the most violent crime incidents, identified as robberies, assaults, and threats.

At its Regular Business Meeting held on June 29, 2020, City Council received an information report from the Saskatoon Board of Police Commissioners regarding pedestrian underpasses and resolved, in part:

“Whereas a report by the City of Saskatoon’s Board of Police Commissioners identifies that pedestrian underpasses are generating significant public safety concerns;

Whereas although the findings of that report reveal that the majority of public safety issues emerge at the Confederation Mall and Vancouver Avenue locations, the problem persists at several other locations as well;

Whereas the report also finds that over the last five years, 81 public safety incidents have been reported to occur at these underpasses; and

Whereas robbery is the single largest public safety issue affecting underpasses, they are also heavily used as a conduit for the progression of other public safety incidents;

Now therefore be it resolved that the Administration report back on potential approaches to mitigate the public safety risks associated with the pedestrian underpasses that exists in all Saskatoon neighbourhoods.”

The Standing Policy Committee on Transportation, at its meeting held on March 1, 2021 received the bridge shared use pathway audit. The scope of the audit included the eight underpasses in Saskatoon. The study focussed on geometric design and operational safety of each location using Road Safety Audit (RSA) methodologies and the applicable principles of Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) as it applies to personal safety. The report recommendations included short-, medium-, and long-term recommendations for each underpass crossing. An initial strategy to improve public safety of the pedestrian underpasses is improvement of the lighting. Details of this strategy are provided in Appendix 1.

CURRENT STATUS

The Circle Drive West Functional Planning Study is addressing future transportation infrastructure needs for Circle Drive between 11th Street and Laurier Drive (inclusive). Work to date indicates that the plan will include grade-separation of Circle Drive West at Clancy Drive and Laurier Drive which will include infrastructure to facilitate the safe movement of all modes of travel including walking and cycling. At the time of the future work, it would most likely be feasible to close the four pedestrian underpasses in this

area as suitable alternatives would be available through the new infrastructure. The planning study is holding another public engagement event in 2021 followed by a report presenting the plan to City Council for endorsement in principle. The report will include some high-level cost estimates, but the preliminary cost estimate is in the \$100 million range. As there are no immediate traffic operation or safety needs for the project, it is a long-range project.

DISCUSSION/ANALYSIS

Approaches to mitigate the public safety risk include:

Mitigation Approach	Positive Considerations	Negative Considerations	Comments
Reconstruct underpass to meet current width and height standards.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintains existing connectivity. • Improved access for cyclists. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cost would be significant. • Does not resolve secluded areas where robberies and other unlawful activities can occur. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May not be feasible for underpasses that cross below a rail line. • Functional planning required to assess feasibility and costs.
Close Pedestrian Underpasses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Secluded areas, where robberies and other unlawful activities can occur, are closed. • Illegal activities near or within the underpasses most likely reduced. • Relatively low cost and easy to do. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased commuting times for people who use the underpasses. • Increased risk of jaywalking across high speed roads. • Not equitable. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consideration required if all underpasses need closing. • All entrance and exits need to be reconfigured so that the ground is flat. • Sound attenuation wall entrance/exits will need to be closed so no one can easily get behind the wall.
Install Cameras	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The secluded areas would have surveillance. • Facilitates investigation and enforcement of illegal activities. • Maintains existing connectivity. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Funding required for infrastructure and staffing. • Not an immediate physical deterrent, passive enforcement. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requires refreshing the plan in terms of function and cost. • Most likely requires a privacy impact assessment.
Build Pedestrian Overpasses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potentially eliminates the secluded areas. • Could reduce illegal activities due to increased visibility of pedestrians and cyclists using the crossing. • Maintains existing connectivity. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potential conflicts due to 138kv overhead power lines, rail lines, traffic noise attenuation walls, private property, etc. • Cost would be significant. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Functional planning required to assess feasibility and costs.
Install Lighting as per Bridge Shared Use Pathway Audit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improves safety in the short term. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not an immediate physical deterrent. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unfunded cost of \$172,043.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

This report is for information only and has no financial implications. Depending on the next step, there may be additional funding that would need to be identified.

OTHER IMPLICATIONS

Privacy, legal, social, and environmental implications were not reviewed as part of the preparation of this report.

NEXT STEPS

At present no additional steps are planned by the Administration, other than an implementation plan being prepared for the Bridge Shared Use Pathway Audit. Several potential next steps available to City Council are:

1. Receive this report as information.
2. Provide a resolution requesting further information on closing the pedestrian underpasses, including information on, but not limited to: which underpasses are recommended for closure; a communication plan; costs associated with the closure(s); a potential schedule for closure(s); and a funding plan. The project could proceed using internal resources as part of Transportation's 2022 workplan, with a tentative schedule of starting work in late 2022 and delivering the work in first half of 2023. Alternately, funding of \$50,000 would be required for the Administration to retain a consultant to complete this work in the near term.
3. Provide a resolution requesting further information on installing cameras, including information on, but not limited to: which underpasses are recommended for cameras; an update on the work completed in 2015 regarding this item in terms of number; type, location, and cost of cameras and how the surveillance system would work; implementation plan requiring coordination with the Information Technology department; required coordination with Saskatoon Police Service; require coordination with Neighbourhood Safety; communication plan; and a funding plan. The project could proceed using internal resources as part of Transportation's 2022 workplan, with a tentative schedule of starting work in late 2022 and delivering the work in first half of 2023. Alternately, funding of \$50,000 would be required for the Administration to retain a consultant to complete this work in the near term.
4. Provide a resolution requesting further information on building pedestrian overpasses, including information on, but not limited to: which underpasses are recommended to be replaced by an overpass; a functional plan which assesses the feasibility of each proposed overpass and addresses the utility, rail, and other infrastructure conflicts; capital and operating cost estimates; implementation plan; communication plan; asset preservation plan; and a funding plan. The project could proceed using internal resources as part of Transportation's 2022 workplan, with a tentative schedule of starting work in late 2022 and delivering the work in first half of 2023. Alternately, funding of \$200,000 would be required for the Administration to retain a consultant to complete this work in the near term.
5. Provide a resolution to install lighting as per Bridge Shared Use Pathway Audit. Funding of \$172,000 would be required to complete this work.

For clarity, the funding mentioned above, other than the lighting, is for the project scoping and planning work. Future funding would be required to implement the physical infrastructure at a later date. It is expected that all funding requests would be made through the regular Business Plan and Budget deliberation process.

APPENDICES

1. Bridge Shared Use Pathway Audit Information

Report Approval

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