

## Saskatoon Freeway Project Update – Phase 3

### ISSUE

The Province of Saskatchewan (Province) has decided to cancel Phase 3 of the Saskatoon Freeway Project. The work being cancelled includes the planning of the freeway between Highway 16 and Highway 7 on the west side of the City of Saskatoon. This cancellation has implications to the City of Saskatoon, and the Administration recommends sending a letter to the Province documenting these issues and requesting that they reconsider their decision.

### RECOMMENDATION

That the Standing Policy Committee on Transportation recommend to City Council:  
That His Worship the Mayor send a letter to the Minister of Highways documenting the need and importance of completing Phase 3 of the Saskatoon Freeway planning and requesting that the Province reconsider the decision to cancel the planning work for Phase 3 of the Saskatoon Freeway project.

### BACKGROUND

In 1999, a partnership involving the Saskatchewan Highways and Transportation (now Ministry of Highways (MoH)), the Rural Municipality of Corman Park and the City of Saskatoon (City) embarked on the Saskatoon Long Term Transportation Planning Study. This study was completed in 2001 and resulted in the signing of the Fundamental Principles of Agreement. This study established the general desire of the partners to pursue the development of a highway route around Saskatoon from Highway 11 (south) to Highway 14 (west) via an east and north corridor.

Subsequently, general location studies were undertaken during the years listed below to establish the alignment of this highway, including:

- 2005: East Perimeter Highway Functional Planning Study
  - a) From Highway 11 (south) to Highway 16 (west)
- 2009: Perimeter Highway Study Phase 2
  - b) From Highway 16 (west) to Highway 14 (west)
- 2018: South Saskatoon Freeway General Location Study
  - c) From Highway 14 (west) to Highway 7 (west)
  - d) From Highway 11 (south) to Highway 5 (east)

City Council endorsed these alignments for the Saskatoon Freeway project on February 27, 2006, December 15, 2009, and April 30, 2018, respectively.

In February 2019, the MoH held a kickoff meeting to begin the Saskatoon Freeway Functional Planning Study (Study). MoH's consultant SNC-Lavalin led this meeting.

The primary goals of the Study included:

- Developing a right-of-way plan;
- Producing cost estimates;
- Inclusive stakeholder engagement; and
- Endorsing the Functional Plan including interchange locations and configurations.

The Study is broken into three phases as shown in Appendix 1. Each phase was expected to take one year to complete.

Phase 1 is almost complete, with a project report and formal request of the City of Saskatoon to endorse the phase expected to be provided by the end of October 2021.

Phase 2 is holding public information sessions the first two weeks in November, preparing a draft report in quarter 1 of 2022, and a request of the City of Saskatoon to endorse Phase 2 may follow at a future time.

### **DISCUSSION/ANALYSIS**

In early October 2021, the City of Saskatoon was informed that the Province has cancelled Phase 3 of the Functional Planning Study. MoH noted the following:

- The 500 metre corridor will remain as is;
- Control circles at future interchange locations will remain; and,
- Development restrictions within the corridor will be in effect.

In a verbal update, MoH representatives indicated that there is no timeframe on when Phase 3 would be completed in the future.

This decision by the Province has the following preliminary implications for the City:

1. Transportation
  - a. Circle Drive will continue to attract more traffic as the City grows including local (within the City), regional, provincial, and inter-provincial traffic of both people and goods.
  - b. Circle Drive today experiences congestion during peak periods at specific locations such as the Circle Drive and 22<sup>nd</sup> Street interchange, and the Circle Drive and Idywlyld Drive interchange. A freeway between Highway 7 and Highway 16 would attract the regional, provincial, and inter-provincial traffic, and extend the usability of Circle Drive as it is configured today. Without a freeway, congestion at specific locations will continue to grow and the traffic impacts will also move upstream from the source over time.
  - c. Cut-through truck traffic on 11<sup>th</sup> Street West will continue to generate complaints from the public.
  - d. Traffic volumes on Neault Road will continue to grow with a mix of local, regional, provincial, and inter-provincial traffic.

- e. Over time, improvements at all these locations, and others in the transportation network will be required. The lack of a plan for the Saskatoon Freeway in this quadrant of the City will increase the difficulty in determining the appropriate improvements to the transportation network.
  - f. The City has no funding strategy or contingency plans for future issues created by the lack of, or delayed, Saskatoon Freeway in this quadrant of the City. To address these issues in the mid-term, this provincial responsibility of the movement of people and goods throughout and through the province remains on the local municipalities.
2. Planning
- a. Currently an update to the Blairmore Sector Plan is being undertaken. Uncertainty on the configuration of the Saskatoon Freeway and specifically the alignment of the freeway and the location and configuration of the interchanges with urban infrastructure makes planning of the long-term transportation network in the area not possible.
  - b. Uncertainty of the transportation network in this area does not allow for proper land use planning in terms of types and density of land uses.
  - c. Maintaining the control circles and development restrictions in the area in essence sterilizes the area for growth considerations until the transportation network is planned.

Over the past several years the Study has gained significant momentum with the public and many stakeholders, has a large consultant team retained and performing, was part of the original Study scope, and assumingly has funding. The Administration recommends that a letter be sent to the Province asking that the decision to cancel the project be reconsidered.

### **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

The financial implications have not been determined.

### **OTHER IMPLICATIONS**

Privacy, legal, social and environmental implications have not been assessed as a result of the Province's cancellation of Phase 3 of the Saskatoon Freeway.

### **NEXT STEPS**

If City Council resolves to adopt the recommendation, the Administration will prepare the letter for His Worship the Mayor's review and signature.

### **APPENDICES**

1. Saskatoon Freeway Functional Planning Study Phases

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#### Report Approval

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