

Pedestrian Underpasses – March 2024 Update

ISSUE

This report provides a follow-up report to address safety concerns at the Vancouver Avenue and Confederation Mall pedestrian underpass.

BACKGROUND

A summary of the background prior to May 2021 is included as Appendix 1.

At the Standing Policy Committee on Transportation (SPCT) held on May 3, 2021, the Committee received a [report](#) regarding potential approaches to mitigate the public safety concerns associated with the pedestrian underpasses that exist in Saskatoon neighbourhoods, and resolved:

“That the Administration provide a follow up report to address specific comprehensive strategies to address specifically the ongoing safety concerns at the Vancouver Avenue and Confederation Mall tunnel and recommend the most effective solutions that combine potential use of lighting, cameras, landscaping or fencing in the adjacent areas. That during the development of these solutions involve appropriate staff from the Transportation Department, Planning and Development Department, Saskatoon Police Service and the associated Community Associations.”

At its Regular Business Meeting held on November 21, 2022, City Council received the final [report](#) for the Circle Drive West Functional Planning Study, and resolved, in part:

“That the Recommended Plan of the Circle Drive West Functional Planning Study be added to the Saskatoon Transportation Master Plan (STMP) Infrastructure list for future prioritization;”

The Circle Drive West Functional Planning Study addresses future transportation infrastructure needs of Circle Drive between 11th Street and Laurier Drive (inclusive). The recommended plan includes 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 construction, it would be most likely feasible to close the four pedestrian underpasses in this area as suitable alternatives would be available through the new infrastructure.

CURRENT STATUS

The Circle Drive West Functional Planning Study is a long-range project and the long-term solution to the pedestrian underpass issues. The timing of implementation is unknown.

DISCUSSION/ANALYSIS

Previously Identified Potential Mitigation

The SPCT report presented on May 3, 2021 outlined the following approaches to mitigating the public safety risk:

Mitigation Approach	Positive Considerations	Negative Consideration	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 concerns with 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 costs 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 and railway. • 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 entrances/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. • Costs 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 total cost of \$172,043. • Cost at Vancouver Avenue/Confederation Mall location is \$21,750 (2020 dollars).

Clarification notes on the previously identified potential mitigation (above table) include:

- The approach of reconstructing the underpass to meet current width and height standards may not be sufficient. If this approach was to proceed, the detailed design would complete a detailed assessment on the required geometry.

- The type, installation, maintenance, and resolution of a camera system will be critical to achieving useful video in low light or from distance.
- Installing lighting as per the Bridge Shared Use Pathway Audit does not prevent crime on its own. However, improved lighting would contribute to users' perception of safety, and in combination with camera installation, more users may become comfortable using the walkways. Higher use would be expected to improve safety in the underpasses. Design considerations for lighting would include head clearance space as the existing underpass is limited in head clearance space and appropriate brightness as to not 'blind' people.

Landscaping and Fencing Review

A site visit was conducted and photographs from the visit are included in Appendix 2. A review of the site and the photographs yields the following:

- Photographs 1 through 6 illustrate the approach to the east entrance of the tunnel and sight availability of the pedestrian underpass entrance is adequate.
- Photographs 4 and 5 illustrate that a person can see straight through the length of the pedestrian underpass from the east entrance.
- Photograph 6 illustrates the 'switchback' to provide lower grades for better accessibility.
- Photographs 7 and 8 illustrate that a person can see straight through the length of the pedestrian underpass from the west entrance.
- Photograph 9 illustrates the fenced area between the Canadian National (CN) rail line and the northbound lanes of Circle Drive West.
- Photograph 10 illustrates the graffiti on the sound attenuation wall at the next Circle Drive West pedestrian underpass to the north.

The Administration's conclusion is that investing in landscaping or revising the topography would not, on its own, result in a safer condition. However, enhanced landscaping would make the area more appealing, which may result in increased use, in particular, if cameras and enhanced lighting are also added.

There are adequate sight lines approaching the pedestrian underpass from both directions. If the topography was revised and levelled, most likely sound attenuation walls would be required to replace the benefit the earth berms provide. In addition to being expensive, this brings social issues of graffiti and locations for squatting. The poor sight lines exist once a person is in the underpass, or when exiting the underpass. Revising the topography would not mitigate this issue.

Photograph 9 clearly indicates the enclosed space that would eliminate an escape route if needed and could create discomfort for people using the underpass. If the fencing was removed here, it is most likely that CN would require fencing parallel to, and west of, their tracks for some distance to discourage trespassing on the tracks. It is noted that there is fencing parallel to, and east of, the CN tracks. A risk would also be people walking onto Circle Drive West.

Stakeholder Discussions

Members of the Transportation department met with Mount Royal Community Association board members on June 14, 2023. Minutes of the meeting are included in Appendix 3. Some highlights of the discussion include:

- Why focus on one underpass?
- The fencing between the tunnels traps people and is very unnerving.
- Don't close it.
- Issues with assigning criminal incidents with a proper location.
- Why isn't there a regular police patrol?
- Prompt graffiti removal would be beneficial.
- Walking by yourself is unnerving.
- This has been an issue for a long time, when will something actually be done?

Members of the Transportation department met with the Massey Place Community Association board members on September 21, 2023. Minutes of the meeting are included in Appendix 4. Some highlights of the discussion include:

- The tunnels are used by local school classes.
- Can the tunnels be closed at night?
- Cameras would be preferred as at least they would provide a record of what happened.
- The current lighting is very old.
- Do the police patrol through the tunnels?
- Can signage or names be added to the tunnel? (Note: subsequent site visit confirmed the underpasses are labeled)
- Do not close the tunnels.
- The fencing between the tunnels is restrictive and increases anxiety.
- Drainage is very poor in the spring.
- Support tunnel names or numbers, improved lighting, passive cameras and landscaping changes.

Members of the Transportation department met with members of the Planning and Development Department on December 13, 2023 to review preliminary recommendations and obtain feedback that was incorporated into the final recommendations. The Transportation department shared the preliminary recommendations with the Saskatoon Police Service in writing and received a response that they did not see any concerns from their perspective.

Recommendations

Based on the discussions with the two Community Associations, the Planning and Development Department, feedback from the Saskatoon Police Service and the site visit, the following tasks are recommended:

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#	Item	Item Description	2024 Cost Estimate
1	Lighting	Install lighting as per the Bridge Shared Use Pathway Audit. The 2020 cost was \$22,838. Adjusting for inflation, the estimated 2024 cost is \$28,000.	\$28,000
2	Remove Fencing Between CN Tracks and Circle Drive	Remove fencing that entraps people between the CN rail line and northbound lanes of Circle Drive. It is anticipated that removing the fencing will increase the perception of safety by eliminating an enclosed area. There is a risk that people will walk onto Circle Drive or the CN rail if the fence is removed.	\$10,000
3	New Fencing	If CN requires new fencing parallel to, and west of, their tracks, it is assumed 200 metres each way would be required for a total of 400 metres. The unit cost estimate is \$60/metre.	\$24,000
4	Cameras (2 sets)	Install a passive camera system (not actively monitored, used after any incidents). Although not an immediate deterrent, installing a camera and video storage system that retains 30 days of video provides the Saskatoon Police Service some information for investigating the incident. The 2015 cost was \$50,000. Adjusting for inflation, the estimated 2024 cost is \$64,000.	\$64,000
5	Geometrics (landscaping)	Re-grading both approaches to maximize sight lines is not recommended. A cost estimate of this item is not feasible at this point without retaining some engineering services to generate a design and cost estimate. A proposed cost for landscaping is included.	\$50,000
Subtotal			\$176,000
Engineering (10%)			\$18,000
Contingency (20%)			\$35,000
Total			\$229,000

It is also anticipated approximately \$10,000 per year would be needed for operating costs for the camera system.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

This report is for information only and has no financial implications. If Committee was interested in proceeding with this project, the City does not have any readily available funding sources for these types of projects. As such the Reserve for Capital Expenditures (RCE) would likely be recommended to fund this initiative if Committee wishes to proceed. This could be done through referral to the 2025 budget deliberations RCE process and potential to reprioritize existing projects or else an allocation could be recommended by Committee. Currently the RCE has a balance of approximately \$2.1 million (including the \$750,000 recommending contingency amount for existing RCE projects) which could be utilized to fund this project.

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. Several potential options available to SPCT and City Council to direct the Administration are:

Option 1: Receive this report as information. No further work would occur on this issue.

Option 2: Provide a resolution to include the project 'Circle Drive West Pedestrian Underpasses Improvement Project' in the next budget process (assuming 2026/2027) as an option and reflect a cost of approximately \$229,000 to be adjusted for inflation at the time of budget submission.

Option 3: If a different combination of recommendations is preferred, provide a resolution that aligns with the combination.

APPENDICES

1. Background Prior to May 2021
2. Site Photographs
3. Meeting Minutes – June 14, 2023 meeting with Mount Royal Community Association
4. Meeting Minutes – September 21, 2023 meeting with Massey Place Community Association

Report Approval

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