

Saskatoon Freeway Planning Study – Phase 2 Endorsement Request – March 2024

ISSUE

The Ministry of Highways has provided the City of Saskatoon a final draft for the Saskatoon Freeway Functional Planning Study – Phase 2 Functional Design Report and request that City Council review and formally endorse the Phase 2 report.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Standing Policy Committee on Transportation recommend to City Council:
That City Council endorse the Saskatoon Freeway Functional Planning Study – Phase 2 Functional Design Report and supporting appendices (Option 2).

BACKGROUND

History

In 1999, a partnership involving the Saskatchewan Highways and Transportation (now Ministry of Highways), the Rural Municipality of Corman Park and the City of Saskatoon 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 (see Appendix 1). 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
 - From Highway 11 (south) to Highway 16 (west)
- 2008 – Perimeter Highway Study Phase 2
 - From Highway 16 (west) to Highway 14 (west)
- 2018 – South Saskatoon Freeway General Location Study
 - From Highway 14 (west) to Highway 7 (west)
 - From Highway 11 (south) to Highway 5 (east)

City Council endorsed these alignments for the Saskatoon Freeway project on February 27, 2006, December 15, 2008, and April 30, 2018 respectively.

In 2019, the Government of Saskatchewan, through the Ministry of Highways, began a functional planning study that will finalize the right-of-way plan, produce project cost estimates, and determine the interchange locations and configurations. The freeway is expected to be a four-lane, 55-kilometre-long divided highway that begins at Highway 11 south of Saskatoon and connects with Highway 16 northwest of the city. The functional planning study will consider the placement of 16 interchanges, five

railway overpasses, at least two flyovers, and one major river crossing. There is no timetable for a final decision regarding the freeway's construction.

Originally, the study was broken into three phases:

- Phase 1 – Highway 16 northwest of Saskatoon east to the South Saskatchewan River
- Phase 2 – South Saskatchewan River to Highway 11 south of Saskatoon
- Phase 3 – Highway 7 west of the City to Highway 16 northwest of Saskatoon

The study's organization chart is shown in Appendix 2. It consists of two committees, six Technical Working Groups (TWG) and one Sub-TWG. Each of these committees and TWGs, except for the Executive Management TWG, have at least one City representative. Councillor Randy Donauer is a member of the Steering Committee.

In February 2019, the Ministry of Highways held a kickoff meeting to begin the Saskatoon Freeway Functional Planning Study. The Ministry of Highway's consultant, SNC-Lavalin, led this meeting.

The primary goals of the study include:

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

In November 2021, the Ministry of Highways indicated that Phase 3 was being removed from the scope of this study and will be completed in the future.

In December 2021, the Ministry of Highways provided the City of Saskatoon with the final draft of the Saskatoon Freeway Functional Planning Study – Phase 1 Functional Design Report, along with the supporting appendices, and a formal request to endorse the study.

At its Regular Business Meeting held on April 25, 2022, City Council received a request to endorse the Saskatoon Freeway Functional Planning Study – Phase 1 Functional Design Report and resolved;

“That City Council endorse the Saskatoon Freeway Functional Planning Study – Phase 1 Functional Design Report and supporting appendices with the exceptions outlined in the report of the General Manager, Transportation and Construction dated March 7, 2022 (Option 3).”

Current Status

In late 2022, the Ministry of Highways provided the City of Saskatoon with the preliminary draft of the Saskatoon Freeway Functional Planning Study – Phase 2 Functional Design Report, along with the supporting appendices, and a request for the City's review and comments.

On February 6, 2023, the City of Saskatoon provided the Ministry of Highways with review comments (Appendix 3).

On April 19, 2023, the Ministry of Highways provided responses to the City's review comments (Appendix 4).

In September 2023, the Ministry of Highways provided the City of Saskatoon with the final draft of the Saskatoon Freeway Functional Planning Study – Phase 2 Functional Design Report, along with the supporting appendices, and a formal request to endorse the study. The cover letter is included as Appendix 5, and the functional design report and appendices are included as Appendix 6.

The functional design report recommendations are included in Chapter 9 of the functional design report. Primary report components include the freeway alignment, the location and shape of interchanges, the location and shape of flyovers, and preliminary assessment of property required. These are the primary components that City Council would be endorsing.

In September 2023, the Ministry of Highways also indicated that Phase 3 was to begin. Phase 3 is now ongoing and planned for completion later in 2024.

City of Saskatoon's Current Approach

The Administration has reviewed the final draft report for Phase 2 and a summary of review comments is provided in Appendix 7.

DISCUSSION/ANALYSIS

Options

- **Option 1 – Do not endorse the study**

This option would have City Council receive the study results for information only, or formally identify that it is not endorsing the results. In the case of formally not endorsing the study, documentation to the Ministry of Highways should be provided to outline the rationale for the lack of endorsement.

Advantages:

- None evident.

Disadvantages:

- Does not provide certainty to the Government of Saskatchewan on the acceptance of the Saskatoon Freeway in principle by the City of Saskatoon.
- May delay the endorsement of the Study, which in turn:
 - further lengthens the time where lands are frozen from being developed through the continuation of a 500-metre subdivision and development restrictions currently in place;
 - does not enable future transportation and land use planning to proceed; and
 - hinders economic development in the area.

- **Option 2 – Endorse the study**

This option would have City Council endorse the study, as presented in the Saskatoon Freeway Functional Planning Study – Phase 2 Functional Design Report and supporting appendices.

Advantages:

- The direction to the Ministry of Highways would be very clear.
- Future work on this phase of the Saskatoon Freeway may be easier to implement by the Ministry of Highways.
- Certainty is provided to landowners and developers on where the Saskatoon Freeway will be, enabling land use and transportation planning to proceed.

Disadvantages:

- None evident.

Rationale

The following was considered in developing the recommendations:

- There is benefit to the City in endorsing Phase 2 of the study.
- Through the review process the Ministry of Highways has acknowledged specific issues to be considered later in the design process.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The financial implications of the Saskatoon Freeway have not been identified. Future work on the Saskatoon Freeway, including the construction, is expected to be funded by the Government of Saskatchewan.

OTHER IMPLICATIONS

Endorsement of Phase 2 of the Study sets in place another significant infrastructure project that will require accommodation in future transportation and land use planning projects by the City of Saskatoon. The Transportation and Planning and Development departments will consider the required planning work and provide an update to City Council on required projects at the appropriate time.

NEXT STEPS

Continue to work with the Province on Phase 3 of the project.

APPENDICES

1. Signed Fundamental Principles of Agreement
2. Saskatoon Freeway Planning Study – Organizational Chart
3. City of Saskatoon Administration Review Comments – February 6, 2023
4. Ministry of Highways Response to Comments – April 19, 2023
5. Letter from Ministry requesting Phase 2 Endorsement – September 12, 2023
6. Saskatoon Freeway Functional Planning Study Phase 2 Functional Design Report Draft and Appendices
7. City of Saskatoon Administration Review Comments – January 25, 2024

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Approved by: Jeff Jorgenson, City Manager

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