

March 18, 2024

City Council

Dear Mayor and Councillors,

**Re: Saskatoon Freeway Planning Study - Phase 2 Endorsement Request
[TS2024-0205]****Saskatoon Environmental Advisory Committee (SEAC)**

On March 15, 2024, SEAC resolved to provide feedback to City Council concerning the Saskatoon Freeway Planning Study – Phase 2 Endorsement Request.

SEAC recommends that City Council does not endorse the Functional Planning Study for Phase 2 of the proposed Saskatoon Freeway for the following reasons:

- **Green Infrastructure Strategy:** The Swale's are identified as significant natural areas and the Green Infrastructure Strategy 11th Action is to protect, restore and manage significant natural areas. The Saskatoon Freeway project does not align with the Green Infrastructure Strategy.
- **Northeast Swale and Small Swale Boundary Endorsement:** In February 2023 City Council endorsed the proposal to go beyond the minimum recommended boundaries and adopt additional boundaries for the NE Swale, which the Saskatoon Freeway will cross. This will undo Council's previous effort in 2023 to protect the Swales.
- **Traffic Engineering:** The Saskatoon Freeway project could be oversized for what is required for Saskatoon and surrounding areas with a predicted population of 830,000 by 2063. Through the Swale area the consultant has proposed 8-lanes moving to 10-lanes. The Stoney Trail perimeter highway in Calgary, AB (population 1.31 million in 2021) consists mainly of 6 lanes with average daily number of vehicles ranging from 22,000 to 59,000 (area dependent) during the weekday. The Anthony Henday Drive in Edmonton, Alberta (population 1.14 million in 2023) is a 6-lane highway that can accommodate up to 120,000 vehicles per day.
- **Swale Biodiversity:** The diversity of the Swale's is at further risk from habitat fragmentation and invasive species from this proposed project. Maintaining the composition, diversity and functional roles of native plants in the Swales is critical for their health and sustainability. However, the fragmentation, disturbance and

transported invasive seed as a result of the freeway will likely promote plant invasion, especially by invasive agronomic grasses (i.e. *Bromus inermis*, *Poa pratensis*). These grasses will displace the native plant species and reduce ecosystem services and available habitat for wildlife. There are few effective mitigation measures to stop the transport of invasive plants along the freeway and into the Swales.

- **Wildlife Crossing:** An 8-lane cross-section is proposed for the section crossing the Northeast Swale (between Blackley Road and Central Avenue) and a 10-lane cross-section is proposed for the section crossing the Small Swale (between Central Avenue and the South Saskatchewan River). As a result, wildlife must cross a distance of approximately 124 m in the Northeast Swale and 116 m in the Small Swale. Since an underpass of this distance is not realistic, it is instead proposed that wildlife will cross under one direction of traffic, exit and cross 32 m in the median area, before crossing under the other direction. This design is still likely not effective due to the hazards and disturbances in the wide median zone. Further, any large wildlife in the 32 m median area are a danger to commuters as the area through the swales will not have lighting.
- **Swale Economic Value:** The City of Saskatoon's Natural Capital Asset Valuation determined that the Small Swale alone provides \$731,200/year in ecosystem services. The degradation as a result of the freeway development could cause significant economic damages.
- **Drainage:** The wetland complexes in the Swales and those draining into the South Saskatchewan River are planned to be part of the drainage pathway. Roadway contaminants such as oil, salts and sediment are very likely to reduce wetland water quality without mitigation measures. Further, the erosion control measures outlined in the report where no additional protection would be provided in areas with vegetation, is likely insufficient as the disturbance associated with freeway construction will likely exceed the retention ability of the vegetation.
- **Environmental Impact Assessment:** It is not known if this project will be designated by the Impact Assessment Agency. It should be noted that there are many invested community groups and that they could petition the Agency to designate the project.

Further Recommendations

- SEAC recommends that City Council propose conducting wildlife, vegetation and wetland surveys in the entire impacted area prior to the detailed design phase. Limited biological assessments in partial project areas should not be used to inform the entire project design.

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- SEAC also recommends that City Council recommends that the Government of Saskatchewan choose a route for the Saskatoon Freeway that does not intrude on the Swales and that the project will be subject to an Environmental Impact Assessment.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Angela Spence".

Angela Spence
Chair, Saskatoon Environmental Advisory Committee