

**Janzen, Heather**

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**From:** City Council  
**Subject:** FW: Email - Request to Speak - Candace Savage - Swale Watchers - Saskatoon Freeway Planning Study – Phase 2 - CK 6003-1  
**Attachments:** Appendix 1 Phase 2 Planning Context.pdf; Appendix 2 Swale-Watchers-March-2024.pdf

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**From:** Web NoReply <web-noreply@Saskatoon.ca>  
**Sent:** Thursday, March 21, 2024 4:02 PM  
**To:** City Council <City.Council@Saskatoon.ca>  
**Subject:** Email - Request to Speak - Candace Savage - Swale Watchers - Saskatoon Freeway Planning Study – Phase 2 - CK 6003-1

--- Replies to this email will go to [swalewatchers@gmail.com](mailto:swalewatchers@gmail.com) ---

Submitted on Thursday, March 21, 2024 - 15:55

Submitted by user: [REDACTED]

Submitted values are:

**I have read and understand the above statements.:** Yes

**I do not want my comments placed on a public agenda. They will be shared with members of Council through their online repository.:** No

**I only want my comments shared with the Mayor or my Ward Councillor.:** No

**Date:** Thursday, March 21, 2024

**To:** His Worship the Mayor and Members of City Council

**Pronouns:** She/her/hers

**First Name:** Candace

**Last Name:** Savage

**Phone Number :** [REDACTED]

**Email:** [swalewatchers@gmail.com](mailto:swalewatchers@gmail.com)

**I live outside of Saskatoon:** No

**Saskatoon Address and Ward:**

**Address:** [REDACTED] Albert Avenue, Saskatoon, SK

**Ward:** Ward 6

**Name of the organization or agency you are representing (if applicable):** Swale Watchers

**What do you wish to do ?:** Request to Speak

**If speaking will you be attending in person or remotely:** In person

**What meeting do you wish to speak/submit comments ? (if known)::** City Council March 27

**Comments:**

Dear City Council,

You have been asked to endorse the Functional Planning Study for Phase 2 of the Saskatoon Freeway. We are writing to ask you to vote "no" to this request for three compelling reasons.

1. The planning context for the Freeway has changed significantly since the general alignment was identified more than twenty years ago. Endorsing Phase 2 without a re-evaluation of the current demographic, economic and financial implications of the project constitutes a lack of due diligence. Please see Appendix 1 Phase 2 Planning Context.

2. In several recent decisions, Council has demonstrated an intention to protect, connect and restore the Swales. The Functional Planning Study clearly documents the severe and irreversible damage that the Freeway would cause to these natural refuges. In the interests of clear, coherent direction and sound administration, Council cannot in good faith endorse the Phase 2 report. Please see Appendix 2, Swale-Watchers-March-2024.

3. Unlike the City, which has been privy to the Phase 2 study for many months, the public has only had access to the completed plan for a few weeks. It is fair to say that response from interested residents has not been overwhelmingly positive. Dozens of concerned individuals have written to you to voice their opposition to the route through the Swales, and fourteen organizations have endorsed the Swale Watchers' position paper on behalf of their memberships. This expression of public concern deserves a thoughtful and unhurried response from Council. We have identified several possible directions you may wish to explore.

**Additional Suggested Actions**

In considering Phase 2 of the Saskatoon Freeway, we invite you to consider taking one or more of the following actions:

- request written assurance from the SK Minister of Environment that an Environmental Impact Assessment of the Saskatoon Freeway will be completed at the appropriate time. We note that the City's North Commuter Parkway was exempted from an EIA on the grounds that sufficient attention had been paid to mitigation during the planning process. It is conceivable that a similar argument could be made for the Saskatoon Freeway and/or that the project could be divided into phases which, considered separately, could be deemed not to meet the threshold for an EIA. Neither outcome would be acceptable.
- request a report from City admin on all studies that have been made into alternative routes for the Freeway.
- request a report from City admin on how misalignments between the Freeway and the City's OCP could be corrected;
- refer the Phase 2 Functional Study to the City's Environmental Advisory Committee and Municipal Heritage Committee for advice.
- refer the Phase 2 Functional Study to the City's Elders or Indigenous advisors for review and advice. This referral should be made in the spirit of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission report, which states: "Reconciliation between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians, from an Aboriginal perspective, also requires reconciliation with the natural world. If human beings resolve problems between themselves but continue to destroy the natural world, then reconciliation remains incomplete. This is a perspective that we as Commissioners have repeatedly heard: that reconciliation will never occur unless we are also reconciled with the earth."
- request a report on terms of reference and possible funding sources for a Health Impact Assessment for the portions of Phase 2 of the Freeway that will cut through areas intended for future neighbourhoods.
- request a report on terms of reference and potential funding sources for a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) encompassing all four Saskatoon Swales--Hudson Bay Swale, West Swale, Northeast Swale and Small Swale, together with natural areas surrounding Saskatoon. The purpose of the SEA would be to assess current and projected cumulative impacts of development on these key natural areas and identify ways to ensure positive outcomes. Adopting this methodology would strengthen and

advance the City's progress toward an integrated green network that functions at a landscape scale, supporting ecological resilience through connectivity.

See: <https://www.saskatoon.ca/environmental-initiatives/climate-change/green-netwo>

Respectfully submitted,

Meghan Mickelson & Candace Savage

Co-chair, Swale Watchers

swalewatchers.org

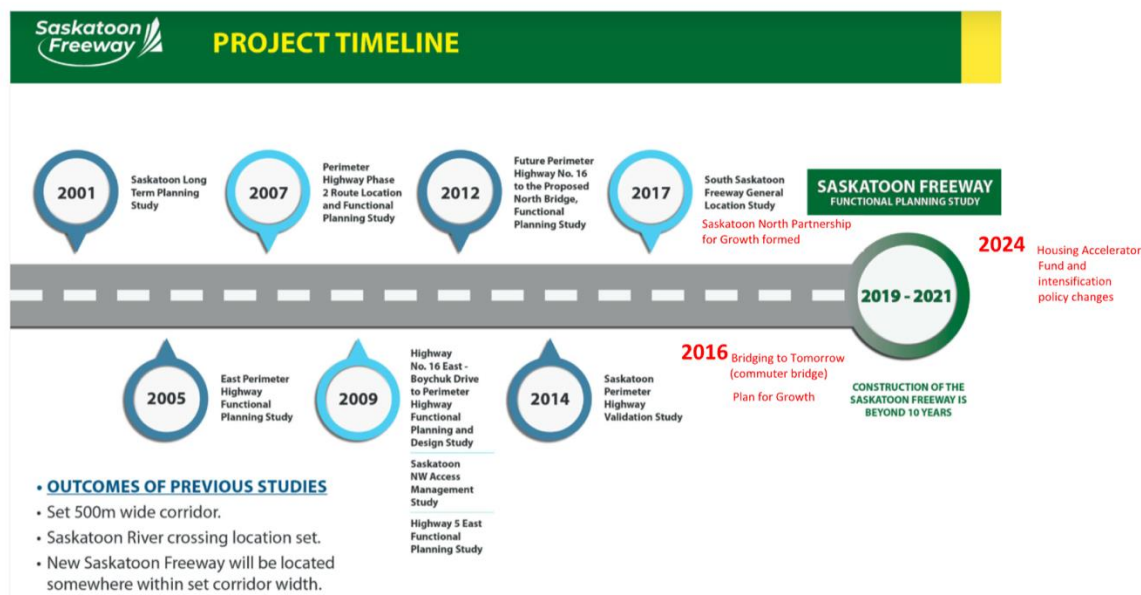
**Attachments:**

- [Appendix 1 Phase 2 Planning Context.pdf](#)365.52 KB
- [Appendix 2 Swale-Watchers-March-2024.pdf](#)834.27 KB

**Will you be submitting a video to be vetted prior to council meeting?:** No

## Changes in Planning Context for Phase 2 of the Saskatoon Freeway

Saskatoon City Council endorsed a general alignment for the Saskatoon Freeway to be put to a functional planning study in 2002, more than twenty years ago. Since then, the planning context for the Freeway has changed significantly. These changes all point in a direction OPPOSITE to approval of the current alignment for Phase 2 of the Saskatoon Freeway.



Timeline from <https://saskatoonfreeway.org/phase-1/>, with our additions in red.

Important changes in the planning context include:

### Construction of the North Commuter Parkway (Bridging to Tomorrow P3 Project)

Responding to a question at the SPC Transportation on March 5 about the need for the Saskatoon Freeway, the Director of Transportation for the City, Jay Magus, noted that, at present, the North Commuter Parkway and Chief Mistawasis Bridge at six lanes provide “a lot of capacity for folks to cross the river in that half of the city.”

**City of Saskatoon Growth Plan** – Since the creation of the Freeway Project, the City has adopted plans with a greater emphasis on intensification. This direction will make the City more sustainable and reduce the need for the Freeway.

Saskatoon’s Growth Plan states: “The City of Saskatoon has developed a vision for economic prosperity, quality of life, and environmental responsibility, and it is essential that today’s land use and transportation choices set Saskatoon up to realize this vision. The implications for the future livability of the city are great.”

**Housing Accelerator Fund Zoning, 2024** – A number of zoning changes are underway to support the City’s Growth Plan and to align with the request of the Federal Government to focus Housing Accelerator Funding on sustainable development

principles that include transit-oriented housing and residential intensification. Again, these changes in development patterns will reduce Saskatoon's need for the Freeway Project.

### **Strengthening of City Policies**

Saskatoon's Official Community Plan (Bylaw 9700) describes a city that "grows in harmony with nature" in which "our natural assets are protected, enhanced and linked." These aspirations are given operational form in policy and bylaws that address issues such as \* Natural Asset Management, \* Wetlands and Conservation Management, \*Conservation of Natural Areas, \* Riverbank Stewardship, and \* Conservation of Heritage Resources. The Swales have been recognized as the highest quality natural areas in Saskatoon and as priorities for designation, protection and management.

The Biological Assessment completed by SNC Lavalin for the Ministry of Highways found that the Freeway would harm the Swales and the species that live there in numerous ways, including: \* Direct loss of habitat, \* Direct mortality including during construction, \* Reduced connectivity, \* Increased fragmentation, \* Light and noise pollution, \* Toxic chemical infiltration, \* Behavioral changes/habitat avoidance, \* Edge effects, \* Hydrological changes, and \* Intrusion of invasive species.

Building a Freeway through the Swales will cause permanent ecological damage, an outcome that is not aligned with City intentions and policies.

There is also reason to question the Freeway Project's compatibility with the City Heritage Policy (Policy C10-020) which establishes the City's intention to protect Cultural Landscapes and Natural Heritage. The Functional Study report notes that a heritage review of the Swales has not yet been completed and that heritage assets are likely to be identified there, especially where the natural vegetation has so far remained undisturbed. The report specifies that "Some of these heritage resources may be sufficiently significant to require extensive mitigation, which can affect both the project detailed design and timetable."

**Increased Knowledge of Conservation Values** – Knowledge of the conservation value of the area impacted by the Freeway Project has increased markedly in recent years. The Habitat Evaluation prepared by Meewasin (2020) outlines a number of Conservation Values requiring significant accommodation, mitigation and monitoring. The Environmental and Regulatory Review report prepared by SNC Lavalin (2020) outlines information gaps, recommends a number of additional studies, and notes significant ecological and heritage assets. Compensation is noted as likely to be required given the significance of the impacts and the inability to mitigate within the study-area boundaries.

**Mounting Public Concern** – As knowledge of the ecological importance of the Swales has grown, so has public demand for protecting these areas. This concern is expressed in the engagement sessions for the Freeway, as documented in the Phase 2 reports,

and in the dozens of letters recently received by Council calling for reconsideration of the alignment through the Swales.

**National Urban Park Feasibility Study** – A study into the feasibility of creating a National Urban Park in Saskatoon is underway, led by Meewasin and involving regional and Indigenous partners. This raises the profile and importance of existing ecologically sensitive areas and the stewardship responsibilities for all public decision-makers. Saskatoon City Council is currently seeking solutions to ensure the long-term viability of the Northeast and Small Swales, including the potential for their enhancement as part of a National Urban Park system.

### **Truth and Reconciliation Commission Report**

When the first colonists arrived on these bends in the South Saskatchewan River in the late nineteenth century, they found the prairie strewn with bones, all that remained of the once vast herds of bison. Now, a mere 14 decades later, the prairie itself is almost gone. The process of colonization has been – and continues to be -- relentless. Building a Freeway through the Swales is a final clean-up operation, targeting the last remaining vestiges of the life that supported people here for countless generations.

The report of the Truth and Reconciliation (2015) reads as follows: “Reconciliation between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians, from an Aboriginal perspective, also requires reconciliation with the natural world. If human beings resolve problems between themselves but continue to destroy the natural world, then reconciliation remains incomplete. This a perspective that we as Commissioners have repeatedly heard: that reconciliation will never occur unless we are also reconciled with the earth.”

**Formation of the Saskatoon North Partnership for Growth** – The establishment of the P4G introduced coordinated planning for development. Warman and Martensville are experiencing significant growth (12.7% and 9.3% respectively at the time of the last census) at rates higher than the City (7.5% for the same period). Regional conversations have acknowledged that a more useful location for the Freeway Project would be much further north to serve these fast-growing centres.

### **Mounting and Unassessed Costs**

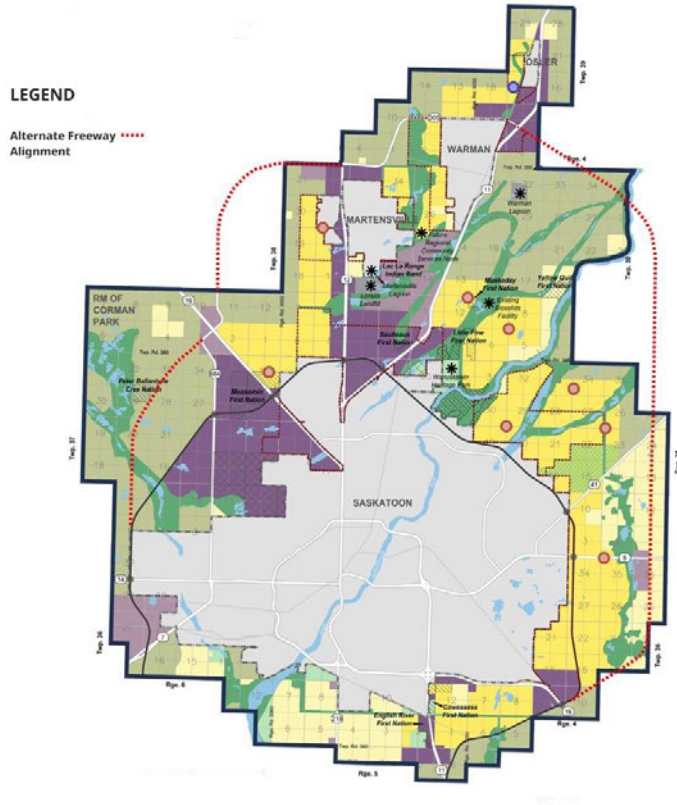
The Ministry of Highways has stated that a more northern route for the Freeway Project does not merit consideration because it would be longer and, hence, more costly and because it is too far from centers of population to attract use. As a result of these beliefs, a northern route for the Freeway Project has not been studied, and Highway’s assertions have not been tested.

The route through the Swales, though shorter, would entail an increased cost per kilometer. The Phase 2 Functional Study identifies a need for an undetermined number of engineered wildlife underpasses and two wildlife overpasses. Recent estimates from the government of British Columbia put the minimum price tag for an effective wildlife overpass at \$6.2 million each. A wildlife crossing to span 10 lanes of traffic in Los

Angeles (the same width as the proposed Freeway through the Small Swale) is expected to cost US\$87 million.

Failing to provide a comparative assessment of costs – together with forecasts of future traffic demand due to shifting patterns of growth – constitutes a lack of due diligence.

### Saskatoon Regional Perimeter Highway Alternate Vision to Support Regional Growth



Base map source: Saskatoon North Partnership for Growth, 2023 June 3, District Land Use Map.

March 2024



**March 3, 2024,**

**Swale Watchers:**

**Position Paper on the Saskatoon Freeway Phase 2 Functional Planning Study**

In the next few weeks, Saskatoon City Council will make a decision that will reverberate through seven generations and beyond, with potentially irreversible consequences.

**The Issue**

The provincial Ministry of Highways and Infrastructure has asked Saskatoon City Council to endorse the Functional Planning Study for Phase 2 of the proposed Saskatoon Freeway. This request is scheduled to go to the Standing Policy Committee on Transportation on March 5 before being forwarded to the full Council for a Yes or No vote on March 27.

The report on Phase 2 is contained in two documents that have just, belatedly, been released: Phase 2 Biological Assessment and Phase 2 Functional Design Report. Although the Ministry of Highways carried out consultations with designated stakeholders as the plan was being developed, these reports provide the first comprehensive overview of the completed design.

The plan for Phase 2 covers a 27-kilometer-long segment of divided highway that arcs around the eastern outskirts of the city and then swings west, through future neighbourhoods, toward a new bridge across the South Saskatchewan River. As the route cuts through the city, it will expand from its standard width of 4 lanes to **8 lanes (4 each way), where it crosses the Northeast Swale, and then to 10 lanes (5 each way) where it crosses the Small Swale**. The impact will extend beyond the travel lanes, as evident in the simulation of the proposed Freeway here:

<https://vimeo.com/648993683>. The plan also calls for a major interchange at the intersection with Central Avenue, between the two Swales.



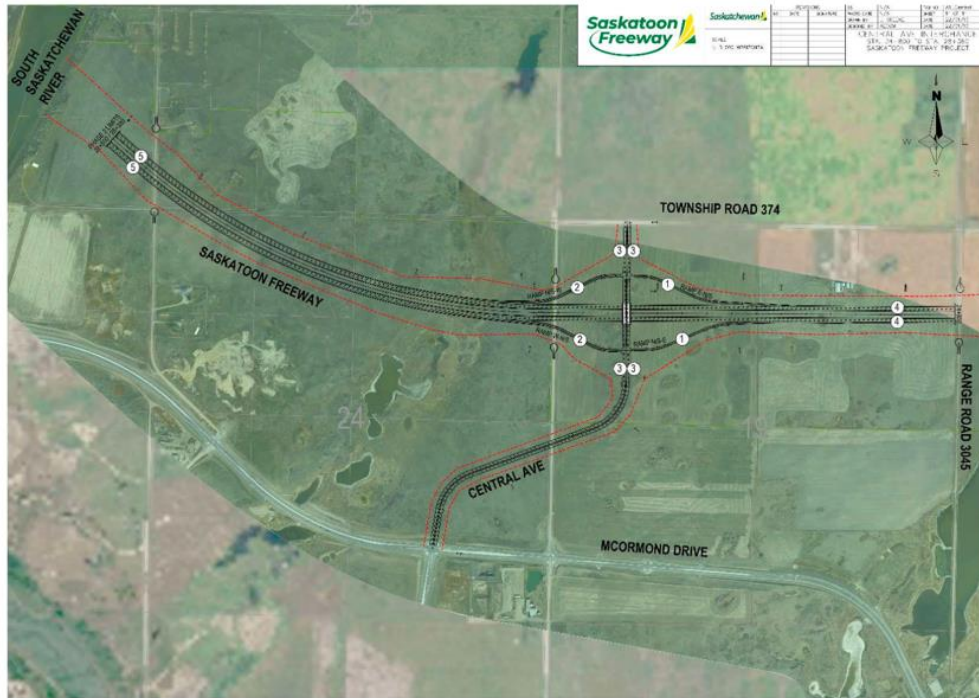


Figure 9.1: Central Avenue recommended interchange configuration

This map shows 8 lanes of traffic emerging from the Northeast Swale and 10 lanes across the Small Swale, with the Central Avenue interchange in-between. Phase 2 Report p. 175

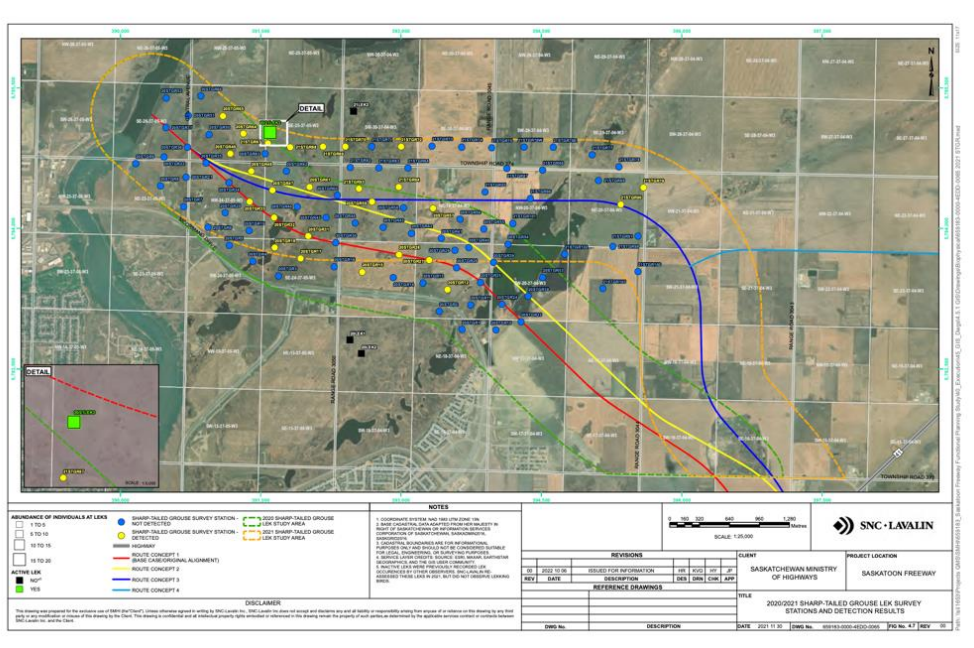
### The Northeast and Small Swales

The Northeast and Small Swales are unique and irreplaceable refuges for Nature and an asset for the people of Saskatoon. By the Ministry of Highway's own assessment, these ribbons of native grassland and natural wetlands support an astonishing abundance of life, including at least 36 species so severely threatened by habitat loss and other stressors elsewhere that they are listed as Species of Conservation Concern.<sup>1</sup> In other words, these are rare, threatened or endangered species at risk of extinction unless we protect their remaining habitat. Plants, insects, amphibians, birds and mammals—they all find a refuge in the Swales.

The Swales continue to be places of discovery and delight. Every time a new environmental survey is conducted, more species and species occurrences are found. The Biological Assessment just released by the Ministry of Highways documents the discovery of a sharp-tailed grouse lek, or dancing ground, an ecologically and culturally significant feature no one had known about before. The report also maps rare habitats—marl bogs—complete with their unique chemistry, hydrology and plants.<sup>2</sup> The Swales continue to surprise us with their diversity of habitats and their dazzling array of life forms.

<sup>1</sup> Phase 2 Biological Assessment, p. ii

<sup>2</sup> Phase 2 Biological Assessment, p. 70



Below: Sharp-tailed grouse presence in yellow. New lek in green. Source: Phase 2 Biological Assessment, p. 27

In the Saskatoon region, less than five percent of the original, natural vegetation remains intact. Are we really prepared to lose even more habitat and to fragment these life-sustaining lands by driving 8 or 10 lanes of traffic through them? How will we recognize ourselves as prairie people if there is no prairie left?

It is difficult to overstate the value of the Swales to the City of Saskatoon. As green infrastructure, they purify air and water, sequester carbon, prevent floods and provide other services with an estimated value of more than \$2.36 million per year.<sup>3</sup> In addition, they support research, education, mental and physical health and cultural grounding and provide the city with a sense of place. If protected, the Swales could become the heart of the proposed Meewasin National Urban Park, bringing employment, opportunity and pride to Saskatoon residents.

In its past decisions, Saskatoon City Council has taken steps to protect the Swales from catastrophic harm. Special care was taken with the design of McOrmond Drive where it crosses the Northeast Swale (narrowing the roadway, reducing speeds, rounding the curbs), and Council recently established pre-development boundaries for both the Northeast and Small Swales as part of the planning for the proposed University Heights 3 neighbourhood.

In the reports on Phase 2 of the Freeway, the Ministry of Highways also, repeatedly, affirms the importance of protecting the Swales. For instance, a section headed *Phase 2 Specific Environmental Recommendations* notes that “The Northeast Swale and small swale [sic] are both ecologically sensitive features and important areas within the COS [City of Saskatoon].”<sup>4</sup> The report goes on to list the

<sup>3</sup> <https://swalewatchers.org/about/>

<sup>4</sup> Phase 2 Report p. 207

mitigations that “should be employed” to minimize impacts on these lands. The first entry on the list states, “The footprint of roadway [should be] reduced as much as possible through sensitive areas.” If a footprint of 8 to 10 lanes is the best that the proponents can do, one has to question the sincerity of their efforts to conserve these assets.

### **Damage Report**

In truth, whether 2 lanes or 10, a Freeway has no business slicing through a valued natural area. The Ministry of Highway’s reports on Phase 2 summarize some of the damage this project will cause:

All Concepts will impact the Northeast and Small Swale wetland complexes, uncultivated grasslands that support native prairie vegetation, cultivated land, as well as native prairie and riparian forest on the banks of the South Saskatchewan River....In addition to the loss of wildlife habitat within the project footprint, both [sic] concept options will impact wildlife through direct mortality (increased vehicle collisions and/or as a result of construction), reduced habitat connectivity, habitat fragmentation, and behavioral changes or habitat avoidance brought on by increased light and noise exposure....Species that are area sensitive, road avoidant, or at a high risk of mortality from roadkill are likely to be impacted by the proposed project. This includes SAR [federally listed Species at Risk] such as American badger, Baird’s sparrow (*Centronyx bairdii*), bobolink (*Dolichonyx oryzivorus*), and short-eared owl.

All Concepts will impact plant species diversity and community composition through ground disturbance, habitat fragmentation, edge effects, and landscape alteration. Roadside rights-of-way facilitate the spread of non-native plant species by acting as transmission corridors....Both [sic] proposed concepts may result in the direct loss of plant SOCC [Species of Conservation Concern] and their habitat....<sup>5</sup>

Those paragraphs deserve to be read slowly and repeatedly.

It is worth noting that highways and other busy urban roads also pose a risk to people living within 500 meters of them.<sup>6</sup> The Functional Plan for Phase 2 does not consider these harms, thereby ignoring the health of people who will live near to the Freeway in the future.

### **Risk Avoidance vs Risk Mitigation**

It is a core principle of Conservation Biology that preventing risk is always the preferred option, with mitigation—reducing risk to an acceptable level--as a poor, second choice.<sup>7</sup> In this case, the best option is obvious. Do not build the Freeway through the Swales.

The mitigative measures proposed by Highways include shifting part of the route to avoid open-water crossings of wetlands in the Northeast and Small Swale. This change was made based on a Multiple

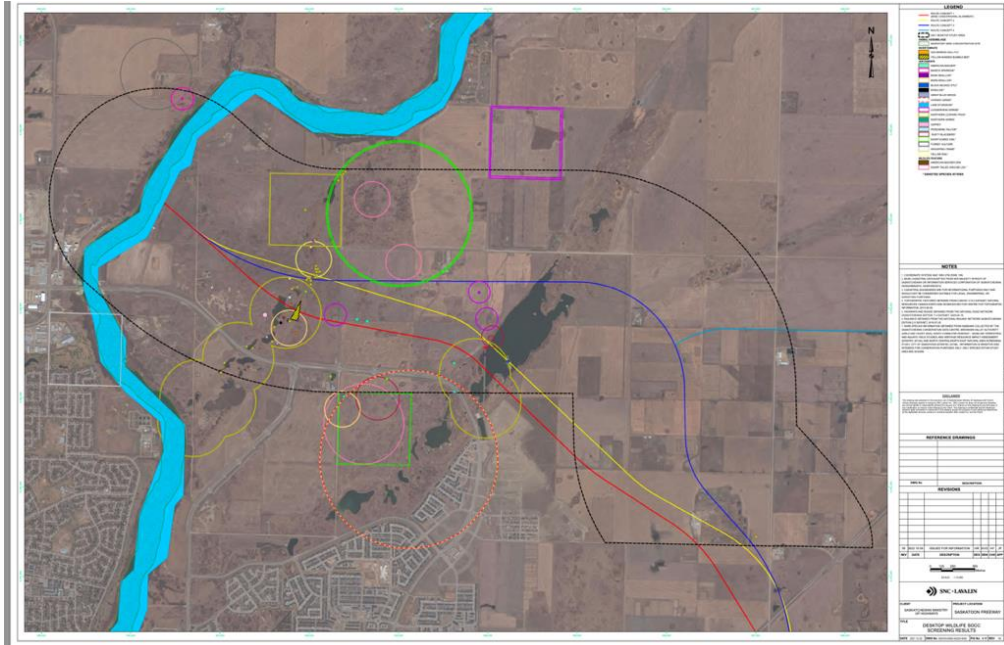
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<sup>5</sup> Phase 2 Biological Assessment p. 75

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.cmaj.ca/content/185/18/1557>

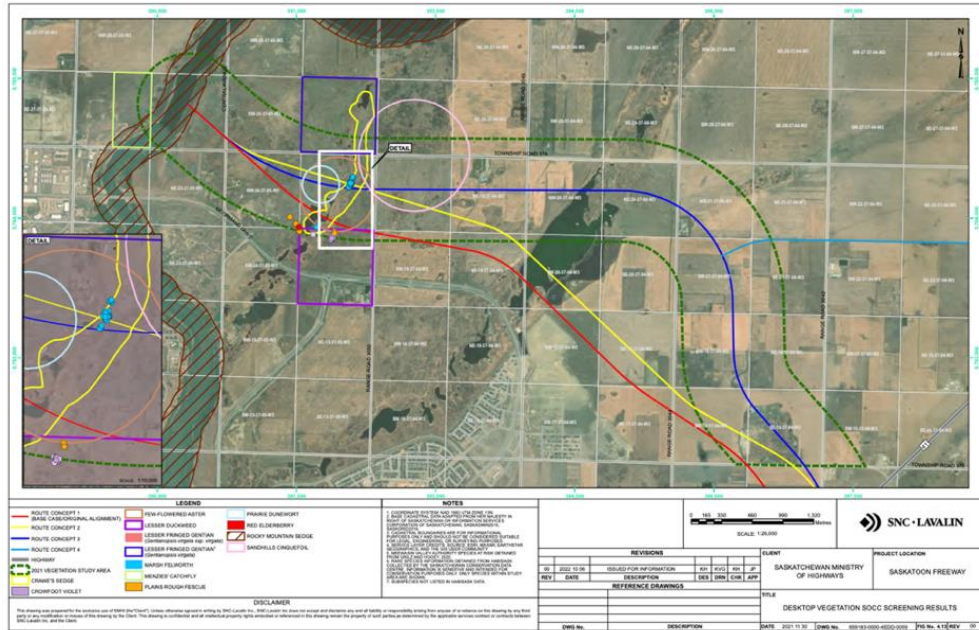
<sup>7</sup> The Mitigation Hierarchy. <https://www.forest-trends.org/bbop/bbop-key-concepts/mitigation-hierarchy/>

Account Evaluation using a discussion-based method described as “Estimate-Talk-Estimate.”<sup>8</sup> The report states that “A detailed quantitative MAE analysis was not used for the SFFPS [Saskatoon Freeway Functional Planning Study] because of uncertainties associated with the travel demand model assumptions: time horizon and population growth, employment growth, etc.” No evidence is presented to support the assertion that the revised route will actually reduce the environmental impact on the Northeast Swale or the Species of Concern that live there. Worryingly, however, the data does suggest that the change in route may put sensitive species and features in the Small Swale at increased risk.



Species of Conservation Concern, desktop study, with the proposed route in purple. Source: MHI

<sup>8</sup> Phase 2 Report, p. 167



Plant Species of Conservation Concern, desktop study, with the proposed route in purple. Source: MHI

The other major mitigative measure proposed by Highways is the construction of engineered wildlife crossings, including two wildlife overpasses for large mammals.<sup>9</sup> Recent estimates from the government of British Columbia put the minimum price tag for an effective wildlife overpass at \$6.2 million.<sup>10</sup> Meanwhile, a wildlife crossing to span 10 lanes of traffic in Los Angeles is budgeted to come in at US\$87 million.<sup>11</sup> Is the Ministry of Highway's plan to build two of these structures based on real-world considerations?

The Phase 2 plan also calls for several culvert-style wildlife underpasses for small mammals, reptiles and amphibians. Because of the width of the Freeway through the Swales, the tunnels would be divided into two segments, with one culvert to take the animals halfway across the road and deliver them onto the median and another to direct them back underground to complete the crossing.<sup>12</sup> The effectiveness of this design is highly questionable.

In summary, the mitigation proposed by the Ministry of Highways is either financially out-of-reach or biologically unrealistic. Risk mitigation is intended to reduce the severity of damage to an acceptable level. The measures proposed by Highways fall far short of meeting this goal.

<sup>9</sup> Phase 2 Report, p. 212

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/calgary/wildlife-overpasses-banff-wildlife-mitigation-cost-study-british-columbia-1.6695994>.

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.cnn.com/2022/04/23/us/california-wildlife-crossing-scn-trnd/index.html>

<sup>12</sup> Phase 2 Report, pp. 212-213

**Sunk Cost Fallacy**

The Sunk Cost Fallacy is an emotion-driven error in thinking that results in bad decisions.<sup>13</sup> It occurs when a person or an organization remains loyal to a commitment in which it has invested in the past—even when it is clear that the future outcomes will be negative. The greater the past investment, the more difficult it is to make the break. It is clear that significant time, money and talent have been invested in planning for Phase 2 of the Freeway. But past expenditures are not a reason or an excuse for burdening the future with harmful consequences.

**Environmental Impact Assessment**

Under the Province of Saskatchewan’s Environmental Assessment Act, the Minister of Environment has the discretion to designate a project as a “development,” making it subject to an Environmental Impact Assessment. Among other criteria, the Act defines a “development” as “any project, operation or activity...which is likely to:

- influence any unique, rare, or endangered feature of the environment;
- substantially utilize any provincial resource, and in doing so, pre-empt the use, or potential use of that resource for any other purpose;
- cause widespread public concern because of potential environmental changes;<sup>14</sup>
- have a significant impact on the environment or necessitate a further development which is likely to have a significant impact on the environment.”<sup>15</sup>

To date, the province has refused to guarantee that an Environmental Impact Assessment of the Saskatoon Freeway will be conducted. As one of the largest infrastructure projects ever undertaken in Saskatchewan, this project clearly merits and requires this legally mandated consideration.

**Advice to City Council**

Based on our careful study of the documents, Swale Watchers have two urgent recommendations for Saskatoon City Council:

1. Given that the Biological Assessment and the Functional Planning Study for Phase 2 of the Saskatoon Freeway demonstrate that irreversible harm would befall the Northeast and Small Swales—two of Saskatoon’s most valuable and valued natural areas—if the project proceeds as planned, **we urge you NOT to endorse the Functional Planning Study for Phase 2 of the Saskatoon Freeway.**
2. Recognizing that the ultimate authority over where, when or if this project is completed lies with the province, rather than with the City of Saskatoon, **we urge you to call on the Government of Saskatchewan to choose a route for the Saskatoon Freeway that does not intrude on the Swales and to guarantee that the project will be subject to a thorough, impartial Environmental Impact Assessment.**

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<sup>13</sup> <https://thedecisionlab.com/biases/the-sunk-cost-fallacy>

<sup>14</sup> For evidence of the “widespread public concern,” please see the comments made during the Environment and Heritage panels of the official project engagement in Phase 2 Biological Assessment pp.184/1218 to 205/1218 and 266/1218 to 288/121

<sup>15</sup> Phase 2 Biological Assessment, p. 5

Respectfully submitted,  
Meghan Mickelson & Candace Savage  
Co-Chairs, Swale Watchers  
swalewatchers.org

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*This position paper is supported by:*

