



Government  
— of —  
Saskatchewan

Minister of Highways

Legislative Building  
Regina, Canada S4S 0B3

MAY 08 2024

His Worship Charlie Clark  
Mayor of Saskatoon  
222 - 3rd Avenue North  
SASKATOON SK S7K 0J5

Dear Mayor Clark

Thank you for the letter and the opportunity to provide a response to “the guiding principals for how the environmental mitigation opportunities in the Phase 2 Functional Design Final Draft Report and the Biological Assessment, as well as the future environmental impact assessment will be implemented.” I understand Saskatoon City Council would like to have a clearer picture of all the project’s implications prior to deciding on endorsement.

When planning a new highway, such as the Saskatoon Freeway, there are four steps the Ministry of Highways (ministry) undertakes. The first is to conduct a general location study, which is followed by a functional design study, detailed design and finally, a fourth step which is construction. All these steps fulfill different objectives and have varying levels of details. As a project progresses, more details are confirmed and used to provide guidance in the next step.

The ministry has previously completed a general location study where a 500 metre corridor was established for the Saskatoon Freeway. Currently officials are working towards completing the next level of design work, which is the functional planning study for the freeway.

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All the steps generally occur in succession, however, the timing between the steps can vary depending on the project. The timing is impacted by various conditions. Some of these conditions include, but are not necessarily limited to, forecasted population growth, actual population, traffic, safety, previous study dates, economic growth, environmental regulatory requirements and study results viability, and time of construction to name a few. For example, a general location study was conducted because Saskatoon and area was forecasting significant growth and that a freeway may one day be required. One of the out-comes of the previous study was to plan for the future by protecting land so it may be available for future construction. The current functional study will more accurately identify land required for construction. It will allow some temporary land protections to be lifted and reduce those limits by approximately 75 per cent when the study is complete. Detailed design, which is the next step after the functional study, will only commence once an approximate date of construction is determined.

Environmental components of the work, such as permit applications and establishment of onsite monitoring responsibilities, require specific information from detailed design for approval. Environmental permits have expiry dates and may become invalid or out-of-date if construction is too far out. Environmental regulations and/or site-specific considerations may also change, and that can make other specifics out-of-date or invalid. Various levels of environmental studies and activities take place during all four steps of the process, however specific studies (e.g., Environmental Impact Assessment) need to take place no earlier than three to five years before construction.

In the following pages you will find many key environmental and heritage considerations in each step for the Saskatoon Freeway Phase 2. The key guiding principle steps are laid out in the Saskatchewan Supplement to the Transportation Association of Canada (TAC) Geometric Design Group (found here: <https://publications.saskatchewan.ca/#/categories/5073>), as well as requirements from regulatory agencies. All considerations are dependent on timing of the step and current regulations at that time.

Level	Key Considerations	Saskatoon Freeway Phase 2 Outcome
General Location Study	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Physical Impacts</li> <li>• Economic Impacts</li> <li>• Environmental Impacts (generally)</li> <li>• Geotechnical impacts (generally)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Established 500m corridor</li> </ul>
Functional Design Study	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Preliminary Environmental Review</li> <li>• Preliminary Heritage Resource Review</li> <li>• Field Surveys</li> <li>• Environmental Specialist's input</li> <li>• Stakeholder Input</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The alignment was moved outside the general location corridor in the vicinity of the Northeast Swale and the Small Swale to avoid valuable riparian areas and away from areas that generally hold water.</li> <li>• The alignment was moved outside the corridor between Highway 11 south and Highway 16 south in order to avoid a significant wetland area.</li> <li>• The Central Avenue interchange was moved east of the proposed general location study location to avoid the Small Swale. This included realignment of Central Avenue as initially envisaged by the City of Saskatoon.</li> <li>• The alignment was positioned outside of the environmental buffer zones for known grouse lek locations, which are critical sites for grouse mating rituals.</li> <li>• The geometric design of the freeway across the swales was established to facilitate multi-use pathways under the freeway and wildlife passages under the freeway.</li> <li>• The functional study identified a desire to utilize dark sky lighting at the interchanges.</li> <li>• The functional study proposed wildlife fencing locations to guide wildlife to the underpasses under the freeway and to prevent animals from gaining access to the freeway driving.</li> </ul>

	<b>Anticipated Key Considerations</b>	<b>Anticipated Saskatoon Freeway Outcomes</b>
Detailed Design	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Environmental Review</li> <li>• Follow the Environmental Impact Assessment Process</li> <li>• Heritage Resource Review               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Heritage Resource Impact Assessment</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Field Surveys</li> <li>• Stakeholder Input</li> <li>• Detailed design elements such as, but not necessarily limited to:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Geometric design</li> <li>○ Sizing and location of drainage structures</li> <li>○ Structural design of bridges</li> <li>○ Ancillary design (pavement markings, signs, lighting and guardrails)</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Environmental mitigation measures included in the functional design recommendations such as, but not necessarily limited to:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Bridging environmental areas adjacent to the South Saskatchewan River, providing for animal crossing underpasses, wildlife exclusion fencing and wetland compensation</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Detailed design of environmental mitigation measures included in the functional design recommendations such as, but not necessarily limited to, sizing and location of multi-use underpasses and wildlife underpasses and fencing.</li> <li>• Detailed design or monitoring requirements resulting from heritage studies, field investigations, engagement with stakeholders and/or requirements from regulatory agencies.</li> <li>• Permits required for the construction of the Saskatoon Freeway such as, but not limited to:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Work Authorization Permit</li> <li>○ Aquatic Habitat Protection Permit</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Ongoing engagement with key stakeholders.</li> </ul>
Construction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Approved applicable permits</li> <li>• Completed Environmental Impact Assessment Process</li> <li>• Other requirements such as, but not limited to, monitoring laid out during detailed design and coordinating with stakeholders</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Follow requirements set out in permits from meeting all required regulatory agency requirements including, but is not limited to:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ On-site monitoring</li> <li>○ Restrictions on timing of construction due to nesting birds</li> <li>○ Topsoil management or transplantation to protect endangered plants</li> <li>○ Short-term and long-term monitoring of rare species</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

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As noted as part of the current planning project, the ministry has surveyed the environmentally sensitive areas and has started developing potential avoidance and mitigation solutions. The construction phase of the project is still at least 15 years in the future. The Ministry of Highways is subject to and would abide to all federal and provincial environmental acts and regulations. There is an extensive environmental assessment checklist that the ministry would need to undertake prior to construction. This timeline prior to construction is standard practice to prevent the environmental information collected from becoming outdated while having the project scope suitably planned.

The ministry is readily available to answer additional questions you may have regarding this project and this phase. If council has further questions, I encourage you to contact Brent Miller, Director, Design Delivery at [brent.miller@gov.sk.ca](mailto:brent.miller@gov.sk.ca).

Sincerely,



Lori Carr  
Minister of Highways

cc: Kyle Toffan, Deputy Minister, Highways  
Brent Miller, Director, Design, Highways