College Drive Bus Rapid Transit (Link) Concept Changes

ISSUE

The initial concept plan for the Bus Rapid Transit (Link) College Drive corridor from Clarence Avenue to Preston Avenue was approved by City Council in 2019. Upon undertaking further detailed engineering work and engagement with stakeholders, this report presents several revisions to the concept plan for City Council approval consideration.

The brand name for the City of Saskatoon's Bus Rapid Transit system is 'Link' and thus throughout the remaining of the report Link is referenced.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Standing Policy Committee on Transportation recommend to City Council that the concept plan for the Link transportation corridor along College Drive between Clarence Avenue and Preston Avenue as presented in Appendix 1 and detailed in this report be approved.

BACKGROUND

During its April 29, 2019 meeting, City Council approved the "Bus Rapid Transit Route Network and Configuration." This identified the Link routes, Link station locations and recommended that the dedicated transit centre runningway bus lanes consist of contraflow lanes. A contraflow lane is a lane in which traffic flows in the opposite direction of the adjacent vehicle lanes.

Administration has been working with the University of Saskatchewan (USask) for required property acquisition and to address the restricted right-of-way width associated with the location of Rugby Chapel.

DISCUSSION/ANALYSIS

The concept of a centre running dedicated transit runningway on College Drive between Clarence Avenue and Preston Avenue was approved by City Council at its April 29, 2019 City Council meeting.

College Drive Dedicated Runningway Design Highlights

The revised College Drive concept plan is included in Appendix 1. Design highlights are as follows:

- Corridor Elements
    - One eastbound and one westbound transit only with adjacent traffic flow centre-running bus lane;
    - An eastbound and westbound Link platform at the intersections of:
        - College Drive and Munroe Avenue;
        - College Drive and Cumberland Avenue; and
        - College Drive and Campus Drive/Field House Road

    - Remove existing curbside local transit stops. Some local route buses may travel on short sections of the traffic lanes on College Drive for logistical reasons, but there will be no curbside transit stops on College Drive from Clarence Avenue to Preston Avenue;
    - Two eastbound and two westbound traffic lanes;
    - A multi-use pathway on the north side of College Drive from Clarence Avenue to Preston Avenue;
    - A multi-use pathway on the south side of College Drive from Cumberland Avenue to Preston Avenue;
    - All remaining channelization designed as Smart channels[1]; and
    - Improved pedestrian crosswalks crossing College Drive with wider crosswalks and enhanced pavement markings.
- College Drive and Clarence Avenue
    - Install a north-south pedestrian crosswalk on the east leg when the site in the southeast intersection quadrant is developed; and
    - Remove one of the two current left turn bays, westbound to southbound.
- College Drive and Hospital Drive/University Drive
    - Install a north-south crosswalk on the east leg;
    - Remove the channelization island in the north-east corner; and
    - Remove left turn, northbound to westbound.
- College Drive and Wiggins Road/Wiggins Avenue
    - Remove the channelization island on the north-west corner; and
    - Remove the left turn, westbound to southbound.
- College Drive and Bottomley Avenue
    - Remove the pedestrian crosswalk and signalization across College Drive.
- College Drive and Cumberland Avenue
    - Remove the channelization island in the south-east corner;
    - Create on-street parking on the east side of Cumberland Avenue; and
    - Continuous median on the south leg at two locations.
- College Drive from Cumberland Avenue to Preston Avenue
    - Reduce the posted speed from 60 km/h to 50 km/h.
- College Drive and Stadium Crescent
    - Remove the channelization island.
- College Drive between Cumberland Avenue and Campus Drive
    - Replace the pedestrian overpass structure with an accessible at-grade signalized pedestrian crossing.
- College Drive and Campus Drive/Field House Road
    - Additional Link stations included here;
    - Install a north-south crosswalk on the east leg; and
    - Remove the dual left turn, southbound to eastbound.

[1] Smart channels:

- Improve visibility of pedestrians
- Reduce vehicle speeds for drivers making right turns
- Reduce the angle of shoulder check for drivers

- College Drive and Preston Avenue
    - Add one left turn bay, eastbound to northbound; and,
    - Install a northbound transit only queue jump and southbound transit only queue jump.
- Preston Avenue and Field House Road
    - Additional Link stations included here.

Some of these changes with turning movement restrictions at intersections and closure of median openings require public notice and a public hearing. This report is intended to seek approval for the general concept plan of the design, but not the specific intersection changes that require public notice.

Preferred Design Alternatives

During the detailed design process the need to make two major changes emerged:

1. The preferred alternative is dedicated transit-only lanes that operate with the flow of adjacent traffic rather than use of contraflow lanes (travel in the opposite direction of adjacent traffic).
2. The preferred pedestrian connection between the Stadium Parkade and the USask campus is an accessible at-grade signalized crossing.

RATIONALE

The following two tables contrast the main differences between proceeding with:

- Contraflow transit-only lanes versus with adjacent vehicle traffic flow; and
- Maintaining the pedestrian overpass versus replacing this with an at-grade pedestrian crossing.

Contraflow vs With Adjacent Vehicle Traffic Flow

Contraflow	With Adjacent Vehicle Traffic Flow
Does not match driver or pedestrian expectations.	Matches driver and pedestrian expectations.
Recommended when running along a one-way street with limited median breaks.	Recommended for centre runningways with median breaks.
Allows for shared centre platforms.	Requires two platforms (one per direction).
Requires approximately the same right-of-way.	

Pedestrian Overpass vs At-grade Pedestrian Crossing

Pedestrian Overpass	At-grade Signalized Pedestrian Crossing
Recommended on high-speed streets.	Recommended on streets with posted speed limits of 60 km/h or lower.
If kept, the overpass alters the roadway design and has negative operational impacts.	Requires less right-of-way.
Ramps are steep and not accessible for all users.	Accessible to all users.
College Drive pedestrian overpass crossing distance = 150 m.	College Drive pedestrian crossing distance = 40 m.
Crossing pedestrians do not interact with College Drive roadway users.	Crossing pedestrians will require College Drive roadway users to stop.
Maintains existing user experience where east of Cumberland Avenue is a more car focused environment.	Creates a consistent College Drive user experience for the entire length of the dedicated runningway.

Engagement Summary

In March 2025, the City of Saskatoon (City) engaged community members to provide information about the College Drive Link design and listen to and acknowledge concerns.

The City engaged with various community members, businesses and property owners through holding five separate open houses in three different locations during different times of day. An Engage page on the City's website was created and a survey was administered to inform residents and collect feedback. 649 visitors attended the open house events and 76 individuals participated in the survey for a total of 725 participants.

Administration engaged on the following topics:

- The dedicated transit runningway bus lanes travel in the same direction as the adjacent vehicle traffic flow transit lanes (rather than contraflow) through the centre of College Drive.
- Pedestrian connection between the Stadium Parkade and the University of Saskatchewan changes to an accessible at-grade crossing rather than a pedestrian overpass.

The full Engagement report is included in Appendix 2. The material presented at these events is included in Appendix 1 and 3. Two primary takeaways from engagement were:

- Strong support that the design is now "with-flow" instead of the original "counter-flow" design.
- The comments about the removal of the pedestrian overpass were mixed. While some respondents indicated support for the new accessible t-grade crossing, others disagreed and stated that the overpass should be kept and that they believe a crosswalk here will unnecessarily slow traffic.

Additional Link Stations and Rugby Chapel Repositioning

Through negotiations with USask on required property acquisition and addressing the location of the Rugby Chapel, USask requested additional Link stations at College Drive and Campus Drive/Field House Road and Preston Avenue and Field House Road. Administration agrees with the additional Link stations because they will service patrons of the Saskatoon Field House, Merlis Belsher Place, Holiday Inn Express and USask campus. These stations had been listed as future station locations in the 2019 Bus Rapid Transit Route Network and Configuration.

USask has a plan to rotate and reposition the Rugby Chapel House. This will place the Rugby Chapel further away from the roadway and outside of the future footprint of the multi-use pathway included in the Link College Drive design.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The costs for the construction of the College Drive dedicated transit lanes and associated infrastructure are funded from the BRT (Bus Rapid Transit) Red line Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program. Capital Project P02328 Bus Rapid Transit.

OTHER IMPLICATIONS

There are no privacy or legal implications identified. The social and environmental implications have not been quantified.

NEXT STEPS

If the recommendation is approved by City Council, the next steps would include:

1. Following Council Policy C01-021 - Public Notice to implement:
    a. Turning movement restrictions at College Drive and Hospital Drive/University Drive and College Drive and Wiggins Road/Wiggins Avenue;
    b. Closure of two median openings on the south leg of the intersection of College Drive and Cumberland Avenue; and
    c. Required right-of-way closures.
2. Report to City Council on required land acquisition.
3. Tendering the Link College Drive project with a plan to begin construction in 2026.
4. Updating Bylaw No. 7200 - Traffic Bylaw to reflect the posted speed limit change on College Drive from Cumberland Avenue to Preston Avenue when construction is complete.

The College Drive Link construction work is being coordinated with water main lining on 25th Street and arch work on the University Bridge.

APPENDICES

1. College Drive Concept Plan
2. Link – College Drive: Engagement Report
3. College Drive Open House: Boards

Report Approval

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