

Saskatoon Freeway Functional Planning Study - Phase 2

Public Focus Group 1 Summary

6:00 – 8:00 pm July 20th, 2020

Opening Remarks:

1. **Purpose:** The purpose of this focus group is to ensure that public perspective is being considered early on in Phase 2.

2. **Introduction of project team:**

Team Member	Company	Project Role
Geoff Meinert	Ministry of Highways and Infrastructure	Senior Project Manager
Jamie Page	SNC Lavalin	Environment Lead
David Stearns	SNC Lavalin	Project Director
Allan Duff	AECom	Deputy Project Manager
Tim Sorochinsky	AECom	Highway Geometrics Lead
Craig Rudulier	SNC	Project Administrator
Kathryn Pollack	Praxis Consulting	Engagement Lead
Shawn Silzer	Praxis Consulting	Engagement Advisor
Kauron Cooper	Praxis Consulting	Project Manager

3. **Accommodation Update:** The focus groups were capped at 15 individuals per session. We are pleased to note that everyone who inquired asking to attend the focus groups was provided a spot within one of the three sessions offered.

4. **Zoom ground rules:**

- Participants were reminded to be respectful and actively listen to one another and encouraged to participate in the open dialogue.
- A brief overview of the agenda was given, and participants were informed if they had questions regarding either of the presentations, they were to either press the 'raise hand' function or type their question into the chat. After the presentation was concluded the questions would be addressed according to a first come, first serve basis.

5. **Boundaries of discussion:**

- Participants were reminded about the topics that were open for discussion and the ones that were not. The topics that were open for discussion included:
 - o What is the best location for the Saskatoon Freeway within the 500 m corridor?
 - o What are the best ways to implement the road and bridges in a way that minimizes environmental impacts?

- Are there any potential mitigations that need to be considered?

Presentation #1 – Saskatoon Freeway Overview – Geoff Meinert

This presentation focused on the layout of the proposed Saskatoon Freeway. Key aspects to note include:

- The highway is expected to be 55 km long
- There will be an anticipated 16 interchanges, 5 railway crossings, +4 flyovers, and 1 bridge crossing.
- The corridor currently being held is 500 m, but the project footprint itself is anticipated to be approximately 100 m; that is the focus of this functional planning study.
- A needs-based case for the Saskatoon Freeway previously completed focused on projected population growth, congestion, and reduced road user costs.

As well, the presentation included some discussion regarding the Swales since Phase 2 is predominately focused on the area of the freeway that crosses the Swales. The presentation included why the planned route was crossing the Swales, the potential routes within the corridor being considered, and the potential mitigation measures being considered to reduce environmental disruption resulting from the crossing the Swales.

Questions:

Focus Group Session 1 (July 20, 2020)

Q: The examples referenced of Banff's [wildlife crossings], have you picked these examples for any particular reason? They are expensive. Are you looking at something like this crossing the NE Swale and Small Swale? Are these options?

A: Yes, we are looking at the same types of options as have been successfully used in Banff. No option is off the table. The freeway will be a barrier to animal movement. We want to make it porous, but we do not want anything crossing on the freeway. So, things have to go under or over. The natural depression of the Swale makes it natural to go over. This also accommodates the trail network of Meewasin Valley Authority (MVA) – including those with mobility issues – so it cannot be a set of stairs. We do not know if the wildlife crossings will be under or over; it lends itself to go under. A number of options will be presented at the open houses anticipated for late 2020.

Q: What is the cost comparison of the wildlife crossings and the rail crossings?

A: Rail line crossings might be a bit more expensive. You have to go up 7 meters higher with rail crossings, but it really depends on how wide and tall.

Presentation #2 – Environmental Research Overview – Jamie Page

This presentation highlighted the completed field and desktop research being done as part of the environment and heritage review. This included the Phase 1 environmental report, MVA research focusing specifically on the Swales, as well as additional ongoing studies. As well, the presentation provided a list of the wildlife and plants that have been already been identified within the roadway's

corridor. Potential future surveys are recommended to be conducted closer to construction, potentially as part of the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA). The presentation also detailed general mitigation measures that have been developed to date for wildlife, wetlands, native grasslands, contaminated sites, South Saskatchewan River crossing and the Wanuskewin Heritage Park. The main mitigation measures identified as being needed included the integration of different wildlife crossings and wetland crossings. Lastly, the presentation touched on the potential future requirement of a provincial or federal EIA.

Questions:

Focus Group Session 1 (July 20, 2020)

Q: Where Highway 11 meets the freeway, I have seen in the P4G studies that they have not included the water drainage in this area. A lot of the areas near the Corman Park industrial area flooded 10 years ago. Nothing has been done since. I am concerned that you are going to close our road. On the summer road we need some sort of drainage ditch. We are pumping water and moving it to the Saskatoon Freeway ditch. I just want to ensure you are aware of that volume of water. It comes from Warman, Martensville, etc. It will be a huge cost for a drainage ditch to replace this. I just want to ensure that this cost is accounted for. Is there anything to do with the water flowing into the Wanuskewin water?

A: Our primary purpose of this design was to make sure that we understand all the issues and can address them. We may not currently have the level of detail you are looking for in a functional design. Our scope does not include addressing existing water-related issues that are not impacted by the freeway's construction. Any areas that are affected by the freeway will be maintained; this means that any filling of existing drainage will be accommodated for by creating additional storage to maintain current storage levels. We are looking at ways of maintaining the current systems expected to be affected by expanding into the flat area of the Ritchie Brothers. However, if the drainage is poor already, this project will not be addressing that. We are only maintaining current levels on drainage areas that are affected by the project.

Q: Is there a study being done south of the Corman Park area? Is the idea to maintain a park area for the ducks, birds and wildlife?

A: I cannot comment on what the City of Saskatoon is doing. We are making sure that the water coming through is accommodated with maintained storage.

Q: Regarding access to our homes, will we still be able to get in and out while construction is going on? We will not have to go to route 41, right?

A: Yes, we try to accommodate, and create different access points, but that is more of a construction detail. Active discussions with the landowners and construction team will be maintained to ensure accommodation throughout the construction process.

Q: The city didn't do much to mitigate the Swale impact, but it appears the ministry is going to lengths with overpasses and fencing. What is the risk of that falling apart? Will the province backpedal?

A: My hope is that when the freeway gets to the detailed designs they will follow through with our recommendations. The cost premium from Banff was 30-40% but it brought a huge benefit because

there are less wildlife strikes. It will also help to keep people off the highway. The incremental costs associated with environmental aspects of crossing the Swale will not make or break the project. It is more expensive to add mitigations later, so we are trying to be proactive and consider in our current planning.

Q: Who will make the decisions on whether or not your design recommendations go through?

A: A large number of stakeholders, including the Ministry of Highways and Infrastructure, will look at them. Once the recommendations are vetted by the Technical Working Group (TWG) and the project steering committee, it has to go to City of Saskatoon Council and Rural Municipal Councils to get approval. The goal is to identify what we need so that there are fewer surprises at construction.

Q: The freeway would be approx. 100 meters wide, is that including the median?

A: Yes, that would be including the median space in the middle of the roadway. This would accommodate for potential future expansion in the median, so we do not have to expand the freeway out wider. We could put in 2 more lanes each direction for a total of an additional 4 lanes if we got rid of the median.

Q: What if the recommendations you are making here are rolled back? What are the consequences? Or is this negated? What would be the regulatory consequences if these recommendations were not followed?

A: The EIA would come with certain required mitigations. These would be complied with when the project gets built. It is very rare that we would not meet their requirements, but we might lose 25-50% of the funding from the federal government. We do not want to risk losing that type of money. Plus, there are criminal charges and other serious consequences of not complying with EIA requirements. We would never intentionally ignore this.

Q: Does the Turkey Vulture require protection in the small Swale?

A: That depends on the potential impact. Nests of any birds are protected under The *Migratory Birds Act* and under The *Saskatchewan Wildlife Act*.

Q: How close are the interchanges to the Swale?

A: A service level interchange is situated in between the NE and Small Swales. Ideally, we are trying to get it in between the Small Swale and the NE Swale with no impact.

Q: Would there be a cost savings to tie the animal crossing and the interchange into one structure? Assuming it is an elevated interchange, could it go high enough and far enough over to accommodate the small Swale?

A: Potentially, we will explore this option.

Q: Would it not also be positive to have other service and connecting roads adjacent to freeway to lessen the impact?

A: We do work with the City of Saskatoon to determine the plan for roads inside and outside the freeway. What is going to go on either side? Once we know, we can integrate into our plans.

Q: Why don't we start way down on highway 11 and design the freeway to go west? This will have way less impact and less environmental concerns. Just thinking about the amount of engineering to ignore the Swale.

A: Yes, there was a study done in 2017. The NE area for the route is more desirable, as most of the City's population lives in the east and thus commutes to/from work in the north. Therefore, this route will have significantly more use. Having a bridge to the south and west would not give those people an option or satisfy their desire.

Q: What about stacking the freeways?

A: We will explore this option.

Q: Just curious that none of the research you have done has mentioned large breed animals.

A: That was the focus of the winter snow tracking and wildlife camera installation. To date we've found mostly deer and badgers. There are potentially moose in the Swales; we just have not caught them on camera.

Q: Regarding the moose, has anyone been looking at by the water and river bodies? To what extent?

A: Yes, they looked on both sides of the corridor and in the river valley during the snow tracking.

Q: The people in my area (Silverspring) are worried about the impact on the Swales as suburban density grows. Is there anything that can be done – restoration, extension, expand, working together - to accommodate the integrity of the Swale?

A: Through this process, we will be identifying the size and area that we are impacting. Mitigation/compensation requirements will be built into the planning process and budgeting. As it is, the Small Swale has already been heavily impacted in certain areas. This is potentially an area we can restore as part of project-related compensation.

Q: I just want to offer a caution related to plans to compensate for the loss of habitat. The greatest mistake is that the compensation cannot always take place near where the habitat is lost. Often when you lose habitat compensation/restoration may happen thousands of kilometers away.

A: Yes, we would be meeting those compensation guidelines, but I agree with you. This is the last resort and ideally, we would like to do this in the near vicinity. Most damage is south of McOrmond Dr.

Q: If any of these bridges do go ahead, they are going to be full-service bridges, and will they accommodate big trucks and their weight?

A: Yes.