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MEMO 7

DATE : March 11, 2020
FROM : Henry Devos
PROJECT : City of Saskatoon, Circle Drive West – Functional Planning Study
SUBJECT : Public Engagement Report, Open House 2

Introduction to Study

Circle Drive is a core route (urban ring road) in the City of Saskatoon’s road network. It supports mobility not only for City residents, but for inter-regional traffic flows through the City. In response to increasing congestion levels and safety concerns, the City plans to continue upgrading Circle Drive to a freeway standard. The City recently constructed Circle Drive South to a freeway standard from Idylwyld Drive to 11th Street. The City has retained CIMA Canada Inc. (CIMA+) to complete a long-term functional plan for Circle Drive west, between Clancy Drive and Laurier Drive. The goal of this project is to remove the traffic signals at the Clancy and Laurier Drive intersections and upgrade to free-flow standards.

Key Technical Challenges

Upgrading Circle Drive to freeway standards by removing the traffic signals at Laurier and Clancy Drives is significantly constrained by three conditions:

1. Existing intersection spacing along Circle Drive ranges between 600m and 900m. However, the preferred spacing between interchanges (based on Best Practices) is 2 km, with a 1.6 km minimum.
 - To achieve a cost-effective freeway design meeting Best Practices, the signalized intersections at Laurier and Clancy Drives should simply be removed.
2. The existing interchange configuration at Circle Drive/22nd Street was designed to emphasize traffic movements between Highway 14 (22nd Street) west and Circle Drive north. The addition of Circle Drive south substantially altered the traffic patterns at this junction.
 - To achieve the most practical, technically effective solution, the existing interchange configuration should be replaced, not salvaged.
3. Intersection spacing along 22nd Street is also substandard for an arterial roadway and its intersection with Confederation Drive mixes local access with interchange operations. As a result, roadway performance is generally poor and residents west of Circle Drive have come to rely on the two existing signalized intersections for travel in/out of their neighbourhoods, particularly using Clancy Drive.
 - To achieve freeway standards and retain all current movements along Circle Drive will require complex and costly measures.

The Preferred Plan Presented at Open House 2

The preferred plan (final stage plan was shown) included the following key features:

- The existing unconventional interchange configuration was replaced with a current design (single-point urban) that accommodates all movements on/off Circle Drive.
- The Laurier and Clancy Drive traffic signals were removed and replaced with a grade separation that accommodated partial movements off/on Circle Drive, to/from the north at Laurier Drive and to/from the south at Clancy Drive.
- The southbound exit from Circle Drive to Fairmont Drive was retained.
- Eastbound 22nd Street includes a new right/off movement and retains the existing right/on movement at Fairmont Drive.
- The southbound exit to 11th Street is moved to the south side of 11th Street, converting the interchange to an all-movement Parclo AB configuration. This change was expected to occur at the final stage, e.g. when Circle Drive is widened to six lanes.
- The speed limit along Circle Drive was increased from 80 to 90 km/h, removing the low-speed curves crossing 22nd Street.

This plan balanced two objectives. First, it achieved free-flow (higher-speed) standards and improved traffic safety (eliminating the risk of unsafe movements) along Circle Drive by removing the traffic signals. Second, it retained partial access in the exceptionally short distance between Clancy and Laurier Drives.

Public Engagement Activities

Two public open house events have now been held for the Circle Drive, Clancy Drive to Laurier Drive, Functional Planning Study. Both events were held at the City of Saskatoon's Shaw Centre, 122 Bowlt Crescent, from 4:00pm to 7:00pm.

The first event took place on Wednesday, June 19, 2019. In advance of the open house, invitations were mailed to 371 property owners abutting Circle Drive through the study area. The City advertised the open house on their website Engage Page to alert the general public.

The public engagement process leading to the first open house¹ began by reaching out to the Community Associations within and surrounding the study area to alert them to the study and invite their input concerning the study corridor. Their input was intended to supplement the concerns and issues already identified by the communities through the City's Neighbourhood Traffic Review program.

The second event took place on January 22, 2020. Efforts to advertise the open house were expanded in response to public feedback at the first open house. In advance of the open house, invitations were mailed to the 371 property owners abutting Circle Drive through the study area as well as 13 attendees from Open House 1 who had requested notification. Notifications of the project were also sent to the 110 businesses and institutions in the mall area north and south of 22nd Street. Notifications were also sent to all the Community Associations within and

¹ See the Public Engagement Report for Open House 1 on the City's Engage page.

surrounding the study area. The City advertised the open house on their website Engage Page and also erected roadside billboards to alert the general public.

Comment sheets were provided for attendees to provide feedback on the open house format and information that was presented, and to collect general information on attendee's location of residence, work, and travel patterns. Optional contact information was also collected from those who wished to receive notification of future events. Attendees were asked to respond by February 7th, 2020.

Open House 2 Attendance

The purpose of the second open house was to present the options considered and the preferred upgrading plan and to gather the public's input.

Approximately 50 people attended the second open house. The open house was an informal drop-in format, no formal presentation was made. Representatives from the City of Saskatoon and the CIMA+ project team were available to discuss the information presented and to answer questions. Of the 73 written or called-in responses, ten were from comment sheets filled in at the event, six were comment sheets emailed or mailed-in following the open house, eight were phone calls and 49 were emails sent in with comments.

The higher attendance at the second open house may have resulted from greater public awareness of the event. The exceptionally high response rate following the open house largely resulted from stakeholder concerns with potential impacts to local travel patterns.

Although an extensive effort was made by the City and study team to alert the public and stakeholders to Open House 2, some attendees still suggested that more should have been done to raise public awareness.

Open House Feedback

- Was the information provided in a format that was understandable?
Yes (13); N/A (2).
No (1), Street/exit names should have been included in video to improve clarity. (*Not an option using a generic video.*);
- Did the information help you understand study scope?
Yes (14); N/A (2).
- Were the staff able to answer your questions?
Yes (13); N/A (2).
No (1), Staff could not provide answer regarding cost or duration of project. (*Project has not been programed by the City and funding allocations will follow an approved plan*);
- How did you hear about the open house?
Notice in Mail (4); Community Association Notice (4); Roadside Billboards (3); Friend/Neighbour (3); Shaw Centre (1); Not Informed (1); "Not informed, but was probably not paying attention" (1).

- Live in the study area?
 - Fairhaven (5),
 - Montgomery Place (4)
 - Parkridge (3)
 - Rosewood (2)
 - Mount Royal (1)
 - Meadowgreen (1)
 - Casa Rio (1)
- How often do you travel on Circle Drive through the study area?
 - Most weekday peak times (7)
 - Weekends (5)
 - Midday (Monday-Friday) (3)
 - Evenings (3)
 - Every day (4)
 - 3-4 times/week (2)
 - Occasionally (1)
- How do you typically travel through the study area?
 - Automobile (16), Walking (1) and Cycling (1).
- Work in the study area?
 - Confederation Suburban Centre (1)
 - Pleasant Hill (1)
 - Massey Place (1)
 - No (7)
 - Retired (2)
- How often do you travel on 22nd Street through the study area?
 - Most weekday peak hours (7)
 - Midday (Monday – Friday) (4)
 - Occasionally (4)
 - Every day (4)
 - Weekends (3)
 - Evenings (1)
 - Avoid it due to congestion (1)

What We Heard

This summary reflects written comments received at the open house; comment sheets, emails and phone calls received following the open house; and discussions with open house attendees. The focus is on the public's concerns with the preferred plan. The following paraphrases the public input received, requiring some interpretation.

- Neighbourhood Access and Egress

Respondents expressed concern over reduced access to/from neighbourhoods west of Circle Drive resulting from the proposed changes at the Laurier and Clancy Drive connections, particularly Fairhaven, Parkridge, Montgomery Place, and Pacific Heights. Residents were concerned about potentially increased travel times due to more circuitous connections to Circle Drive for some movements. Many respondents felt that the proposed plan isolates and impacts the Fairhaven and Parkridge communities the greatest.

- Business Access

Comments concerned the reduced access/egress to the west side of Circle Drive would increase congestion along 22nd Street/Confederation Drive, impacting businesses both north and south of 22nd Street.

The preferred plan would improve overall performance along 22nd Street through the study area compared with existing conditions.

- 22nd Street and Local Road Network

22nd Street is the only direct route to downtown from west Saskatoon. There was significant concern that the preferred plan would divert additional traffic along local roads to an already congested 22nd Street, resulting in circuitous travel and increased commute times, further eroding its level-of-service.

Again, the preferred plan would improve overall performance along 22nd Street through the study area compared with existing conditions.

The City has identified the intersection of 22nd Street and Diefenbaker Drive for future study to address performance concerns.

- 11th Street Interchange

There were concerns that the at-grade rail crossings immediately west of the interchange would result in frequent and lengthy travel delays. With increased volumes using 22nd Street, diversion to 11th Street was not seen as an attractive alternative route since it is frequently blocked by rail traffic, leaving drivers with no attractive option.

The City is examining other railway solutions that may ultimately alleviate rail traffic crossing 11th Street.

Again, the preferred plan would improve overall performance along 22nd Street through the study area compared with existing conditions.

- Noise Attenuation

Improved noise attenuation was a concern for residents of Meadowgreen and Montgomery Place. Specific to Montgomery Place, the new southbound off-ramp to 11th Street would bring traffic closer to the neighbourhood and would impact an earth berm that is seen as an existing sound attenuation feature.

The City is planning to undertake noise analysis in the study area in the near future.

- Safety

Many respondents supported removing the traffic signals at Clancy and Laurier Drives, since it would improve roadway safety. However, many other respondents did not see any safety issues and supported the status quo; do not upgrade Circle Drive to freeway standards.

There was concern that more circuitous travel patterns may affect safety through a number of school zones.

- Free-Flow Circle Drive

Some respondents questioned the rationale for a free-flow standard along Circle Drive. Since it was not prioritized in the past, removing the signalized accesses now is difficult. Some respondents found current operations along Circle Drive acceptable, experiencing wait times at signals that rarely exceed one cycle.

Other respondents expressed interest in seeing a free-flow standard extended north along Circle Drive passing Airport Drive, Avenue C, Millar Avenue and Warman Road.

- Cost

Several comments conveyed concern regarding the cost for potential upgrading along Circle Drive West. These may reflect concern over the tradeoffs to be made with upgrades to other existing municipal infrastructure.

- Open House Awareness

Some respondents felt more could have been done to advertise Open House 2, some suggesting that more public events be held.

In advance of the open house, invitations were mailed to all property owners abutting Circle Drive through the study area, as well as to the businesses and institutions in the mall area north and south of 22nd Street. Notifications were also sent to all of the Community Associations within and surrounding the study area. The City advertised the open house on their website Engage Page and also erected roadside billboards to alert the general public.

The City's communication branch, the Communications & Public Engagement team, approved the advertising program for Open House 2.

- Miscellaneous Concerns

A possible reduction in access for emergency responders.

EMS will be contacted when a recommended plan has been identified to ensure that the needed access routes for emergency vehicles are maintained.

An associated environmental impact due to increased travel times was identified by several respondents.

Existing conditions will lead to increased congestion and travel times.

Summary

The concerns heard both at and following Open House 2 were largely focused on reduced access to and from Circle Drive and the adjacent neighbourhoods and an expected increase in congestion along 22nd Street and connecting roads. This was seen as leading to circuitous travel and increased travel times for many area residents. Some respondents felt that 11th Street was not a feasible alternative route due to the at-grade rail crossings. Noise attenuation and cost concerns were also identified, as well as a desire for additional or more accessible advertisement for events. The City and study team are assessing the community's concerns and looking for potential solutions. A third open house will be held at a later date to present the revised preferred plan.

Recommendations

1. The City should circulate the public engagement report following Open House 2 (i.e. Memo 7) to the relevant Community Associations and post on the City of Saskatoon's Engage Page website.
2. The City should determine if the cost to provide a more complex solution, that restores more of the existing traffic movements, can be justified.