

MEMO 8

DATE : November 24, 2021
FROM : Henry Devos
PROJECT : City of Saskatoon, Circle Drive West – Functional Planning Study
SUBJECT : Public Engagement Report, Open House 3 (held October 21, 2021)

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. The city recently constructed Circle Drive South to a freeway standard from Idylwyld Drive to 11th Street. As a result, this new river crossing means that Circle Drive West now connects Highways 7 & 14 west and Highway 16 north (via Neault Road) with Highways 11 & 16 south.

In response to increasing congestion levels and safety concerns, the City plans to continue upgrading Circle Drive to a freeway standard. The city 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 1.5 to 2 km.
 - 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 Highways 7 & 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 (less than 100m between Confederation and Circle Drives) and its intersection with Confederation Drive mixes local access with interchange operations. 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 would require complex and costly measures.

The Recommended Plan Presented at Open House 3

The Recommended Plan 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 existing southbound-to-eastbound turning movement using Fairmont Drive (a circuitous Jughandle configuration) has been replaced with a conventional, and efficient, exit ramp.
- The Laurier and Clancy Drive traffic signals were removed and replaced with grade separations that accommodate turning movements off/on Circle Drive, to/from the north at Laurier Drive and to/from both directions at Clancy Drive.
- The southbound exit from Circle Drive to Fairmont Drive is retained.
- Eastbound 22nd Street includes a new right/off movement to Fairmont Drive and the existing right/on movement to Fairmont Drive has been relocated south to Fairlight Crescent.
 - This change permits traffic crossing 22nd Street from the south mall to the north mall to reach Confederation Drive, a movement not currently permitted.
- 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 permits restoring all turning movements at the Clancy Drive interchange.
- The speed limit along Circle Drive was increased from 80 to 90 km/h, removing the low-speed curves crossing 22nd Street.

The Recommended Plan balanced two objectives:

- 1) It achieved free-flow design standards and improved traffic safety. Removing the traffic signals eliminating the risk of unsafe movements along Circle Drive and brings design consistency.
- 2) It improved access to/from Clancy Drive and retained partial access to/from Laurier Drive in the exceptionally short distances between Clancy, 22nd and Laurier Drives.

Summary: Benefits of Recommended Plan

The Recommended Plan Achieves:

1. Improved 22nd Street roadway performance and safety.
2. Improved Circle Drive West performance and safety.
3. Improved capacity and cross-city travel times.
4. Consistent facility design better meeting driver expectations.
5. Improved multi-use trail pathway network and pedestrian safety.
6. New configuration better supports Circle Drive's long-term role in the provincial highway network.

Summary: Chief Concern with Recommended Plan

One Stakeholder Concern with the Recommended Plan Stands Out:

- The two traffic signals at Clancy and Laurier Drives were retained by Circle Drive's original Stage 1 design to accommodate convenient local access.
- If the traffic signals were to continue to be retained, it would lead to increased traffic congestion and safety concerns as traffic in the city and surrounding region grows. This will include traffic diverted through the city from the south end of the future Saskatoon Freeway's west leg and the regional highways.
- Circle Drive's Stage 1 design unfortunately resulted in area residents and business owners relying on now long-established, but interim, travel patterns.

The Recommended Plan is Long-Term:

- Removing the signals after these many years will change the routes in/out of some neighbourhoods and business areas and is disruptive to affected drivers.
- Upgrading Circle Drive West to free-flow standards is considered a long-term project. The city hopes that preparing the plan at this still early stage will give area residents and business owners time to adjust their plans (where possible) before the changes are implemented.
- Major transportation projects with potential to affect large areas and/or existing development are commonly planned long in advance of anticipated construction timelines. The original plans for Circle Drive West did not foresee the Saskatoon Freeway and the absence of a southwest leg. The city has revisited its plans for Circle Drive West to reflect these changing circumstances.

Public Engagement Activities

Two public open house events were previously 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.

Open House #1¹: 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 house 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. Approximately 25 people attended the first open house event.

¹ See the Public Engagement Report for Open House 1 on the City's Engage page.
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The purpose of the first open house was to alert the community to the planning study and gather preliminary input regarding the constraints and issues affecting development of the functional plan.

Open House #2²: 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 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.

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.

Open House #3

The third open house was a Virtual Event and took place on October 21, 2021. The city advertised the open house on their website Engage Page.

The purpose of the third open house was to present the Recommended Plan for upgrading Circle Drive west, to share the changes that were made following Open House 2, and to respond to final questions and gather comments.

Approximately 75 people attended the third open house online, 50% more than the second open house. CIMA+ presented the Recommended Plan and the City of Saskatoon moderated the event, including the question-and-answer period.

² See the Public Engagement Report for Open House 2 on the City's Engage page.
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Frequently Asked Questions from Open House #3

There was a mix of support and some concerns expressed that will all be considered in the final plan. The following questions & answers capture the range of questions posed during and following the virtual open house.

Pedestrian Connections across Circle Drive:

- 1) Why are there pedestrian overpasses (over Circle Drive) leading to underpasses (under the CN Rail tracks)? Has this been done elsewhere in Saskatoon?
 - This is the only area in Saskatoon where overpasses would lead to underpasses because of limited options for crossing the rail tracks. The city has committed to continuing to discuss these locations with CN Rail in hopes of improving the remaining underpasses to a more modern design.
 - We did investigate constructing an overpass at Laurier Drive and 29th Street over the CN Rail tracks. Unfortunately, there are power transmission lines that prevent this option from being recommended at this time.
 - The location at Clancy Drive includes the street and sidewalk along the street passing under Circle Drive, so that location is a bit different. The overall crossing length in the underpasses will be shortened, but still exist at all three locations.
- 2) Are the existing crossings being removed?
 - The proposed plan includes keeping existing pedestrian connections across Circle Drive between Clancy Drive and Laurier Drive.
- 3) Are the tunnels being removed?
 - This plan recommends removing the pedestrian crossing tunnels under Circle Drive and installing sidewalks along Clancy Drive and Laurier Drive, with a pedestrian overpass near 29th Street. The tunnels under the CN Rail tracks will remain and we will continue to work with CN Rail to make improvements and upgrades.
- 4) How will you address safety at the ends of the new pedestrian overpasses? The overpass at 29th Street will still lead into the back alley where issues currently exist.
 - Providing safe access for pedestrians is important for all connections. As we enter the detailed design phase, we will do a CPTED (Crime Prevention through Environmental Design) review to evaluate this location for improvements.
- 5) Can the power lines running along Circle Drive between the road and the CN Rail tracks be raised to accommodate a pedestrian overpass for the road and the rail tracks?
 - Unfortunately, there is a high voltage power transmission line between Circle Drive and the CN Rail tracks that cannot be raised or lowered. This does not leave space for a pedestrian overpass at 29th Street or Laurier Drive. There are operational and safety concerns related to increasing the height of the lines, and regulations that prevent them from being buried underground.

Pedestrian Connections across 22nd Street:

- 1) How would pedestrians and cyclists cross 22nd Street to get from Confederation Mall to the Tim Horton's on Fairlight Drive (north business area to south business area)?
 - People can cross 22nd Street at the Diefenbaker Drive intersection or use the pedestrian overpass near the CN Rail tracks that will remain in place.
 - We will investigate the impact on the plan to add a pedestrian crossing on the west leg of the intersection at Confederation Drive and 22nd Street.
- 2) Is the pedestrian overpass crossing 22nd Street just east of Circle Drive West going to remain in place?
 - Yes, this pedestrian structure is not affected by this plan.

Traffic Noise Sound Attenuation:

- 1) Will there be sound attenuation walls added or improved along Circle Drive within the project's limits?
 - A traffic noise modelling study will be completed as a part of this project with recommendations for addressing future traffic noise sound attenuation locations. Options, which may include sound attenuation walls, will be considered during the detailed design of this project.

Laurier Drive Traffic Movements:

- 1) Why hasn't a southbound exit been included at Laurier Drive? This does not retain the same functionality that already exists and may cause traffic issues in the neighbourhood.
 - There is not enough room for a Laurier Drive southbound exit, due the proximity of the 22nd Street interchange.
 - Circle Drive exiting traffic and the Laurier Drive entering traffic would not have enough time or opportunity to weave between lanes at high-speed through the area to get to their destinations.
- 2) What happens to vehicles currently go through Laurier Drive to south Circle Drive?
 - With the proposed plan, vehicles that currently take Laurier Drive to southbound Circle Drive could go westbound on Laurier Drive to Confederation Drive, then and then eastbound on 22nd Street to the Circle Drive southbound ramp.
- 3) Will removing the movements to and from the south on Laurier Drive increase traffic at Diefenbaker Drive and 22nd Street significantly?
 - Our traffic modeling predicts that re-directing traffic from Laurier Drive to Diefenbaker Drive and Confederation Drive for access to 22nd Street will increase traffic in those areas; however, it will still be within the capacity of the network. Some vehicles will take other routes.

Speed Limits:

- 1) Will speed limits increase on Circle Drive between 33rd Street and Clancy Drive once this change is completed?
 - Yes, the speed limit on Circle Drive between 33rd Street and Clancy Drive will increase to 90 kilometers per hour.

Diefenbaker Drive:

- 1) Why isn't an upgrade of the Diefenbaker Drive and 22nd Street intersection not included in the plan? The changes proposed will make the intersection a lot busier.
 - An assessment of Diefenbaker Drive was outside of the scope of this project. The focus of this project is the long-term plan for Circle Drive; however, an assessment and possible upgrades may be required in the future.
 - As more development in Saskatoon's west and the Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) system is implemented, 22nd Street will be widened further west. Once the recommended plan for Circle Drive has been finalized, additional work can be completed to determine the required upgrades to 22nd Street in coordination with BRT, future growth planning and this plan.
- 2) Will upgrades to Diefenbaker Drive be implemented at the same time as these other recommendations if it is not included in this plan?
 - The Circle Drive West Functional Plan still needs to be finalized and funded, so no work is scheduled to implement this long-term plan.
 - Upgrades to Diefenbaker Drive may be coordinated with other upgrades along 22nd Street, either in anticipation of the Circle Drive West Functional Planning Study, or as part of other area projects like the Bus Rapid Transit plans.

11th Street Access:

- 1) Why can't the current 11th Street exit from Circle Drive southbound be maintained in this plan?
 - Circle Drive is proposed to become a free flow facility rather than including a traffic signal at Clancy Drive. This existing traffic signal separates the movements to Clancy Drive and the 11th Street ramp. The southbound entering movement (to Circle Drive) from Clancy Drive cannot occur safely at the same time as the southbound exiting movement to 11th Street over such a short distance once traffic is operating in free flow on Circle Drive.
- 2) What will the intersection at the new Circle Drive exit to 11th Street using the loop ramp look like? Will there be capacity to hold enough vehicles on that ramp if trains are blocking 11th Street? I'm concerned that it may back up onto Circle Drive creating safety issues.
 - In the proposed plan, the intersection at 11th Street will be a typical signalized intersection. The exit ramp from Circle Drive is designed as a generous loop, taking into account current and future traffic demands.

- 3) Why doesn't this plan include a road passing over or under the rail line on 11th Street? Trains are a big issue for access to the Montgomery Place neighbourhood. The new 11th Street access location will require westbound traffic to cross the main rail tracks leading to Chappell Yards and the wait times can be long.
- The Circle Drive West Functional Planning Study does not include the Rail Grade Separation at 11th Street. Find more information in the *Rail Relocation versus Grade Separation Feasibility Study - January 2021 Update report* that went forward to City Council where it was placed on the Infrastructure Priority List in the *Saskatoon Transportation Master Plan*.
 - The new 11th Street exit ramp from Circle Drive will be a loop ramp which is a conventional interchange design recommendation.
 - Both this Circle Drive West Functional Plan and the 11th Street Rail Grade Separation Project (routing traffic over the rail line) are future long-term projects. Neither of these projects have a timeline attached to them for implementation.
- 4) If a train on the north/south CN Rail track is blocking 11th Street and another train on the CP Rail track is blocking the crossing at Fairlight Drive and Elevator Road, how will emergency vehicles access Montgomery Place?
- Trains at these intersections can be problematic for traffic and emergency vehicles. However, emergency services would coordinate their response in a similar fashion as they do today.
- 5) What is the timeline for building the 11th Street grade separation?
- There is currently no timeline for the implementation of this project. The project is included on the Infrastructure Priority List in the *Saskatoon Transportation Master Plan*.
 - The infrastructure priority list is updated at minimum every five years and includes all transportation projects city-wide.
- 6) Have other rail grade separated options to access Montgomery Place been considered, such as an off-ramp and on-ramp between Circle Drive southbound and Dundonald Ave through the proposed solar farm location?
- Any rail grade separation at 11th Street was outside of the scope of this project. A *Rail Relocation versus Grade Separation Feasibility Study - January 2021 Update report* went forward to City Council where it was placed on the Infrastructure Priority List in the *Saskatoon Transportation Master Plan*. The first phase of this study was presented in March 2018: *Rail Relocation versus Grade Separation feasibility Study – Phase 1 report*.

Other Locations within the Study Area:

- 1) Why is the ramp over Confederation drive being removed for the movement exiting Circle Drive southbound onto 22nd Street West? Trucks will now have to travel through the 22nd Street and Confederation Drive intersections. Won't this make things more difficult for trucks?
 - Yes, the ramp that currently takes you from Circle Drive southbound to 22nd Street westbound is removed in this configuration. Part of the reason is that 22nd Street will be three lanes wide, plus additional turning lanes. If that ramp were to be retained, drivers could not safely maneuver to make a left turn at Diefenbaker Drive through the additional lanes (this does happen today, but can be challenging at certain times – for both safety and opportunity). Truck traffic will be required to travel through the intersection of Confederation Drive when making this movement.
- 2) Why not allow access from Fairlight Drive to the 22nd Street off ramp to Circle Drive South?
 - It's not best practice under Transportation national guidelines to connect a local access road to a freeway. Fairlight Dr traffic will take Fairmont Dr southbound and connect to Circle Drive southbound at Clancy Drive.
- 3) How will westbound traffic on 22nd Street access Parkridge and Fairhaven neighbourhoods?
 - From 22nd Street westbound, drivers will turn left at Diefenbaker Drive intersection to access Parkridge and Fairhaven neighbourhoods at Fairmont Drive.
- 4) What is the consideration for truck traffic southbound on Circle Drive?
 - There is a bypass ramp proposed for truck traffic entering Circle Drive south from 22nd Street eastbound. Trucks will be able to bypass the Confederation Drive and Circle Drive intersections to access Circle Drive southbound.
- 5) Is Clancy Drive exit going to be an underpass?
 - Yes, Clancy Drive will access Circle Drive via an underpass.
- 6) Has there been any thought to allow vehicle access between Fairhaven and Meadow Green at Clancy Drive and 18th Street West under the CN Rail tracks?
 - No. This connection was not included in the scope of this project. This plan was focused on Circle Drive and its operations at Clancy Drive and Laurier Drive.
- 7) Was any consideration given to people who travel between west-end areas like Parkridge, Fairhaven, and Pacific Heights and downtown, particularly during peak traffic times?
 - Yes. The Consultant reviewed the City's current traffic model in these areas and reassigned those trips in the analysis to evaluate 22nd Street and Circle Drive. The effectiveness of the proposed transportation plan is based on the reassigned volumes.

- 8) Will it take longer to get from Laurier Drive to Circle Drive southbound once the proposed changes are implemented?
- The new route is about the same timing, from Laurier Drive to Circle Drive southbound is via Confederation Drive southbound under 22nd Street to the re-aligned Circle Drive South on-ramp.

General Questions and Comments:

- 1) Will public feedback from the third Open House be considered before the final plan goes forward to the Standing Policy Committee on Transportation (SPCT)?
- Yes. All new comments and feedback will be incorporated to help draft the report to the SPCT, which is anticipated for spring 2022.
- 2) Are there additional images and animations to help residents understand the plans?
- Yes. The presentation from the October 2021 Open House 3 is available and includes many additional images that help describe the changes proposed. Animations were not produced as a part of this project.
- 3) How will residents in Parkridge and Fairhaven be impacted during construction?
- There is still more work to finalize and get approval, then funding the project before the construction phasing and detour plans are designed. Those plans would be developed closer to the time of construction and always consider local traffic access.
- 4) How much will this project cost to build?
- The third open house completed the public engagement portion of the Circle Drive West Functional Planning Study. The next steps are completing the engineering of the recommended plan, including noise modelling and mitigation, and developing a cost estimate.
- 5) How long will this take to build?
- Construction of this project is not yet scheduled. It is also unknown how long construction could take.
- 6) Can you please post the proposed interchange plans for the 11th Street rail grade separation?
- Yes. The proposed grade separation plans for 11th Street are included in the *pdf of the Open House 3 presentation* (slide 27) which is also linked in the content of the Engage tab. Information on the grade separation can also be found in the *Rail Relocation versus Grade Separation Feasibility Study - January 2021 Update report* that went forward to City Council where it was placed on the Infrastructure Priority List in the *Saskatoon Transportation Master Plan*.

- 7) Can construction of an eastbound turn bay on 22nd Street happen sooner to accommodate existing traffic wanting to turn onto Circle Drive?
- Once the long-term Circle Drive West functional plan is finalized and adopted by City Council, the city will have a road map to start making smart investments in infrastructure over time as required for improving current operations.
- 8) Can construction of dual left turn lanes from the Circle Drive northbound exit onto 22nd Street be accelerated? The future plan looks like an improvement, but it sounds like construction is a long time in the future.
- The ultimate phasing of the construction of this plan has not been finalized. That being said, due to the substantial change this plan proposes for the Circle Drive northbound exit onto 22nd Street, it is not likely that this portion alone will be able to be accelerated. Opportunities to make improvements to the existing exit to allow for dual left turn movements here are being evaluated. Completion of this project, and adoption of the recommended plan, will allow us to make good investments in current infrastructure projects.
- 9) This plan is horrible with only one access point to get into some neighbourhoods.
- The number of access points to all affected neighbourhoods is the same; however, the particular patterns for access will change.
- 10) Has Saskatoon Transit been consulted regarding this plan?
- Yes. The Saskatoon Transit and Bus Rapid Transit planning teams have been included as stakeholders throughout the development of this proposed plan.
- 11) Can additional pedestrian crossings be implemented around the 11th Street and Dundonald Avenue intersection? Lots of children are crossing here before and after school.
- Thank you for this comment. It was shared with the appropriate staff within the Transportation Engineering department for review under the correct program. This work is outside of the scope of this project.
- 12) This work will result in many detours to various areas and effect traffic, emergency vehicles, and businesses. How will the city minimize the effects during construction?
- There is still more work to finalize and get approval, then funding the project before the construction phasing and detour plans are designed. A construction management and detours plan will be established as a part of the detailed design and construction plan closer to the time of construction and always consider local traffic access.

Emergency Response:

- 1) Does the current plan ensure compliance of NFPA 1710, fire protection into Montgomery Place? What impact will the changes have on our emergency responders' ability to respond to calls?
- Fire and Protective Services are a stakeholder on this project and all large-scale transportation projects. Additionally, this project cannot be viewed in isolation. It

needs to be considered alongside the 11th Street grade separation plans. Fire and Protective Services will have a say in implementation to ensure they can respond effectively.

- 2) Do you consult with 911 emergency services during this process?
 - Yes
- 3) What comments have emergency services made regarding the changed access to Montgomery Place from Circle Drive southbound?
 - Fire and Protective Services has response plans for the Montgomery Place neighbourhood that include consideration for the possibility of train conflicts. Consultation with Fire regarding these plans indicated that the relocation of the 11th Street ramp is not expected to adversely affect their response and may be an improvement overall.

Other Areas:

- 1) When will you tackle the issues at Circle Drive and Avenue C?
 - This project is high on the Infrastructure Priority List in the *Saskatoon Transportation Master Plan*; however, there is no funding or timeline identified yet.
- 2) Is there a recommendation for a rail grade separation for 33rd Street immediately east of Circle Drive to help accommodate the added traffic from newly developed neighbourhoods to the west?
 - No. This location was included in the *Rail Relocation versus Grade Separation Feasibility Study - January 2021 Update report* and was not recommended for future study.
- 3) Confederation Drive between 22nd Street and 33rd Street is very busy already, making it tough to get out of the Massey Place neighbourhood. How will this plan address this issue?
 - While Confederation Drive north of 22nd Street was not included in the scope of this project, we heard this concern during the *Massey Place Neighbourhood Traffic Review* (NTR).
 - Based on the analysis completed in the NTR, the following recommendations were made for Confederation Drive. These recommendations should resolve access issues for the Massey Place neighbourhood.
 - i. Install traffic signals at Confederation Drive and Milton Street - awaiting funding; and
 - ii. Confederation Drive and Massey Drive Active Pedestrian Corridor - completed.