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### **Re: Saskatoon Freeway Planning Study – Phase 2 Endorsement Request (Agenda item: 7.2.1)**

To the Standing Policy Committee on Transportation:

We are writing to you to urge you to heed the evidence-based analysis and recommendations of The Swale Watchers in their February 2024 position paper on the Saskatoon Freeway Phase 2 Functional Planning Study. The Saskatchewan Environmental Society endorses their position paper.

We understand that the Saskatchewan Ministry of Highways and Infrastructure has asked Saskatoon City Council to endorse the Functional Study for Phase 2 of the proposed Saskatoon Freeway. We urge the City of Saskatoon to NOT endorse this study. The plan for Phase 2 covers a 27-kilometre-long segment of divided highway that will expand from four to eight lanes where it crosses the Northeast Swale, and then to 10 lanes where it crosses the Small Swale. The plan also calls for a major interchange at the intersection with Central Avenue, between the two Swales. The impact of the proposed highway will cause irreparable damage to both of these valuable natural areas, as is indicated in the Functional Planning Study just released by the Ministry of Highways: "Phase 2 **crosses critical environmentally sensitive areas at the Small Swale and Northeast Swale.** This phase also directly impacts numerous existing landowner's and access for future residential developments" (pg. iii, 2023 – emphasis added).

As you know, the Swales are refuges for an astounding abundance of life. At least 36 Species of Conservation Concern (SOCC) and several Species at Risk (SAR) rely on the Swales' habitat, including the horned grebe, short-eared owl, common nighthawk, yellow rail, loggerhead shrike, northern leopard frog, bobolink, American badger, crowfoot violet, marsh felwort, and plains rough fescue. Additionally, a previously undiscovered sharp-tailed grouse lek, or dancing ground, was observed in the Small Swale, as noted in The Biological Assessment just released by the Ministry of Highways. This is an ecologically and culturally significant wildlife feature no one had known about before, and it should be protected. The Biological Assessment also maps rare marl bog habitats, complete with its unique water chemistry, nutrient properties, and floral community. As green infrastructure, these wetlands and grasslands also provide unmatched ecosystem services to the people of Saskatoon by purifying air and water, sequestering carbon, preventing floods, supporting research, education, mental and



physical health, and much more. Building the Saskatoon Freeway through the Swales will undoubtedly disturb the human communities near the Swales via stressors such as light and noise pollution. It is also important that the City considers the climatic impact of a project of this scale. New and debatable highway developments are ultimately shortsighted given the need for transformative change to address the climate emergency.

We applaud the steps Saskatoon City Council has previously taken to protect the Swales from harm. Special care was taken with the design of McOrmond Drive where it crosses the Northeast Swale, and Council recently established pre-development boundaries for both the Northeast and Small Swales as part of the planning for the proposed University Heights 3 neighbourhood. We now encourage the City to do everything in its power to *continue* protecting the Swales.

To reiterate The Swale Watchers' urgent recommendations, of which SES is in favour of:

- 1. Given that the Biological Assessment and the Functional Planning Study for Phase 2 of the Saskatoon Freeway demonstrate that irreversible harm would befall the Northeast and Small Swales—two of Saskatoon's most valuable and valued natural areas—if the project proceeds as planned, we urge the City NOT to endorse the Functional Planning Study for Phase 2 of the Saskatoon Freeway.*
- 2. Recognizing that the ultimate authority over where, when, or if this project is completed lies with the province, rather than with the City of Saskatoon, we urge the City to call on the Government of Saskatchewan to choose a route for the Saskatoon Freeway that does not intrude on the Swales and to guarantee that the project will be subject to a thorough, impartial Environmental Impact Assessment.*

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Megan Van Buskirk". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of the first and last names being capitalized and prominent.

Megan Van Buskirk  
Associate Director  
Saskatchewan Environmental Society