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His Worship the Mayor and Members of City Council
c/o Office of the City Clerk
City of Saskatoon
222 – 3 Avenue North
Saskatoon, SK, S7K 0J5

RE: TRAFFIC BRIDGE

His Worship the Mayor and Members of City Council:

We are writing out of concern over the future of the Traffic Bridge, our city's founding bridge, and want to share with you some considerations we feel are important. Between the four of us, we teach, conduct research, provide applied consultancy and have prior work experience in the areas of urban planning and design, land planning and development, transportation planning, and planning processes and techniques. We hope you find the following considerations constructive as you debate and decide upon the future of the Traffic Bridge. *Ryan Walker wishes to speak on our behalf at the next meeting of City Council.*

Heritage and Public History

Finished in 1907, the Traffic Bridge was an important 'deal-maker' for creating the City of Saskatoon. In 1905 the Town of Saskatoon proposed uniting with the villages of Nutana and Riversdale to form a city. Nutana residents insisted a traffic bridge was needed to cross the South Saskatchewan River. Funding for the bridge was approved at the first session of the legislature for the new province in 1905 and helped catalyze the city's creation along with its board of trade. The essential heritage characteristics of the Traffic Bridge include its upper truss members, its width, and its location connecting Nutana to the south downtown.

It would be difficult for Council to decide upon an option for the renewal of the Traffic Bridge without first passing a decision on its heritage value for the City of Saskatoon. When the City of Edmonton, for example, rehabilitated its 105-year-old Low Level Bridge in 2006, they had determined that the bridge was a *Municipal Heritage Resource*.

It made their subsequent technical decisions on how to renew the bridge that much more focused. We would argue that the Traffic Bridge in Saskatoon holds a dearer place in our public history than the Low Level Bridge in Edmonton, yet City Council has not officially positioned the bridge as a municipal heritage resource.

We believe that the Traffic Bridge should be re-constructed according to the original design specifications rendered over a century ago. If the re-use and rehabilitation of the upper truss members can be viably accomplished, then this would be most desirable. If it is not possible to re-use and rehabilitate these key structural components of the bridge, then their reconstruction with new material should follow the original design specifications. The width of the bridge should remain the same. Re-construction according to its original specifications, with or without the re-use and rehabilitation of the original material, would be an investment in the heritage and public history embodied in the Traffic Bridge. Incorporating wider lane widths, designing truss members according to different specifications, and omitting original design details, would all detract from the authentic re-construction of our founding bridge. A decision by Council to re-construct the current bridge according to its authentic heritage characteristics will be looked back on as an investment in the public history of this city.

Place-asset, Urban Quality and Economic Development

At a time when Saskatoon is growing, new communities being built, Circle Drive nearing completion, the university under expansion, future generations will look back at what makes Saskatoon a city unlike all the others. What will stand out are the unique features of this city. The Traffic Bridge is one of those increasingly scarce features of our built environment that helped define this city. Its prominence today is only magnified by its place in the River Landing signature area of our downtown, positioned within the Meewasin Valley park and Trans Canada Trail system.

Cities around the world compete to attract a mobile and skilled workforce, retain residents, and stimulate tourism through what is often referred to as place-product development. One of the most promising practices in place-making is the useful adaptation of built heritage representative of a city's unique and authentic public history. The authentic re-construction of the Traffic Bridge according to its original design specifications would be an investment in an important place-asset for Saskatoon's future. Cities with pride in their history and character are cities that succeed economically, socially, and culturally.

Transportation Service Function

Re-prioritizing its transportation service function as a dedicated place for pedestrians and cyclists would fit with the characteristics and location of the Traffic Bridge. The bridge is relatively low to the water, rich in heritage and character, and connects popular parks and civic spaces on both sides of the river. Terminal vistas provided at each end in the statue of "The Founders" on the north and the rising and curving slope of Victoria Avenue at the south already bestow high urban quality and pedestrian scale to the bridge. As we try to enliven the area between the Broadway and Senator Sid Buckwold Bridges,

and meet the demands for better pedestrian- and cyclist- transportation infrastructure, the time seems right to consider these options carefully at the Traffic Bridge.

The 120-year-old Walnut Street truss bridge crossing the Tennessee River in Chattanooga was recently converted from mixed travel mode to a pedestrian-only bridge, connecting the downtown to the north shore. It has become an acclaimed component of that city's downtown improvements to cultural and arts attractions, parks and recreation along the riverbank, making it an award-winning 'livable city'.

Whether we are driving attentively across a narrow two-lane neighbourhood bridge, making an authentic link to our past, or whether we are dedicating the bridge to a pedestrian-cycling function to make a bold commitment to an emerging appetite for pedestrian quality in the south downtown and cycling as a viable and growing transportation mode choice, the function of the bridge, coinciding with its form, should be bold and purposeful. Now is the time to think creatively and ambitiously about how we allocate our transportation service functions between our bridges.

Planning Process

The Traffic Bridge is one of the greatest existing and potential future place-assets in our city centre. With a city centre planning process underway, a community visioning exercise (Saskatoon Speaks) which addresses citizens' priorities for 'moving around', 'the city centre' and 'the economy', and with a Culture Plan nearing completion which has identified 'heritage' and 'the city centre' as among its draft strategic directions, could City Council not wait to see how the re-construction of our founding bridge in the signature area of our city centre might fit into the important planning priorities forthcoming shortly?

The Traffic Bridge requires consideration beyond a typical functional and cost-accounting. As a central place asset and key heritage resource in our public history the decision over the Traffic Bridge should be nested very well within our strategic directions to become one of the most livable cities on the Prairies and within Canada.

Sincerely,



Avi Akkerman, PhD, MCIP



Robert Patrick, PhD, MCIP



Jill Gunn, PhD, MCIP



Ryan Walker, PhD, MCIP

Professors of Regional and Urban Planning