

Response to Design Regina Draft Documents

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Preface

This document is a response to the [draft documents](#) posted as part of the Design Regina process. The authors of this response are also the primary authors of *Transforming Regina: Planning for 2040 and beyond*, which achieved a place in the finals of the Regina *Morph My City* competition. Readers interested in a detailed analysis of Regina's development through the year 2040 are encouraged to peruse [our full report](#), which we have made publicly available. Every subject discussed in this response is explored in greater detail in our report.

We are pleased that the City has vigorously pursued the Design Regina process. We believe that inclusive and detailed community engagement efforts like this are crucial for the long-term well-being of our city.

In the interests of brevity, this response has been limited to commentary on aspects of the stated priorities and goals for which we feel some changes should be considered. Thus, this document does not show our appreciation for the majority of the content in the Design Regina documents. We think that they are a very good starting point for future discussions about the future of Regina. In fact, the reader should consider our silence on any particular topic contained within the Design Regina draft documents to be an endorsement of their current content.

Community Priorities

The current listing of [community priorities](#) is useful but incomplete. For example, it does not mention the safety or health of residents. Most urban residents care about things like noise, air pollution, and physical danger due to things like fast-moving automobiles. These factors are an inescapable part of their vision of what sort of city they want to live in. A lack of declaration of these very obvious priorities might lead to a lack of recognition of how they might be affected by the goals and specific policies that will be laid out later in the process¹.

Context

A vision of what the world will be like by 2040 is lacking in these documents. Residents and planners who are trying to envision the Regina of 2040 will be limited by their understanding of long-term trends that are shaping the global and national context. Thus, an acknowledgement of these factors is crucial to the proactive design of a healthy, vibrant, and prosperous city.

Important long-term trends

Energy commodities such as oil and natural gas are limited by their geological supply. Globally and continentally, these commodities are trending towards high and volatile prices over

¹ The drafted goals do include a health & safety section, which we will discuss in more detail later.

the coming decades². Saskatchewan's economy, like that of most of the developed world, is currently very dependent on these sources of energy to fuel its prosperity. It behooves us to find ways to proactively prepare for the inevitable economic shocks from energy prices. By doing so, we can improve the long-term prosperity of Regina while also improving its resilience to other, unforeseen, shocks.

Despite the ongoing local prosperity due to resource extraction, the expected high value of these commodities in the next few decades will come at the price of high fuel and food prices for the rest of the economy. The ~78% of the economy that is not comprised of these industries will experience the detrimental effects of needing to pay more to maintain their consumption of fuel and food³.

Transportation

In light of the realities of energy supply in the next few decades, the pursuit of auto-centric development today is counterproductive. The shift in priorities of urban dwellers in North America toward transit, carpooling, active transport, and walkable communities indicates that City policies which promote single-occupancy car usage have become undesirable.

Transport Density

A practical overarching goal should be to **increase the density of our transportation modes**. Transitioning away from single-occupancy vehicles means that:

- a. we don't need to build bigger roads,
- b. our roads will last longer⁴,
- c. our roads will move more people, faster,
- d. transit service can be invigorated by increased ridership,
- e. and residents will benefit from additional active transport infrastructure.

It is possible that the currently stated goal of "Optimize road network capacity" intends to express this same sentiment, but we believe it is worth saying explicitly what sort of transformation the transportation system needs to undergo in the coming decades.

Transportation Goals

We agree wholeheartedly with the stated goals for improving the variety of available transportation modes, the promotion of active transport, and the integration of land-use and transportation planning. These are definitely top priorities.

Curbing single-occupancy automobile usage

This could be achieved through measures such as traffic calming, reducing the subsidy inherent in publicly-provided parking, removing or reducing the minimum parking spot requirements in the City Bylaws, and eventually creating high-occupancy vehicle lanes on

² Extensive documentation of these facts is available in the works of top energy researchers such as Charles Hall, Gagnon, Nathan, Charles AS Hall, and Lysle Brinker. "A preliminary investigation of energy return on energy investment for global oil and gas production." *Energies* 2.3 (2009): 490-503.

³ CANSIM Table 379-0030.

⁴ [Evaluating Public Transit Benefits and Costs](#), Victoria Transport Policy Institute, 2013, p. 48-49.

expressways.

Promote high-density transportation modes

This goal could be pursued through actions like the creation or promotion of carpool ride-finding software, recognizing CarShares with additional Taxi-like rights, and allowing R-cards to be recharged online and used for other transport modes like Taxis and CarShares.

Specific to public transit, many small actions can improve transit usability, accessibility, and comfort⁵. In addition, the power and flexibility of transit can be enormously extended by introducing jitneys to fill an important niche in city transport⁶.

Promote active transportation modes

Long-term planning is critical to the successful promotion of active transport. A goal of transport planning should be to **better utilize the existing active transport infrastructure**. A direct way to address the underutilization of active transport infrastructure is to make information available to residents in an accessible and complete format. A local example is how the City of Winnipeg has consolidated information about cycling routes within the city onto a single [web page](#).

A related goal is the **development of a more complete active transport network within the city**, such as by creating an effective network of dedicated bike lanes and multi-use pathways. It is important to prioritize the placement of new active transport infrastructure in places where it:

1. connects to the existing network and
2. provides service to areas with a lack of current active transport infrastructure.

Infrastructure

A stated goal is to ensure that lifetime costs are as low as possible while still delivering the service adequately. This is a good goal, but we would like to explicitly increase its scope.

Most of our major infrastructure systems (e.g. roads, water, sewer, stormwater) are networks that facilitate the flow of inputs to designated places. Understanding the quantity and location of these inputs is crucial for the development of cost-effective solutions. Policies in other areas such as land usage and transportation planning often set the stage for the scope and location of the service loads that the infrastructure must accommodate. For these reasons, we believe that a stated goal of the design process should be to **explore opportunities for cost-effective upstream policies that reduce the overall cost of infrastructure by reducing inputs**.

An important example for Regina is stormwater. When storm water fees are the same regardless of the composition of the surfaces on a property, the property owner has no incentive to reduce the load they are creating for the stormwater system. Utilizing individual parcel assessments (IPAs), the stormwater load from every property can be estimated, and fees can be levied accordingly. Even keeping this system revenue neutral will create a significant

⁵ For more details see [Transforming Regina: Planning for 2040 and beyond](#), p 8-9, 51-60.

⁶ For more details see [Transforming Regina: Planning for 2040 and beyond](#), p 58-60.

economic incentive for the conscientious use of urban land. Landowners can employ extremely cost-effective urban drainage systems such as rain gardens to minimize the the stormwater fees they will pay to the City. Changing to an IPA system will have ramifications far beyond its effect on stormwater system management. A well-implemented IPA system could be used for a recalibration of water and sewer rates, property taxes, and even energy bills (in cooperation with SaskPower and SaskEnergy). Such a deployment would require the involvement of several City departments. Nonetheless, it is something that should be considered carefully because of the long-term benefits to the city it can unlock at low cost⁷.

Land Usage

We would replace goal 1 with: “**Achieve a compact, mixed urban form by prioritizing infill development in established neighbourhoods near existing transportation corridors.**” Greenfield development is likely to be an unavoidable fact about the future of Regina, but it is not something that the City should strive for.

Development on the periphery of the city will:

- a. prolong the necessity of automobile usage for errands in the city,
- b. increase the commuter traffic loads on all roads,
- c. increase the demand for parking throughout the city,
- d. increase the distance between average locations within the city, making active transport to specific locations more difficult,
- e. increase the total area needing to be served by transit.

None of these are desirable or serve as a positive step toward the sustainability, resilience, or vibrancy of Regina.

The existing goals already point out that land usage and transportation should be explicitly planned in tandem. We think this goal is worth reiterating. They should in fact be planned at a single desk if possible. These fields are inextricably connected at a physical level. A holistic understanding of the living city and its possibilities requires that the concepts of land usage and transport planning be melded into a cohesive endeavor. The city as a whole can benefit from a more synergistic approach to how our land is used and how we move around in it.

Urban Agriculture

There is no mention of actual urban agriculture other than community gardens. The City should follow in the footsteps of Kelowna, BC by **carefully limiting the use of pesticides and herbicides within the city** and explicitly **legalizing the use of urban land for growing food for local sale**. Kelowna's law changes have led to the vigorous expansion of urban farming with small-plot intensive (SPIN) farms like [Green City Acres](#) growing rapidly, which allows them to contribute to the local economy, transform yards into vibrant and varied green spaces, and improve the well-being of residents though "as fresh as you can get" local produce.

Health & Safety

The stated goals are extremely general. We agree with them all, but believe that they

⁷ For more details see [Transforming Regina: Planning for 2040 and beyond](#), p 81-82, 104-105.

don't go nearly far enough to elucidate precisely what would be entailed in the achievement of these goals. Here are some suggestions about how they can be extended.

Health and active transport

The health benefits of active transport have been extensively documented⁸ ⁹. We propose that the goal: **The City will invest in the long-term health of residents through the improvement of active transport infrastructure.**

Social Risk

We propose a new goal: **Recognizing the dangers of winter exposure and the social priority of resident safety, the City will establish a plan to guarantee shelter and the necessities of life to those individuals without recourse.** Goal 2 under Social Development states something similar, but fails to specify concrete outcomes.

Air quality

We propose: **Improvements in air quality will be pursued through carefully considered regulation of the sectors most responsible for environmental and health damage through air pollution.** Some examples of sectors would be pesticides/herbicides, vehicles, industrial polluters, and construction (materials and processes).

⁸ [Inverse associations between cycling to work, public transport, and overweight and obesity: Findings from a population based study in Australia.](#) Li Ming Wen, Chris Rissel. Health Promotion Service, Sydney South West Area Health Service, Australia, 2007.

⁹ [All-Cause Mortality Associated With Physical Activity During Leisure Time, Work, Sports, and Cycling to Work.](#) Lars Bo Andersen, Peter Schnohr, Marianne Schroll, Hans Ole Hein, 2010.