

Transportation Corridor Study Review Project

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ABSTRACT

The Transportation Corridor Study Review Project was initiated by Transportation Planning at The City of Calgary when Council asked that a new Policy be created based on a collaborative community engagement and communication approach with internal and external stakeholders. The policy is to address options for staging and prioritising both interim and ultimate solutions within a given corridor, provide clear definitions of desired outcomes for movements through and across the corridor for all transportation modes, and outline The City's commitment to stakeholder engagement throughout the corridor study process.

The project team divided the implementation of this project into two phases: Phase 1 consisted of a three part engagement plan to involve citizens and key stakeholders; Phase 2 consisted of developing the policy along with a literature review of North American jurisdictions best practices and five City of Calgary case studies.

To supplement the policy, a new set of guidelines was created to foster an understanding of the process followed by The City of Calgary when undertaking transportation corridor studies and facilitate the implementation of the appropriate engagement level throughout the course of a project.

This paper discusses the Transportation Corridor Study Review Project designed to examine the process for undertaking transportation corridor studies at The City of Calgary and create a new policy. The paper focuses on engagement both in the project approach as well as in future transportation corridor studies.

INTRODUCTION

Although long-term in nature, corridor studies can impact both current and future citizens in a number of different ways. In the past, corridor studies were conducted with an eye towards achieving the engineering objectives of the study – determination of roadway requirements and right-of-way. However, it has become very apparent that this strategy does not place an appropriate amount of emphasis that the impacts of roadway planning studies have on adjacent communities and citizens. Recognizing this, The City of Calgary (The City) identified a need to create a Transportation Corridor Study Policy (the Policy) to guide how corridor studies are conducted to ensure that the process incorporates appropriate levels of collaborative engagement with the general public and impacted stakeholders in an open and transparent manner throughout the planning process.

Background and Need

The City conducts a number of different types of planning studies intended to identify the long-, medium-, and short-term needs of the city’s transportation network. At the highest level is the Calgary Transportation Plan (CTP) and the Municipal Development Plan (MDP) which sets out the policy-level objectives with which all studies must align.

Corridor studies are conducted on specific transportation routes shown on the CTP’s road network. A transportation corridor study is a long-term transportation system analysis which examines the current and future transportation planning needs for a specific area of the city and is typically completed 10 to 30 years in advance of construction. Transportation corridor studies identify opportunities for enhanced transit, walking and cycling facilities, identify infrastructure upgrades (widening, interchanges, intersection improvements, etc.) required to ensure the continued flow of vehicles and goods, the required road right-of-way and associated land impacts, and are conducted using the current best practices in transportation corridor planning and roadway as well as Complete Streets design. **Figure 1** illustrates the transportation planning spectrum and where corridor studies fit in.

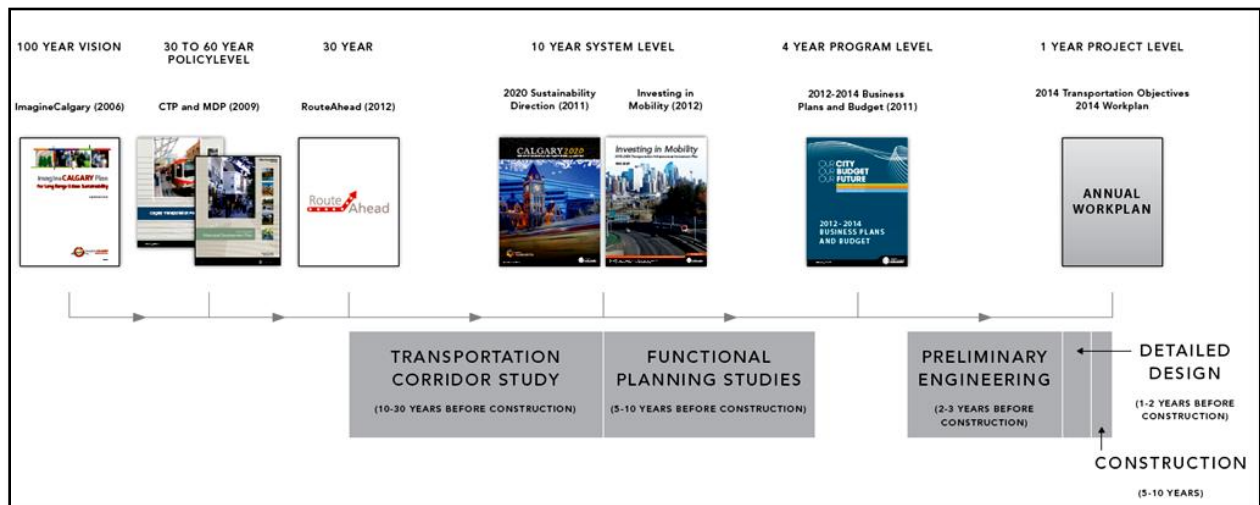


Figure 1 - Corridor Studies Time Frame

The planning process for transportation corridor studies typically follows a four phase approach as shown in **Figure 2**:

- *Phase 1 – Project Initiation* includes identifying and defining the study area and needs and confirming that the project goals align with policy objectives such as the CTP/MDP.
- *Phase 2 – Concept Development* includes developing the evaluation criteria to be used to assess options, the development of options and the application of the evaluation criteria to the options. This is often an iterative process.

- *Phase 3 – Study Recommendations* begins with the selection of the preferred alternative and includes the work required to further develop the concept to ensure the study objectives have been met.
- *Phase 4 – Project Closeout* includes the presentation of the study findings and recommendations to senior management and Council.

While the four phase approach is technically sound, it has led to an increasingly complex arrangement of unresolved or previously unidentified stakeholder issues and concerns being discussed and debated near the end of the process as stakeholder involvement was limited in the early stages of the process.

The City of Calgary is looking to move towards a more collaborative process which involves stakeholder input throughout the process in order to provide more context-sensitive and collaborative solutions. This type of process would take a complex problem, conduct an iterative process whereby initial stakeholder input is obtained, the problems/issues are assessed within an appropriate context and technical information is added to the mix, and result in the development of a collaborative solution at the completion of the study.

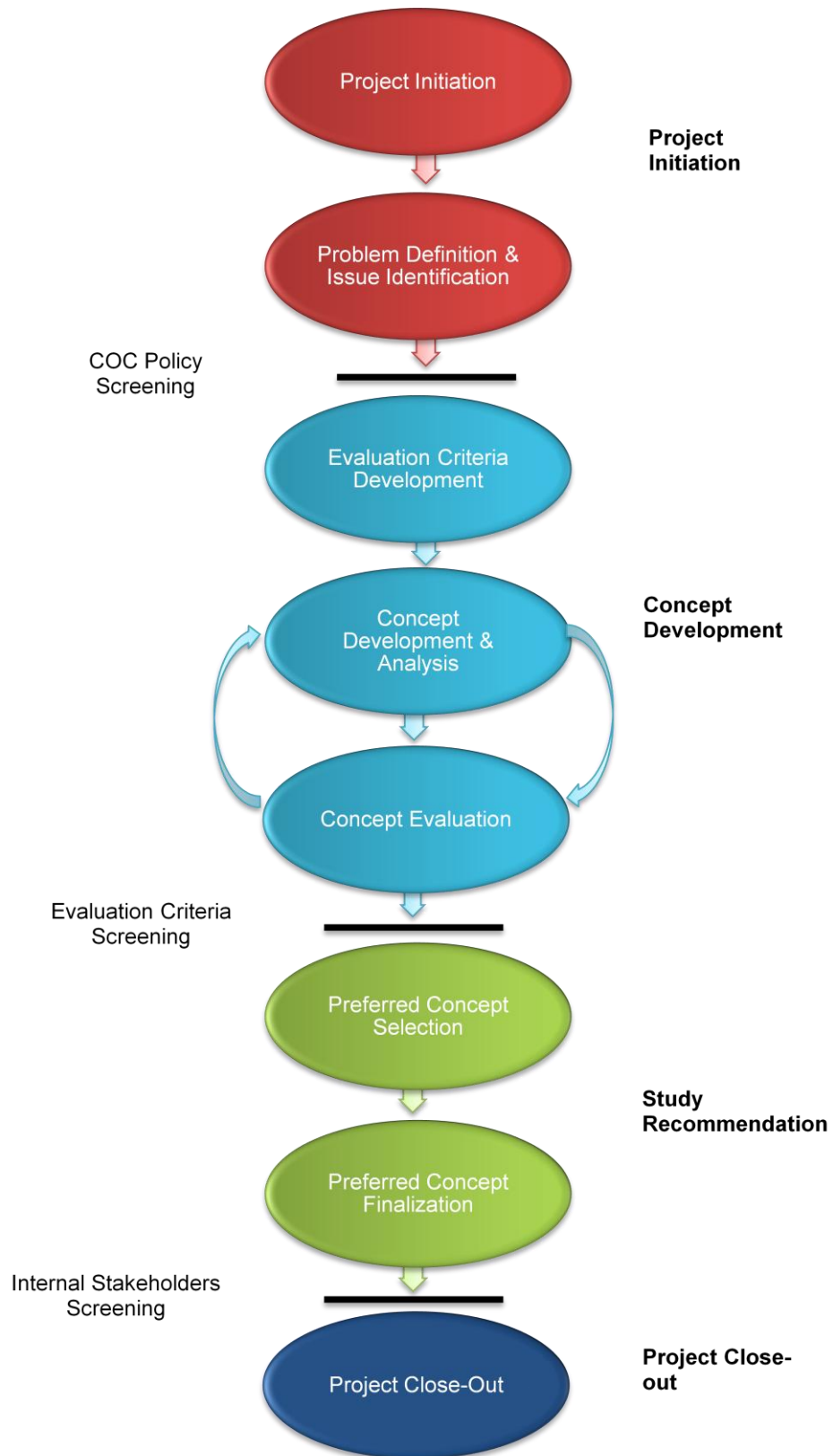


Figure 2 – Transportation Corridor Study Planning Process

Initial Investigation

In order to define the scope of the Policy and prior to engaging external stakeholders, the project team undertook the following actions:

- Conducted a literature review to draw on best practices of North American jurisdictions with respect to how the public is involved in decisions related to Transportation Planning Studies;
- Reviewed transportation policies and programs that are relevant to how The City works with communities (e.g. Traffic Calming Policy, Community traffic studies);
- Involved The City's Engage Resource Unit to advise, facilitate, and support the development of stakeholder engagement guidelines for future corridor studies;
- Consulted City business units including Land Use Planning and Policy, Calgary Transit, and Transportation's Strategy division to ensure key considerations in land use and transit planning are included; and
- Conducted informal workshops and discussions with City business units to identify key elements and considerations that should be included as part of the project.

Based on the initial review and feedback, a three part engagement program was established by the project team in order to create the Transportation Corridor Policy in collaboration with internal and external stakeholders.

LITERATURE REVIEW & CASE STUDIES

As part of the initial investigation, the project team conducted a literature review of transportation policies in North American jurisdictions. The review focused more heavily on the United States as the project team was not able to find Canadian jurisdictions with specific policies for transportation planning studies and public involvement while many US State departments of transportation (DOTs) have those policies due to the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) regulations.

The FHWA, as part of its Environmental Policy Statement in 1994, has supported proactive public involvement at all stages of planning and project development [1] and prompted all DOTs to develop involvement processes with the public. In addition, a "Thinking Beyond the Pavement" national workshop (that was sponsored in 1998 by the FHWA, the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials, the Maryland Department of Transportation, and the Maryland State Highway Administration) highlighted specific qualities of excellence in design and the characteristics that contribute to that excellence as follows [2]:

Qualities of Excellence:

- An agreement by a full range of stakeholders of the purpose and needs of the project is made in the earliest phase of the project and amended as warranted during the project development.

- The project is in harmony with the community and preserves environmental, scenic, aesthetic, historic and natural resource values of the area.
- The project achieves a level of excellence in designers' and stakeholders' minds.
- The project involves efficient and effective use of resources of all involved parties.
- The project is designed and built with minimal disruption to the community.
- The project is seen as having added lasting value to the community.

Contributing Characteristics:

- Communication with all stakeholders is early, open, honest and continuous.
- A multidisciplinary team is established early—with disciplines matching the needs of the specific project—and includes the public.
- A full range of stakeholders join transportation officials in determining the project's scope, clearly defining the purposes of the project, and reaching consensus before proceeding.
- The development process is tailored to the circumstances, examines multiple alternatives, but results in a consensus approach.
- Top agency officials and local leaders are committed to the process.
- The public involvement process, which includes informal meetings, is tailored to the project.
- The landscape, the community, and valued resources are understood before the engineering design begins.
- A full range of tools for communicating project alternatives, such as visualization techniques, is used.

This was in line with the lessons learned from five City of Calgary case studies which were also reviewed as part of this project. The lessons learned from The City of Calgary Case studies were as follows:

- Taking a step back is sometimes necessary in order to re-evaluate project priorities and success measures.
- Evaluate the number of stakeholders, anticipated complexity, and exposure to challenging and controversial issues throughout the project phases.
- Determine an appropriate level and scope of public consultation for the degree of complexity and challenges in the project.
- Sufficient budget should be allocated for public consultation.
- Ensure that communities are being heard and that their concerns and suggestions are being examined.
- Developing a set of tradeoffs with the communities and external stakeholders has proven to be valuable in developing alternatives.
- Engage the communities early in the project schedule to hear their concerns.

- Ensure there is flexibility in the project to meet citizen, community, and Councillor requests and make changes as necessary.
- The public's understanding of when and how they are engaged plays an important role in the engagement process and in the level of trust between The City and the public.

ENGAGEMENT AND POLICY DEVELOPMENT

Engagement and Communications Plan

The approach to creating the communications and engagement plan for the Transportation Corridor Study Review Project was seen as an opportunity to respond to the need for change as heard from stakeholders during previous transportation projects. What The City heard through this project was that citizens and stakeholders would like to be engaged earlier and more often during the transportation corridor study project lifecycle. With this in mind, the project team created a communications and engagement approach for this project that sought to involve citizens and stakeholders earlier in the project with the view that this approach would serve as a pilot for communications and engagement in future transportation corridor study projects.

In order to develop a collaborative community engagement and communications approach, the project team conducted a multiphase engagement program to gather stakeholder feedback to inform the decision-making process. The engagement approach for the project was divided into three parts.

The three parts of the engagement program were as follows (illustrated in **Figure 3**):

- Part A “Understanding the As Is” was designed to gather feedback about past experiences stakeholders had with previous transportation corridor study projects. The project team wanted to hear about what The City did well and where it could improve the engagement and communications process to create a baseline understanding of stakeholder expectations when it comes to engagement. This phase of engagement was targeted at communities which had experienced transportation corridor studies in the past and internal stakeholders.
- Part B “Shared Learning” was designed to build understanding and to create a “state of readiness” for stakeholders to participate in the writing of the Transportation Corridor Study Policy. Part B was also used to report back to participants what the project team heard during Part A, share what had been learned through case studies and a literature review of best practices for undertaking transportation corridor studies, gather feedback about how stakeholders would like to be involved in the policy writing process and recruit stakeholders to form a Citizen Working Group. This part of engagement marked the city-wide launch of the project.
- Part C “Process Building” was designed to collaborate with a self-selected Citizen Working Group to evaluate and integrate engagement feedback from previous parts of the engagement program and work together to create a draft Transportation Corridor Study Policy. Part C was also used to gather and incorporate feedback from internal and external

stakeholders as well as citizens about the draft policy and guidelines before finalizing the policy and submitting to City Council for approval.

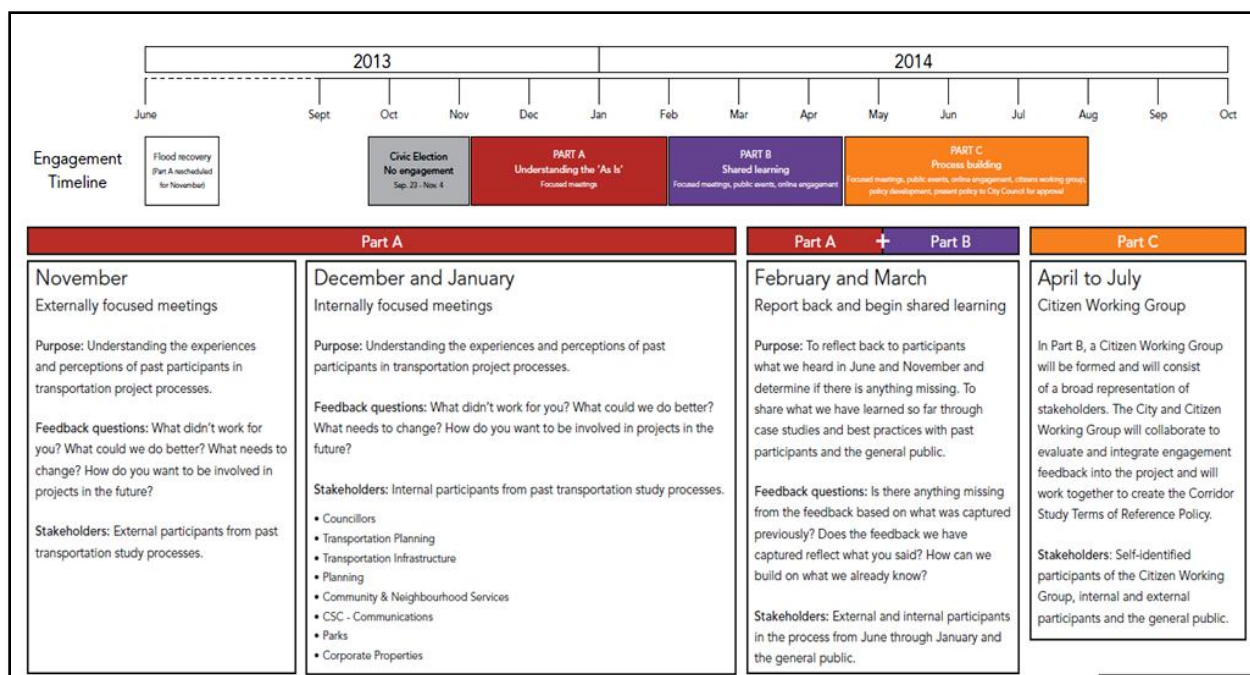


Figure 3 – Policy Development Engagement Plan

The 3-part program ran from June 2013 until July 2014 and strategically targeted various internal and external stakeholders and citizens. Strategic communications encouraged city-wide participation in engagement events that ranged from awareness building and information sharing-style events all the way to collaborative events such as the policy writing workshop. The overall communications goals were as follows:

- Build awareness and understanding about the Transportation Corridor Study Review Project.
- Provide timely, clear, responsive and objective information to assist stakeholders and citizens during all phases of the engagement program.
- Promote opportunities for participation in project engagement events.
- Develop accessible and understandable communication materials for each engagement event throughout the engagement process.
- Respond to stakeholders and citizens in a timely manner and share with them what was heard throughout the engagement program, how feedback was incorporated into decision-making and/or explain why feedback wasn't used.

Part A: Understanding the As Is

In support of Part A: “Understanding the As Is” of the engagement program, the project team held three *Conversations: Planning Transportation Corridors* workshops, an internal stakeholder workshop and an online survey with a total of a 139 participants. Each of the engagement events, in person or online, asked participants to answer 4 questions relating to past experiences with transportation projects, the questions were as follows:

- Question1: What aspects did you like about the transportation planning process you participated in? What can The City do to help make the planning process experiences more consistent and valuable?
- Question 2: What aspects did you not like about the planning process you participated in? What could have been done differently by The City to help make your experience better during the planning process?
- Question 3: What types of transportation projects and/or issues do you want to be involved in? How would you prefer to be involved in transportation projects?
- Question 4: What types or groups of stakeholders and citizens do you think should be involved in transportation projects? At what point in the planning process do you want to be involved?

The general themes from those engagement events included the following:

- Engagement needs to be conducted before decisions are being made.
- Stakeholders would like to have more opportunities to participate at the onset of projects and throughout them.
- A preference for engagement opportunities that have fewer participants thereby allowing for more meaningful interactions among attendees and with City staff as opposed to having one large event.
- Web, online surveys, phone and other alternative methods for stakeholder participation should be considered in addition to in-person sessions.
- The need to simplify the information being presented into common categories such as costs, impact, and efficiency and provide that information visually.

Part B: Shared Learning

In support of Part B: “Shared Learning” of the engagement program, the project team created a four- part plan to share information and promote the second phase of stakeholder and citizen workshops. The four part plan included place-based engagement, holding two additional *Conversations: Planning Transportation Corridors* workshops for stakeholders, a workshop with third-party consultants often contracted to undertake transportation corridor studies on behalf of

The City and recruited volunteers from the public to form the Citizen Working Group that would help write the policy.

The project team asked attendees at the two *Conversations* workshops to put themselves in the position of The City's Transportation Planning team and use a provided, fictitious transportation corridor study scenario to create a plan for communicating and engaging the public. The case study exercise helped participants understand the process of a transportation corridor study and gave participants the opportunity to provide feedback about when and how in the process the public should be involved. The exercise helped to prepare participants for the next phase of engagement: Part C Process Building and policy writing.

To establish a group that would collaboratively write the policy, during Part B of the engagement program, the project team asked external stakeholders and citizens to volunteer as part of a Citizen Working Group that would work together with the project team to write the new policy. A total of 17 people volunteered for the working group.

The general themes from those engagement events included the following:

- Citizens and stakeholders should be involved during these three phases of the transportation corridor study technical planning process:
 - Identify and define study areas and needs
 - Develop possible transportation corridor concepts
 - Identify preferred transportation corridor concepts
- Community feedback should be used to influence decision-making in the following ways:
 - Find themes
 - Balance professional expertise with community feedback and policy
 - Try to blend input and build consensus
- The new policy should:
 - Be scalable to the project and be flexible;
 - Seek to maximize “public acceptance” early in the process;
 - Provide a framework of the planning process so citizens know what to expect;
 - Define the process for identifying stakeholders, level of engagement, timelines; and
 - Follow CTP principles.
- The new policy should not:
 - Dictate timelines, formats, strategies, project objectives, goals; and
 - Require a consensus or definite number of people participating in engagement.

Part C: Process Building

In support of Part C: “Process Building” of the engagement program, the project team created a two-phase approach to use the engagement feedback from the first two parts of engagement to outline and draft the new policy and associated guidelines for implementing the policy.

During the first phase, the project team, together with the 17 volunteers forming the Citizen Working Group, held two meetings to begin the process of writing the policy. The first meeting with the Citizen Working Group included a handout of The City of Calgary policy document template and an explanation of what each section should and should not include. The meeting then moved into a content creation discussion for each of the policy sections.

Prior to the second Citizen Working Group meeting, the project team used the feedback from the first meeting to create a draft of the policy as discussed and decided by the working group. During the second meeting, the project team and working group reviewed the draft to make sure the content reflected the feedback provided and worked through each section of the draft policy to review, discuss and finalize content.

In the second phase, stakeholders were invited to review the draft of the completed policy. The project team held two information sessions and posted the policy on the project webpage to solicit feedback and comments.

THE TRANSPORTATION CORRIDOR POLICY

The project team in collaboration with the Citizen Working Group drafted and finalized the Transportation Corridor Policy which was approved by Council. The Policy is broken down into: background, purpose, scope, definitions, policy, and procedure. The purpose, scope, and summary of the policy statements are discussed below.

Purpose & Scope

The objective of the Policy is to guide Administration, Council and the Public about how The City will undertake Transportation Corridor Studies using best practices (interactive, two-way, multiple channels, timely, etc.) of communications and by following The City’s engage! Policy.

This new Policy applies to all transportation corridor studies undertaken by The City once it has been determined by the Transportation Department that a corridor study is required.

Policy Summary

The Transportation Corridor Policy clarifies what is and is not intended to be undertaken as part of a Transportation Corridor Study.

The City of Calgary will:

- Undertake Transportation Corridor Studies to facilitate long term growth of the City based on the goals and objectives of the CTP.
- Use a multifaceted communications approach to communicate with stakeholders.
- Conduct the appropriate level of engagement based on the classification of the corridor, impact to the surrounding community and the engage! policy.
- Provide clear definitions of desired outcomes and tradeoffs for the movement of all transportation modes.
- Work with stakeholders to identify existing and potential issues along a Transportation Corridor.
- Use the issues identified and work with stakeholders to develop concepts for improvements to a Transportation Corridor.
- Seek to develop concepts that:
 - Preserve the integrity of adjacent communities
 - Identify community improvements
 - Minimize negative impacts on adjacent land uses and open spaces
 - Include a 'do nothing' concept
 - Include staging and prioritizing both interim and ultimate solutions
- Communicate the factors and timelines that may lead to implementation of the recommended concept(s)

The City will not review the function or classification of the transportation corridor as part of the transportation corridor study process.

Stakeholders will:

- Have an opportunity to participate in an active two way process to develop and evaluate concepts.
- Have an opportunity to understand the issues and/or need for a transportation corridor study.
- Have the ability to follow up on the corridor study process through various engagement and communication tactics.

GUIDELINES

In order to supplement and facilitate implementation of the Transportation Corridor Study Policy, a set of guidelines was developed. The Interim Transportation Corridor Study Guidelines (the Guidelines) document The City of Calgary Transportation Department's current and recommended approach to undertaking Transportation Corridor Studies with stakeholders, citizens and the public at large. They are intended to help inform Council, Administration, retained consultants and all stakeholders of the requirements, goals, and objectives of

Transportation Corridor Studies as well as the engagement processes that will be used to complete these studies.

The Guidelines outline the selection strategy of candidate corridors and provide information relating to the guiding policies and directions that form the foundation of all transportation corridor studies. A detailed overview of the transportation corridor study process is included and guidance provided as to where opportunities for engagement exist throughout the course of the study. Suggestions for means of communication with stakeholders and formats of engagement are also provided, for information only. Specific tactics should be identified in the project-specific engagement and communications plan. The Guidelines incorporate the following Policy principles for the process of transportation corridor studies:

- Project Initiation - The City will use its best efforts to inform Stakeholders of the initiation of a transportation corridor study;
- Issue Identification and Problem Definition – The City will make its best efforts to involve stakeholders to identify issues within a Corridor;
- Project Goal Development – The City will seek to provide, by engaging with stakeholders, clear definitions of desired outcomes for a transportation corridor study;
- Concept Identification – The City will seek to establish, by engaging stakeholders, feasible transportation corridor concepts to meet the project goals that seek to preserve the integrity of adjacent communities, minimize the negative impacts of transportation corridor concepts on land uses and open spaces adjacent to transportation corridors and meet the goals and objectives of the transportation corridor as identified within the CTP;
- Concept Evaluation – The City will seek to undertake, with the assistance of stakeholders, an evaluation of the potential concepts for a transportation corridor in a manner that is consistent with The City’s Triple Bottom Line Policy and considers such factors as community impacts, cost vs. benefit, feasibility, etc.; and
- Concept Selection and Recommendation – The City will seek to select and recommend, with the assistance of Stakeholders, the preferred concept(s) for the transportation corridor. The preferred concept(s) will consider short term and interim improvements along with the ultimate solution.

The Guidelines can be accessed online at www.calgary.ca/corridorstudies.

CONCLUSION

In the past, transportation corridor studies were often conducted with an eye towards achieving the technical or engineering objectives of the study – determination of roadway requirements and right-of-way. However, it has become very apparent that this strategy does not place an appropriate amount of emphasis on the impacts of roadway planning studies on adjacent communities and citizens.

Going forward, The City intends to expand the scope of a typical transportation corridor study to better examine the corridor’s integration with adjacent land uses and its impact on communities and open spaces. The new scope of the transportation corridor study will also identify an appropriate level of stakeholder engagement, related to considerations such as the number and proximity of adjacent communities and the complexity of the project.

The new policy developed through the Transportation Corridor Study Review Project will be more sensitive to context and outlines eight specific commitments associated with engagement that The City of Calgary will meet on every project. The policy also outlines the scope of a transportation corridor study. In addition to the Policy, a set of interim Guidelines have been developed to complement the policy and provide guidance on the new process to be followed for transportation corridor studies including how and when to engage stakeholders. **Table 1** illustrates the differences between the ‘old’ and the ‘new’ transportation corridor study processes.

Table 1 – Comparison of Study Processes

Element	Old Process	New Process
Process Approach	Traditional	Context sensitive
Project Scoping	Pre-RFP and selection of consultant with little external input	In conjunction with RFP preparation with input from consultant and/or stakeholders
Issue Identification	Solely done by project team	Jointly done by project team and stakeholders
Issue Resolution	Back end loaded	Front end loaded
Engagement Plan	Preset	Iterative
Engagement Tactics	Determined by project team	Determined by stakeholders and project team
Project Methodology	Varied by project manager	Process framework providing consistency for stakeholders

REFERENCES

[1] FHWA. (2013, May 16). *Federal Highway Administration*. Retrieved September 9, 2013, from http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/planning/public_involvement/archive/legislation/pi_pol.cfm

[2] Maryland State Highway Administration. *Thinking Beyond the Pavement*. Conference, Washington, DC: Federal Highway Administration, 1998.

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