

Edmonton-Strathcona County Footbridge

Environmental Impact Assessment and Site Location Study

RECOMMENDATION

That Executive Committee recommend to City Council:

1. That the Environmental Impact Assessment and Site Location Study for the Edmonton-Strathcona County Footbridge project, as set out in Attachment 1 and 2 of March 23, 2022, Integrated Infrastructure Services report IIS00765, be approved.
2. That the location of the footbridge in the River Valley be deemed essential and approved pursuant to Section 3.4.1 of the North Saskatchewan River Valley Area Redevelopment Plan, Bylaw 7188.

Report Purpose

Council decision required.

Council is asked to approve the Environmental Impact Assessment and Site Location Study report for the Edmonton-Strathcona County Footbridge project and deem the footbridge's location in the River Valley essential, in accordance with the North Saskatchewan River Valley Area Redevelopment Plan - Bylaw 7188.

Executive Summary

- This report requests City Council's approval of the Environmental Impact Assessment (included in Attachment 1) and Site Location Study (included in Attachment 2) for the Edmonton-Strathcona County Footbridge project.
- While the footbridge will result in new disturbances to the North Saskatchewan River and adjacent terrestrial habitats, plans are in place to minimize environmental impacts.
- The Environmental Impact Assessment recommends measures to minimize the amount and duration of environmental impacts.
- A restoration plan will provide for terrestrial areas outside of the infrastructure footprint to re-establish and blend with surrounding natural habitats to help to prevent long term environmental issues.

Edmonton-Strathcona County Footbridge - Environmental Impact Assessment and Site Location Study

- Impacts to the North Saskatchewan River and its aquatic habitat will be minimized by establishing mitigation measures related to surface hydrology and fish habitat.
- The Environmental Impact Assessment for the project concludes that any potential adverse effects of the project can be avoided, reduced, or mitigated by applying appropriate measures during project design and construction.
- The footbridge will improve the connectivity of trail networks in Edmonton and Strathcona County, provide recreation opportunities, and expand year-round enjoyment of the North Saskatchewan River Valley.
- Approval of this report demonstrates the City's commitment to environmental project reviews, environmental permitting, and environmentally sound design. This work ensures that the City's environmental stewardship outcome is met during the construction of this project.

REPORT

The North Saskatchewan River Valley is one of the Edmonton Metropolitan Region's most cherished amenities, renowned for its ecological, recreational, and cultural value. The Edmonton-Strathcona County Footbridge project will create an active mode link between Edmonton and Strathcona County. It will connect to the North Saskatchewan River Valley trail systems, including the Great Trail of Canada (Trans-Canada Trail). The Great Trail of Canada is the longest trail network in the world, and connects Canadians and visitors to nature in Canada, from coast to coast. Please refer to the following site for a map with details:
<https://tctrail.ca/explore-the-map/>.

The footbridge will be located over the North Saskatchewan River, connecting the northeast area of the City of Edmonton to Strathcona County along the alignment of 167 Avenue in Edmonton and Township Road 540 in Strathcona County. Refer to page 9, Figure 1-1 of the Environmental Assessment report (Attachment 1) for the project area. This project will enhance connectivity and access through the North Saskatchewan River Valley, and improve opportunities for recreation and connectivity throughout the Region. The River Valley Alliance, Strathcona County and City of Edmonton are partners in funding this project.

Planning for a new pedestrian/cyclist bridge between northeast Edmonton and Strathcona County began in 2007 with the approval of the River Valley Alliance's guiding document, *A Plan of Action for the Capital Region River Valley Park*. In January 2020, the City of Edmonton, in partnership with Strathcona County and the River Valley Alliance, completed a feasibility study for a new pedestrian/cyclist bridge over the North Saskatchewan River at approximately the alignment of 167 Avenue/Township Road 540. The footbridge is also identified in the City's Ribbon of Green, the Strathcona County Trail Strategy, and the River Valley Alliance's Plan of Action 2007 and Strategic Plan 2021-2024. In December 2020, the planning and design phase began, with anticipated completion in February 2022. Pending funding approval, construction is expected to start in the summer of 2022, with completion targeted at the end of 2024, though delivery timelines are currently in development.

Edmonton-Strathcona County Footbridge - Environmental Impact Assessment and Site Location Study

In accordance with Section 3.4.1 of the North Saskatchewan River Valley Area Redevelopment Plan - Bylaw 7188, the project is subject to the approval of an Environmental Impact Assessment that outlines current conditions in the project area, evaluates potential risks, and identifies adverse impacts that must be eliminated, minimized or mitigated through design, landscaping and construction measures. A Site Location Study was also completed to analyze and confirm the location of the proposed footbridge, and the project is subject to its location in the River Valley being deemed essential by City Council. The Environmental Impact Assessment discusses potential impacts (Attachment 1, Section 5) on the biophysical environment resulting from implementing the project elements referenced in the report. The Environmental Impact Assessment provides mitigation measures to ensure the project will not result in any significant adverse impacts on the environment.

As summarized in the Environmental Impact Assessment, the potential key impacts and mitigations include:

- Steep and potentially unstable slopes of the North Saskatchewan River Valley.
 - Construct eastern bridge approach early in construction schedule to allow for settlement of the underlying material
 - Excavate foundation soils that may contribute to instability.
- Surface Water – North Saskatchewan River flood levels.
 - Create a flood response plan and minimize the duration/extent of instream berms.
- Surface Water – Water quality in the North Saskatchewan River.
 - Follow recommendations for instream work made by qualified Aquatic Environment Specialists.
 - Avoid the use of hazardous substances in or near the North Saskatchewan River.
 - Avoid refuelling equipment or performing equipment repairs or maintenance within 30 meters of the North Saskatchewan river bank.
- Fish Habitat - Aquatic habitat in the North Saskatchewan River.
 - Minimize the duration and extent of instream berms, where possible.
 - Implement measures to avoid harm to fish and fish habitat.
 - Install isolation berms outside of the restricted activity period for the river.
 - Complete a fish rescue after constructing isolation berms within the isolated areas.
- Vegetation
 - Prioritize the use of previously disturbed areas for access and construction.
 - Vegetation removal to be completed by contractors under the direction of Natural Areas Operations.
 - Project clearing limits will be marked with highly visible flagging to minimize the extent of vegetation loss.
- Wildlife
 - Accommodate access through or around construction areas for passage of medium to large mammals.
 - Direct any construction lighting towards the construction area and avoid projecting light into surrounding natural areas.

Edmonton-Strathcona County Footbridge - Environmental Impact Assessment and Site Location Study

- Keep the construction area clean of garbage and waste and avoid feeding or harassment of wildlife.
- Historical Resources – Potentially undiscovered archaeological, palaeontological, and/or provincially designated historic resources and/or Indigenous traditional use sites.
 - Stop work and inform the project team of discoveries of potential historic resources.
 - Report discovery of potential historical resources to Alberta Culture, Multiculturalism and Status of Women.
- Impacts on Recreational Use
 - Temporary fencing will be installed around the active construction area and signage will be posted indicating project information, duration, and a phone number for inquiries.

The Site Location Study also highlights some benefits of the project:

- The project will integrate existing trails on both sides of the river, thus expanding the length of trails available to Edmontonians and visitors of Edmonton.
- Barrier-free design considerations will help more people access the river valley.
- There will be more opportunities for connecting with nature, celebration, cultural activities and the inclusion of more people after the bridge is installed.

Budget/Financial Implications

Funding for this project is approved under Capital Profile 20-20-2024 (Edmonton-Strathcona County Pedestrian Bridge) for planning and design from Project Develop and Delivery Model (PDDM) Checkpoint 1 to Checkpoint 4. The profile contains \$4.4 million. The project team will bring forward a request in the first half of 2022 for construction funding (to PDDM Checkpoint 5), including details related to cost-sharing agreements with other funding partners.

Legal Implications

The North Saskatchewan River Valley Area Redevelopment Plan - Bylaw 7188 requires that the Environmental Impact Assessment report and Site Location Study report for the Edmonton-Strathcona County Footbridge project be approved by City Council and that the location of the footbridge within the River Valley be deemed essential by City Council before the proposed development can proceed to construction.

The requirements of the North Saskatchewan River Valley Area Redevelopment Plan - Bylaw 7188 only apply to those portions of the project located within the boundaries of the City of Edmonton.

COMMUNITY INSIGHT

The community outreach for this project involved comprehensive stakeholder engagement, public engagement and Indigenous engagement.

The project team has reached out to the public and stakeholders, including businesses, adjacent landowners, environmental, cycling, community, and recreation groups, to share project information and obtain feedback on plans. Several in-person meetings have been held with and are continuing with key stakeholders.

Edmonton-Strathcona County Footbridge - Environmental Impact Assessment and Site Location Study

Two online public engagement sessions were held for this project: the first was in April 2021 to introduce the project and the second was in June 2021 to obtain feedback on the draft concept design. Public engagement surveys and presentation materials were made available on the project website. Over 1,000 responses have been provided to the surveys for this project. The project website is updated regularly with the latest, up-to-date information.

For Indigenous engagement, four virtual workshops were carried out in January 2021 to share preliminary project information and gather input and knowledge for the footbridge project. Indigenous communities were invited to view potentially impacted areas and receive more details about the footbridge. Site visits were held in July 2021. Facilitators and note takers were assigned to each community to capture on-site recommendations and perspectives. Attendees were of diverse ages, abilities and genders, including 19 Indigenous Nations and communities, represented by 55 members who participated in the sessions.

A public event is planned for March 2022 to share the preliminary design with the public for feedback. In addition, before the start of construction, anticipated to begin in mid to late 2022, a pre-construction public information session will be held. Key highlights will be shared, including details on expected construction activities and trail closures that will affect the public, including how trail traffic will be managed throughout construction.

GBA+

Project information is being shared with adjacent residents, landowners, business owners, people who use the river valley area to commute, bike and walk, and anyone interested in learning more about the project via the project website or direct email from the project manager. Diverse methods are being used to communicate, including email, mail, one-on-one in-person and virtual meetings, verbal presentation (live), a recording of the presentation, a question-answer document, site visits, public engagement surveys and a publicly accessible website.

GBA+ considerations are reflected in this project through the design process. One consideration includes barrier-free access, ensuring that people of diverse backgrounds, ages and physical abilities can be users of the facilities and amenities. This will be achieved by accommodating active modes of transportation on site, considering the grades of existing routes and overall bridge slopes and width. Illumination and wayfinding signage has been confirmed as components of this project and will include simple navigational displays to assist people of various backgrounds and cultures. Public art and interpretive panels are being considered to ensure that the public displays are appropriate for all ages and backgrounds.

The equity measures identified and implemented include arranging a pre-construction information session about the construction activities and closures and ensuring the safety of all users during construction. In addition to the engagement and communication activities identified earlier, the City of Edmonton's Neighbourhood Resource Coordinator for this area will be contacted to ensure that appropriate community notification has been completed.

Edmonton-Strathcona County Footbridge - Environmental Impact Assessment and Site Location Study

ATTACHMENTS

1. Edmonton-Strathcona County Footbridge - Environmental Impact Assessment
2. Edmonton-Strathcona County Footbridge - Site Location Study - 2020-3925