

What We Heard Report: Yellowhead Trail Freeway Conversion Program

Spring 2019

| **SHARE** YOUR VOICE
SHAPE OUR CITY

Edmonton

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I. YELLOWHEAD TRAIL FREEWAY CONVERSION PROGRAM OVERVIEW

Identified in the City's proposed 2019–2022 Capital Budget as a transformational project, the freeway conversion will upgrade Yellowhead Trail to improve the safety, operational capacity and level of service of this key inter-city, inter-regional and inter-provincial route. Yellowhead Trail has the highest volume of truck traffic within Edmonton and has national significance as part of the Trans-Canada Highway.

The Program has an approximate budget of \$1 billion and is funded by all 3 levels of government.

What does this mean for you?

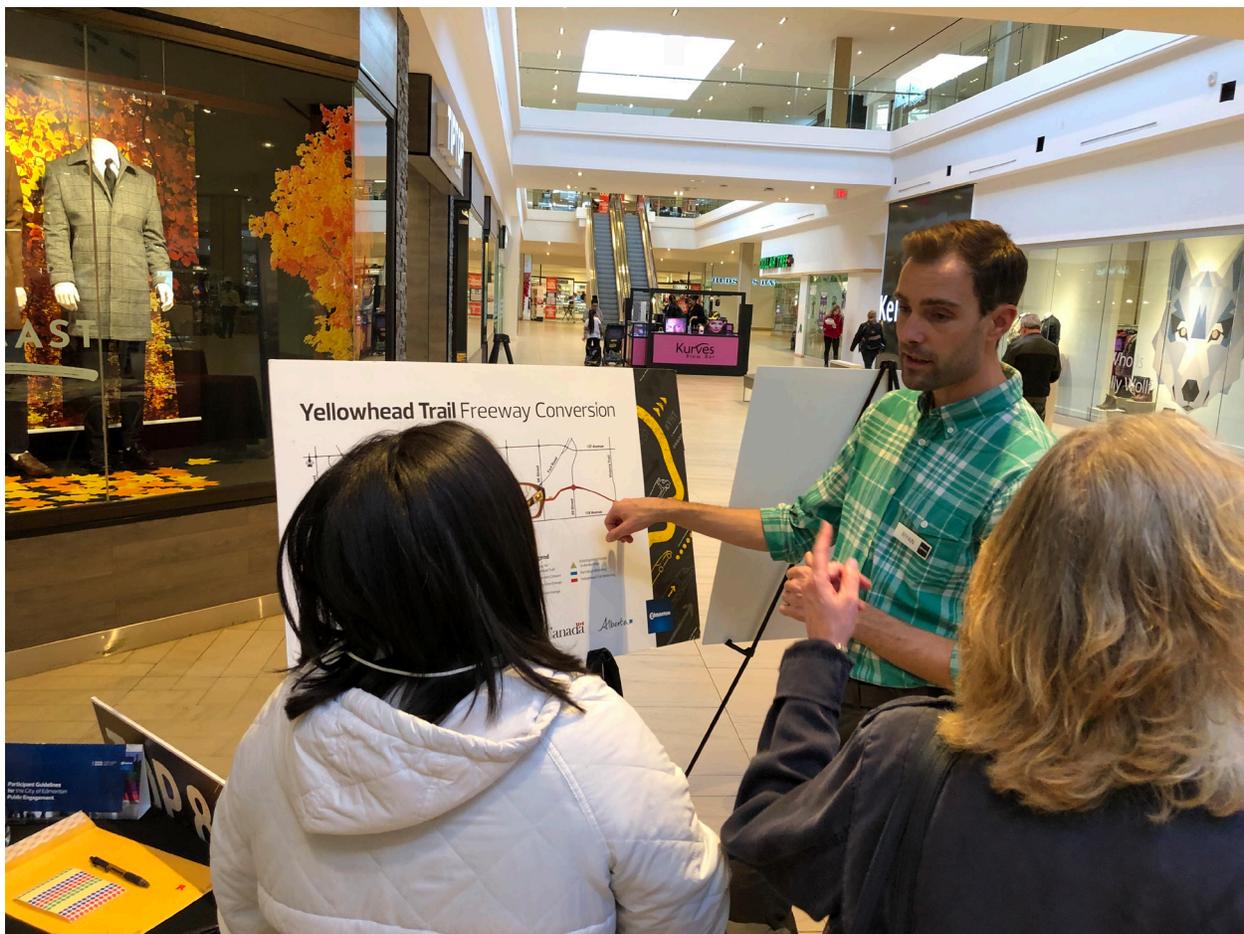
Yellowhead Trail is changing. It is becoming a freeway which means three lanes of free-flowing traffic in each direction with a target speed of 80 km/hr. To achieve this, current signalized intersections and direct access on or off Yellowhead Trail will be removed and two new interchanges will be built. Road users will exit and enter Yellowhead Trail at the nearest interchange or a new parallel service road.



Yellowhead Trail is Changing: Full Speed A [Yellow]head

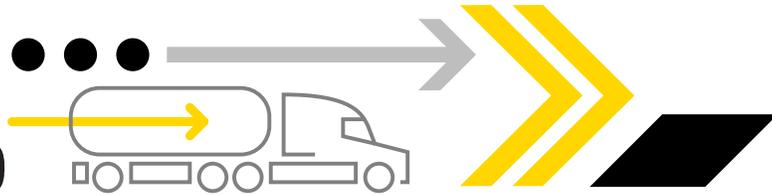
II. INTRODUCTION

From September to November 2018, the City hosted conversations with stakeholders and the public about the Yellowhead Trail Freeway Conversion Program (the Program). The City wanted to understand the public's level of knowledge of the current plans, initial ideas, issues and concerns with the Program. Building awareness of the freeway conversion and gaining a better understanding of the breadth of interested and impacted stakeholders, was also a focus. The feedback will also help the City ensure future communications and engagement plans reflect the ideas and preferences of the public and how they want to be involved and informed.



III. HOW YOU ENGAGED

HOW YOU ENGAGED



Timeline



Face-to-face

917 Visitors **AT** 18 Pop up events

84 Attendees **AT** 31 Stakeholder interviews & meetings

23 Attendees **AT** 4 Focus groups

Written

144 Paper survey respondents **31** Email submissions

Online

1,200 Panel survey respondents **2,157** Open-link survey respondents

Other attendance

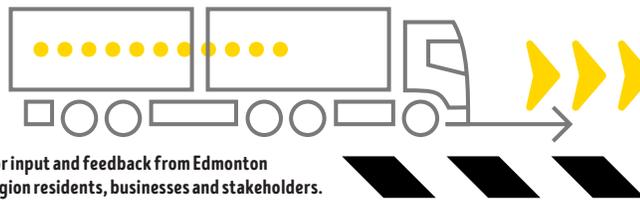
276 Visitors **AT** 8 Other City pop up events

4,832 Total participants engaged

IV. WHO ENGAGED

WHO ENGAGED

The City asked for input and feedback from Edmonton Metropolitan Region residents, businesses and stakeholders.



Ages



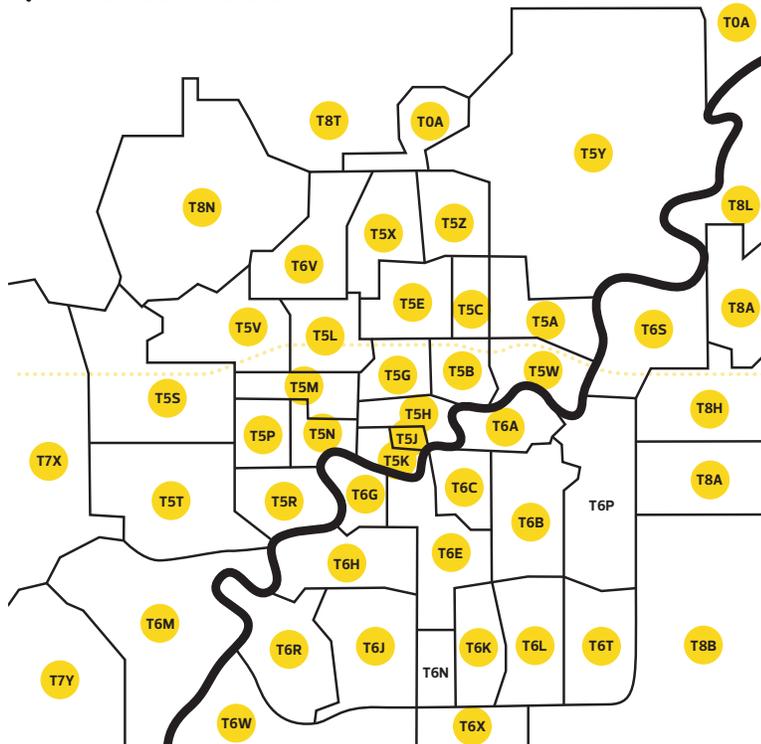
Number of years in Edmonton



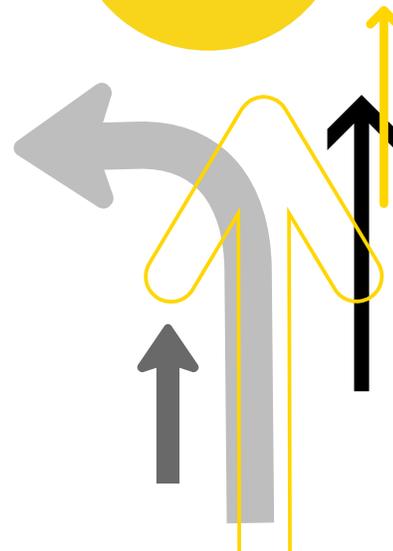
Own or rent



Postal code

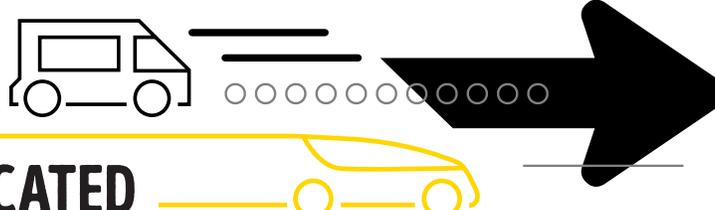


Outside of Edmonton:
 Parkland County
 Sturgeon County
 Strathcona County
 Lamont County



V. HOW WE COMMUNICATED

HOW WE COMMUNICATED



12,651  Visitors to website

604  YouTube video views

9,900  Chalkboard video views

637  E-newsletter sign-ups

3  Newsletters sent out

Social media interactions

 **219** Likes  **132** Shares  **93** Comments

 **8** Tweets  **26** Retweets  **11** Comments

517  Radio ads  **20** Print ads

70 @ Direct emails  **23** Telephone calls

VI. WHAT WE ASKED

There were three key topic areas we wanted to better understand:

- Program Awareness
- Identification of key issues, concerns, topics and areas of interest
- How participants want to be involved

Depending on how respondents participated the questions differed slightly, but the core concepts remained consistent. Questions were altered to suit audience needs.

Program Awareness

Participants were asked questions regarding their level of knowledge and awareness of the Program and their level of interest in joining the conversation. Sample questions:

- *Have you heard about the City's plans to convert Yellowhead Trail into a freeway?*
- *Where did you hear about the freeway conversion plans?*
- *Please share with us your level of interest in joining a conversation about changing Yellowhead Trail into a freeway.*

It was important to gather location specific information to pinpoint where on Yellowhead Trail participants are most interested in providing input. Participants were provided a map (see page 17) to identify the location. Sample questions:

- *If given the opportunity, what areas or locations on Yellowhead Trail would you be interested in providing input on, as part of the Freeway Conversion Program? Please circle the areas you are most interested in.*
- *Thinking of future use of Yellowhead Trail after it becomes a freeway, please describe what aspects of the trail your organization is looking forward to? And why?*

Identification of key issues, concerns, topics and areas of interest

In order to understand the effects of the Program, participants were asked to identify key issues, topics, opportunities and concerns. Participants were also asked what was most important to them about this topic and why it mattered. Sample questions:

- *What are the key issues, topics, opportunities and concerns that we will need to talk about with the public?*
- *What information is important for you to know about this Program?*

How participants want to be involved

In order to adjust and adapt the City's approach to future communication and engagement plans, participants were asked how they want to be involved in the conversation in the future.

Sample questions:

- *How do you currently learn about public engagement opportunities sponsored by the City?*
- *We know there are a variety of different expectations and preferences for how people may want to join this conversation (about the Freeway Conversion Program). Which of the following methods work best for you?*
- *With so many ways to communicate we want to know how you would like to hear more about the Program. What communication methods do you prefer?*

Basic demographic information was also collected in order to validate and adjust assumptions about who was interested in the Program. Participants were asked the following demographic questions:

- *In which of the following age categories do you belong?*
- *How long have you lived in the Edmonton area?*

Question modified to specific audiences

When working specifically with stakeholder groups, we asked them to identify additional stakeholders who may have been missed and need to be included in the conversation.

- *Changes to Yellowhead Trail have impacts on many different people. What are your suggestions or recommendations for groups, organizations or individuals we should reach out to?*

VII. WHAT YOU TOLD US

What do you already know about the Yellowhead Trail Freeway Conversion Program?

Participants were asked to identify their current level of knowledge about the Program. We asked, "Have you heard about the City's plans to convert Yellowhead Trail into a freeway?"

Here's how you responded:

- 77% of those who participated indicated they had heard about the City's plan to convert Yellowhead Trail into a freeway (34% answering yes, and 43% answering yes, but vaguely)
- 22% indicated they had not heard about the City's plan for Yellowhead Trail
- 1% of respondents replied *not sure*

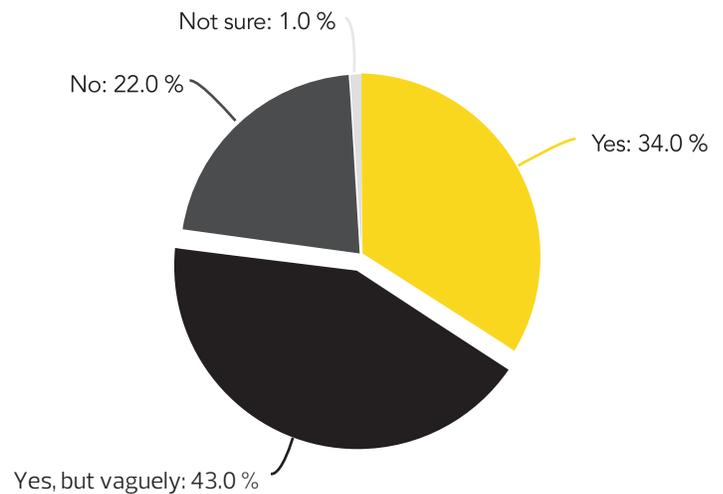
Participants told us they heard about the Program from a variety of sources such as:

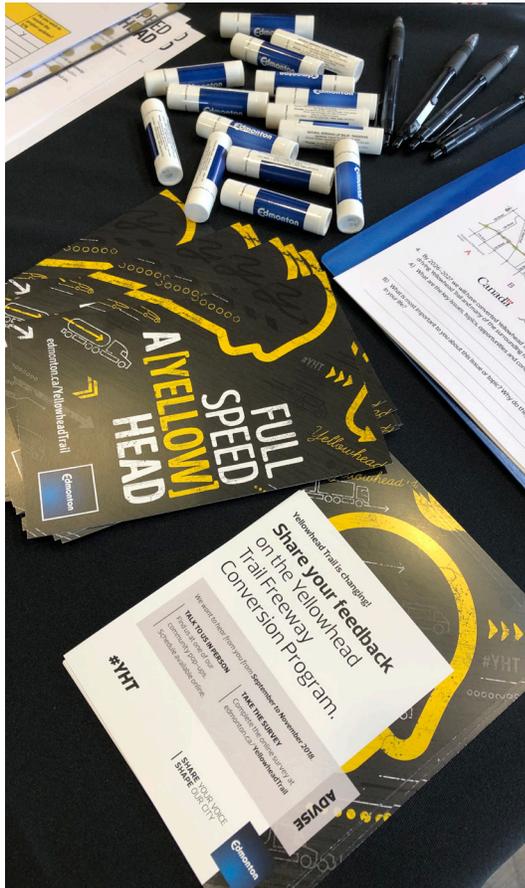
- Attendance at another City meeting (such as Building Great Neighbourhoods events)
- Participating in the City's online Insight Community
- City social media channels

In our conversations with participants, we learned that their depth of knowledge about project details varied. Some knew very little and others were aware of more specific details.



Results from Online Survey





Interest level in joining the conversation

Participants were also asked to share their level of interest in joining the conversation about the Program.

Here's how you responded:

- 17% indicated a *really high* interest
- 30% of respondents told us they had a *high* interest in joining the conversation
- 27% answered *medium* interest
- 32% replied *medium low*
- 23% told us *low*
- 6% of participants told us they were *not interested in this conversation*

In our dialogue with the public we learned that there were a variety of reasons people were not interested in this conversation.

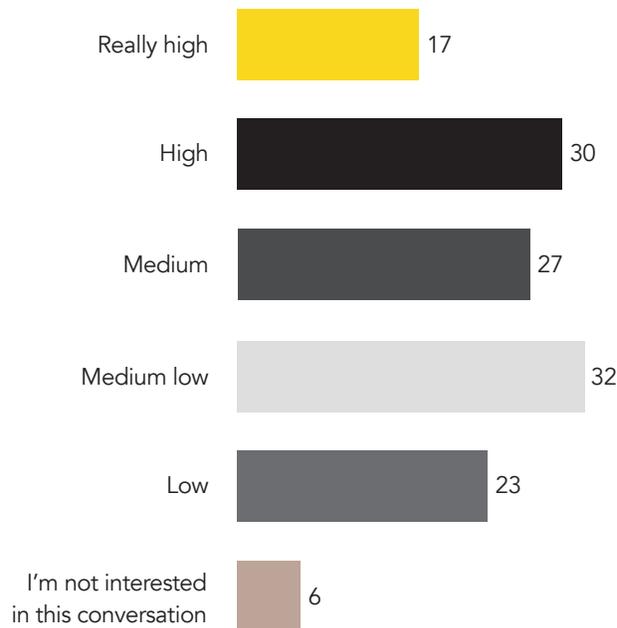
We heard:

- Taking alternate routes and not driving on Yellowhead Trail
- Use of public transportation
- Satisfaction that the project was happening

There were some that also expressed that they did not have interest or capacity to participate in the conversation due to family commitments and involvement in other City initiatives.



Results from Pop Up Events



Multiple answers possible.
Number shown represent percentages.

What information is important?

In order to inform future engagement and communication plans, we asked participants:

What information is important for you to know about the Program?

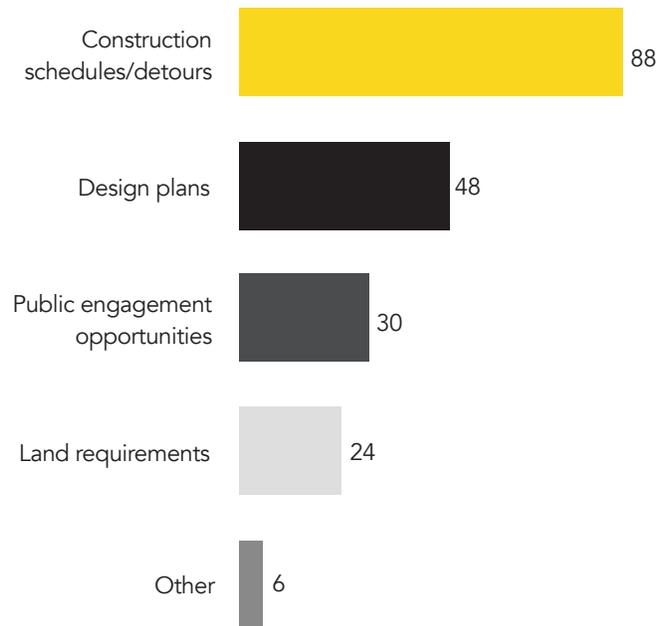
Here's how you responded:

- 88% noted *construction schedules/detours*
- 48% indicated *design plans*
- 30% of participants would like information about *public engagement opportunities*
- 24% are interested in *land requirements*
- 6% indicated *other* and provided additional suggestions such as budget, transparency, access points in and out of neighbourhoods and at specific intersections

Respondents overwhelmingly indicated that information about construction schedules and detours are most important for them to know. We specifically heard comments relating to traffic routes, flow and timelines.



Results from Online Survey



Multiple answers possible.
Number shown represent percentages.



ROUTE PLANS, DETAILED
IMPLEMENTATION TIMELINES.

LET PEOPLE KNOW AHEAD OF TIME
OF YOUR PLANS.

LENGTH OF TRAFFIC DISRUPTION
DURING CONSTRUCTION.



How should we communicate information about the Program?

We asked participants to identify how they would prefer to hear more information about the Program.

Here's how you responded:

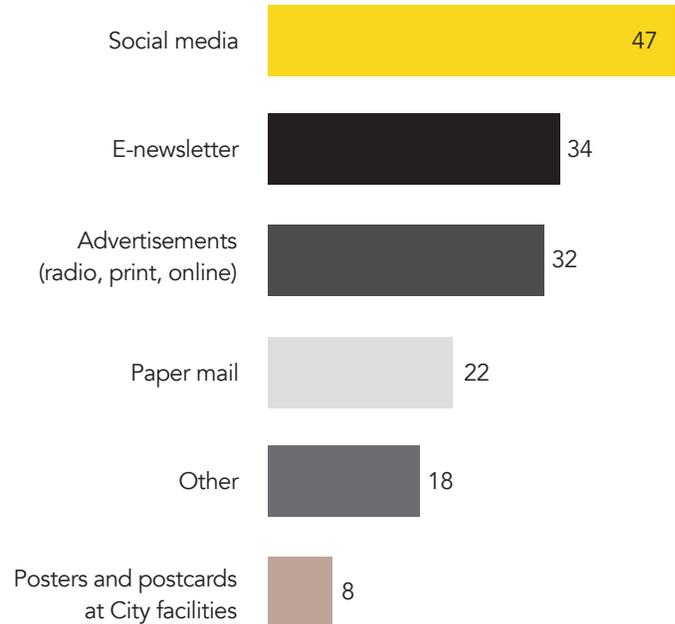
- 47% prefer *social media posts*
- 34% of participants indicated *e-newsletter*
- 32% of people told us *advertisements*
- 22% responded *paper mail*
- 18% replied other (*including ideas such as City website, morning TV show and local newspapers*)
- 8% responded posters and postcards at *City of Edmonton facilities*

Some additional options we heard from participants included:

- Community League Facebook group
- Community League newsletter
- Email distribution lists
- Mail-out
- Word of mouth



Results from Online Survey



Multiple answers possible.
Number shown represent percentages.



We also asked participants to:

Please tell us how you currently get your information and/or learn about public engagement opportunities.

Here's how you responded:

- 65% indicated *media story* as their medium to learn about public engagement opportunities
- 42% of respondents indicated *social media*
- 38% told us they learn about opportunities through *word of mouth*
- 30% responded *advertisements*
- 26% get their information from the City *website* or another municipal website
- 21% indicated via *mail/flyers*
- 14% of participants learn about opportunities through a *community group or organization* via methods such as newsletter or announcement
- 4% responded *other* which included emails (30%), signs on the road (22%), Edmonton Insight Community (7%), and radio (7%)

In addition, participants shared their expectations for how they want to be engaged for this Program. We heard general feedback about engagement as well as more specific ideas.

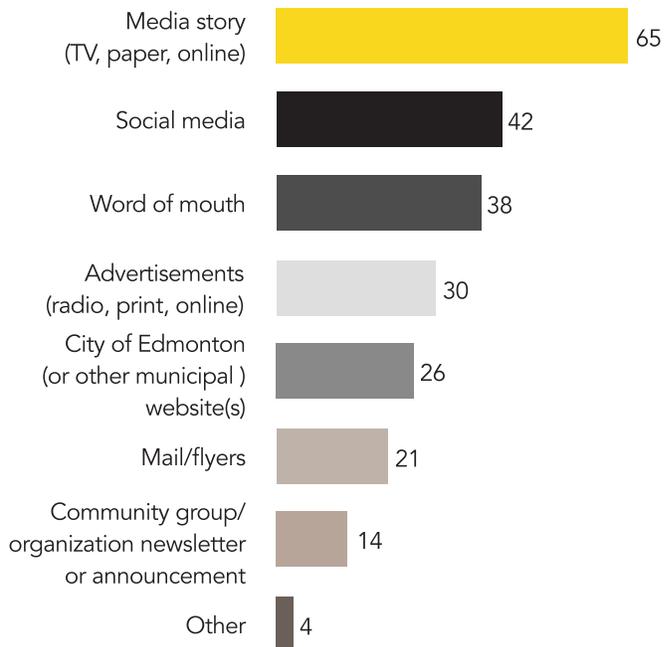
- It was recommended that the City raise awareness about the Yellowhead Trail Freeway Conversion Program and relay information to residents as early as possible and in easily accessible ways.
- There is an expectation from communities that the City will be sincere in their efforts to engage and that input received will link back to decisions made.

More specifically, participants shared ideas for how the City could share information with them. A sample of what we heard is below.

- An interactive map online
- Traffic modelling to help visualize changes to traffic patterns
- Large signage on the streets
- Verbal or interactive project updates (viewable online)



Results from Online Survey



Multiple answers possible.
Number shown represent percentages.

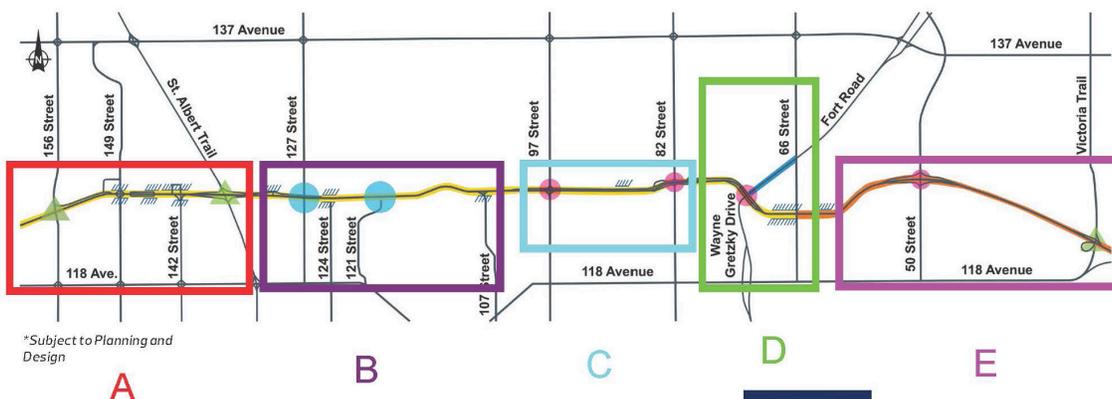


What are the areas of Yellowhead Trail you are most interested in talking about?

Participants were provided a map of Yellowhead Trail and asked to identify what areas or locations on Yellowhead Trail they would be interested in providing input on if given the opportunity. This map is shown below. Here's how you responded:

Online Survey Results

Yellowhead Trail Upgrades



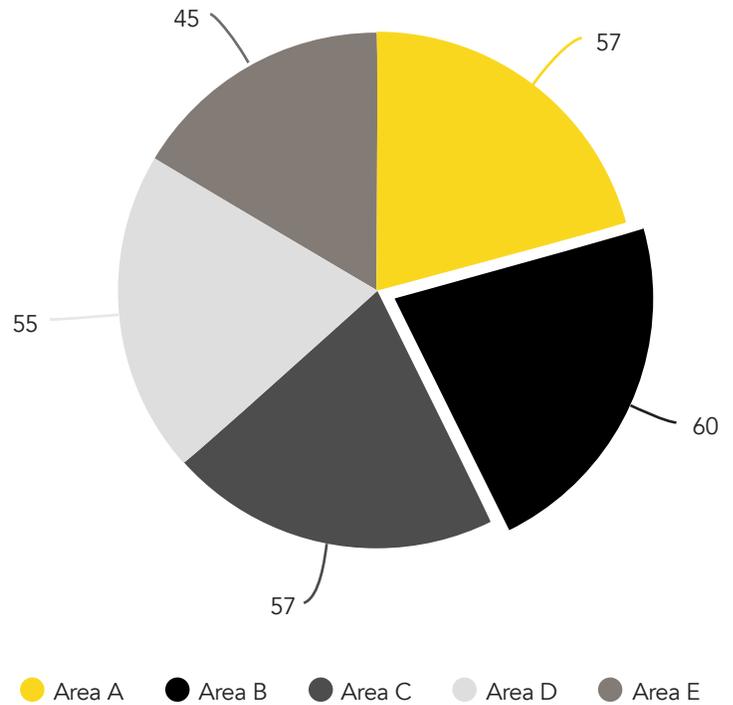
Interest in providing input on Yellowhead Trail by area ranged from 45% to 60% with Area E receiving the least interest. Here's how participants responded when we asked where they'd like to provide input:

- 57% of respondents were interested in providing input on Area A. Non-users are least interested (37%) while on-corridor residents are most interested (65%)
- 60% indicated Area B as where they would like to provide feedback. Non-users are least interested (40%) while on-corridor residents are most interested (75%)
- 57% of participants responded Area C. Non-users are least interested (31%) while on-corridor residents are most interested (76%)
- 55% indicated an interest in Area D. Similar to other areas, non-users are least interested (36%) while on-corridor residents are most interested (69%)

45% shared that Area E is the location on Yellowhead Trail where they are interested in providing input. Only a quarter (25%) of non-users would be interested while on-corridor residents are most interested (64%)



Results from Online Survey



Multiple answers possible.
Number shown represent percentages.

What are the key issues, topics and concerns?

Participants were asked to share the key issues, topics and concerns they had related to the Yellowhead Trail Freeway Conversion Program. The major themes that emerged were:

- Safety
- Speed
- Traffic flow
- Timelines and construction schedules
- Design considerations
- Impacts to residents
- Impacts to businesses
- Other concerns and issues

Safety

One of the goals of the Program is to improve safety and reduce collisions by eliminating signalized intersections and managing access locations on Yellowhead Trail. We heard from participants that the safety of those travelling along Yellowhead Trail is a top concern. Comments we heard about safety included:



BEING SAFE AND PATIENT WHILE DRIVING IN CONSTRUCTION ZONES.

PEOPLE DRIVING WITH CARE AND CAUTION SHOULD BE IMPORTANT,
SAFETY.

I'M A TRUCK DRIVER AND IT IS VERY MUCH NEEDED TO SAVE TIME
AND FOR SAFETY.

PEDESTRIAN SAFETY ACROSS INTERCHANGE.



We heard other comments highlighting the safety concerns of trucks travelling at high speeds and backlogs at intersections. Additional comments related to exiting and entering the freeway, pedestrian safety concerns, safety hazards including short cutting through neighbourhoods, safe access for bikes and driving safely through construction zones.

Speed

Closely linked to the safety theme was the speed limit on Yellowhead Trail. Participants shared that they want to see a consistent speed limit though there were differing opinions on what that speed limit should be. A large number of participants were satisfied with the proposed 80 km/hour speed limit while others felt 90, 100 or even 110 km/hour was more appropriate for a freeway.

Participants shared the following comments related to speed limit:

“ NEEDS CONSISTENCY IN EXITING AND SPEED LIMIT.

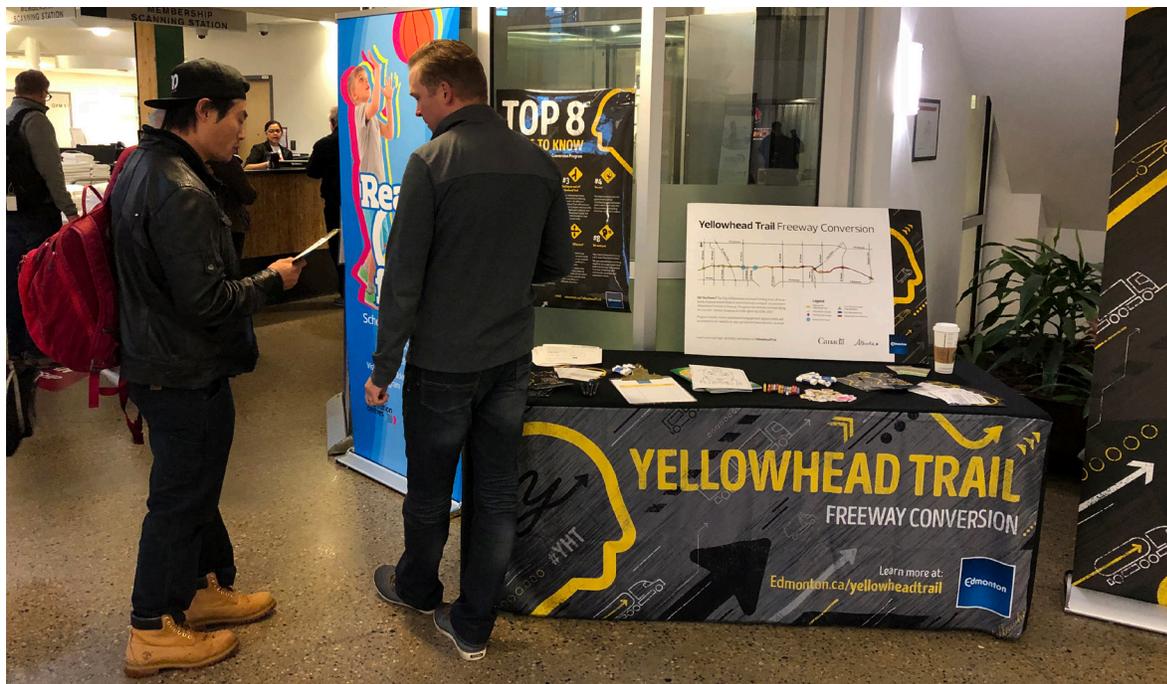
SPEED THINGS UP, BETTER COMMUTE.

I WOULD LIKE THE SPEED TO REFLECT THE HIGHWAY SPEED AT
100 KM. (NOT 80). A HIGHWAY IS A HIGHWAY.

CONCERNED ABOUT 80 KM ROAD VS 100 KM. IT SHOULD BE 100 KM ”

Traffic flow

Participants were concerned about the flow of traffic and traffic disruption on Yellowhead Trail during construction. One commentator asked, “How are they going to do this without tremendous traffic issues?” We also heard a desire for information concerning traffic routes and detours, so commuter routes could be adjusted, and the public could plan ahead. One participant summed this up by saying, “I want to know what's happening when, so I know how it will affect my commute.”



Timelines and construction schedules

Related to traffic flow were concerns about timelines and construction schedules. When we asked participants what information was most important for them to know, 88 % told us construction schedules/detours. It is important for users and commuters to have a clear understanding of the construction schedule in the areas that affect them. One participant urged the City to "stage construction to allow access to [the] community."

Stakeholder interview participants shared their specific concerns about locations close to them. Sample comments from one area of concern (118 Avenue) included:

“ INCREASED TRAFFIC ON 118 AVE AND 127 ST.

TRAFFIC CIRCLE AT 118 AVE - THERE'S ALREADY SO MUCH TRAFFIC AND PEOPLE DON'T KNOW HOW TO USE THAT CIRCLE.

I WORK RIGHT HERE AND REALLY WORRIED ABOUT HOW TRAFFIC WILL BE IMPACTED ON 118 AVENUE.

TRAFFIC CIRCLE AT 118 AVE AND ST. ALBERT TRAIL (IT IS A REAL PROBLEM IN OUR AREA).

MOVEMENT ON 118 AVE AND HOW THIS WILL BE IMPACTED WHEN THE ROADWAY CHANGES BEGIN, ALREADY A REALLY BUSY ROAD THAT IN PLACES DOESN'T FLOW WELL.

”

Design considerations

Participants expressed a desire for information about design such as upgrades to parallel or service roads, traffic light sequencing and timing, length of on and off ramps and widening the freeway. Participants had questions about how the City might design around areas where there is no land to acquire or structures that will not be moved. We heard concern about designing to accommodate the bus barns, the new Blatchford neighbourhood, the cemetery and the rail yard.

Participants expressed concern about additional traffic on already high-volume roads. One comment we heard from a stakeholder in Area C of the map (97 Street to 82 Street) was, "What are you going to be doing in the area to make sure our already over-used roads don't get worse?"

The online panel survey asked respondents to rate the importance of several considerations that go into the design decisions over the course of the Program (1 extremely important, 5 not important at all). Overall, "reducing congestion on Yellowhead Trail" was rated of the highest importance with 76% of respondents indicating that it was extremely or very important. This was followed by "Impacts to commuters" and "Construction timelines" (60% and 58% respectively).

Impacts to residents

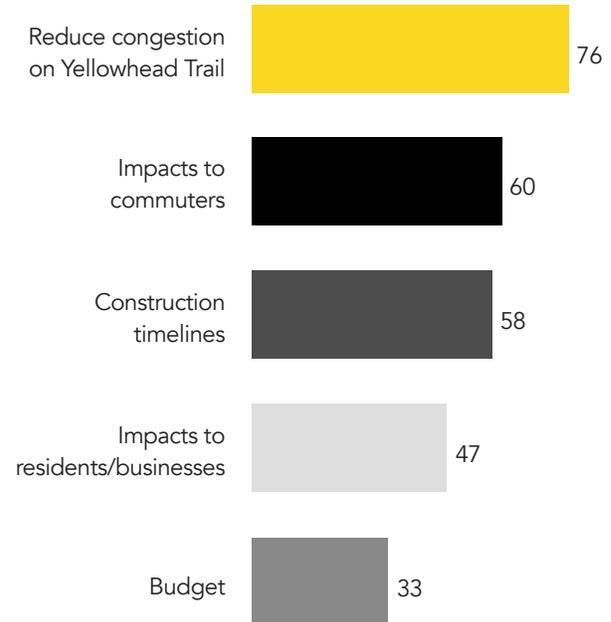
Many participants also voiced concern over the impacts the Program would have on the residents in the program area. Respondents told us they were fearful about increased traffic and short cutting through their neighbourhoods as well as an increase in noise during construction. Access to and from neighbourhoods was also a concern for residents.

Another very important concern for those living within close proximity to Yellowhead Trail is the perceived negative impacts on property values and property taxes. Several participants expressed their worries, fears and uncertainties around land acquisition. We heard the following comments from residents:

“ WHICH HOUSES WILL BE EXPROPRIATED? I WANT TO KNOW IF I HAVE A HOUSE NEXT YEAR. HOW ARE OUR HOUSES BEING IMPACTED. ”



Results from Online Survey



Multiple answers possible.
Number shown represent percentages.

Impacts to businesses

There was an overall concern for the impacts on businesses that are on and off the Yellowhead Trail corridor. Participants cited construction disruption, access to businesses and noise as concerns and questions were raised about accommodations and compensation for businesses.

Other concerns and issues

There were several concerns and issues that we heard during all stages of collecting input. Some of these included:

- Impacts to the new Blatchford area and the rail yards
- The cost of the project and increase in property taxes
- Impacts on bus routes during and after construction
- Impacts on LRT construction and timelines
- Importance of communicating construction information to Fire Departments and Emergency Medical Services
- Area specific concerns and issues where there would be access closures to Yellowhead Trail and new interchanges built

Level of support for the Program

In our conversations with participants and stakeholders, most people expressed support for the Yellowhead Trail Freeway Conversion Program. Many participants shared that the project was long overdue, and they were happy it was moving forward. At project completion, participants told us they are looking forward to the convenience of not stopping at lights, improved traffic flow, shorter commute times and less congestion. There was also a segment of respondents who viewed the Program as unnecessary due to a variety of factors like the Anthony Henday freeway now in operation. Other participants identified themselves as non-users and considered themselves neutral—neither supportive or unsupportive of the Program.

“

THIS IS IMPORTANT THAT THE YELLOWHEAD IS CONVERTED TO A FREEWAY AS IT WILL IMPROVE CONGESTION ON YELLOWHEAD.

THE CITY HAS TO GROW AND WE HAVE TO BE WILLING TO GROW WITH IT.

IT DOESN'T REALLY AFFECT ME, BUT I'M GLAD IT'S FINALLY HAPPENING.

I LIVE CLOSE TO THE YELLOWHEAD. IT NEEDS TO STAY THE WAY IT IS SO WE ALL CAN GET AROUND TOWN.

”

VIII. HOW YOU WANT TO BE INVOLVED IN THE FUTURE

What methods and ways of joining the conversation work best for you?

We asked participants to tell us their preferred method for joining the conversation about the Program. A majority of respondents (83%) prefer to participate in the conversation about the Program online while 22% prefer to participate in activities that are more structured, such as workshops or focus groups. A similar portion (20%) prefer attending in-person, drop-in sessions.

What would stop you from participating in this conversation?

Planning for future engagement opportunities will be an important component of the Yellowhead Trail Freeway Conversion Program. We asked participants to tell us what would stop them from participating in engagement opportunities. Participants shared the following:

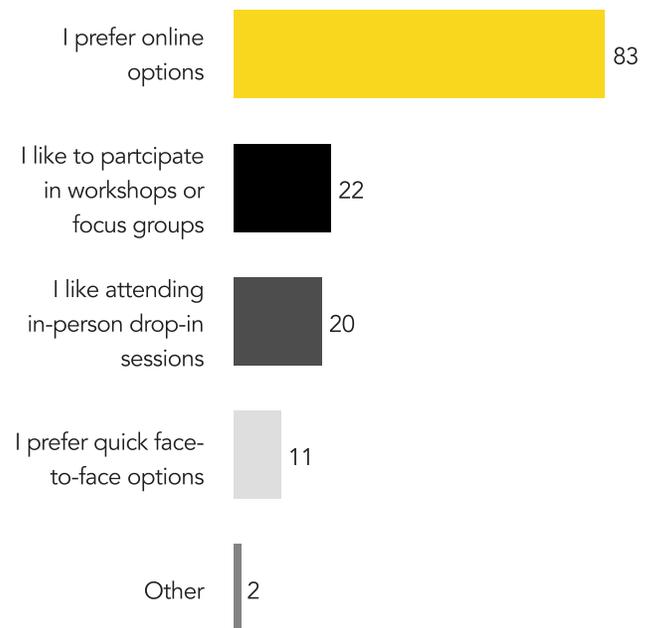
- Late communication to community leagues
- Not giving enough notice of upcoming events or opportunities to participate
- Venues that are not transit accessible for in person engagement events
- Past negative experience with the City on another initiative
- The City perceived to not listen and consider feedback
- Not setting clear expectations about how participant input will be used

What can you expect next?

Communities along Yellowhead Trail are an important stakeholder in the Yellowhead Trail Freeway Conversion Program, along with commuters, businesses and commercial traffic, as are any and all Edmontonians who rely on and are affected by Yellowhead Trail. Input from the public as a whole will help support strong design plans and other project decisions such as construction considerations.



Results from Online Survey



Multiple answers possible.
Number shown represent percentages.

The graphic below depicts where we are and what you can expect next.



156 STREET TO ST. ALBERT TRAIL

The design phase will begin in 2019 and involves public engagement. Already, some public input has been collected through engagement activities on a couple of the sub-projects.



ST. ALBERT TRAIL TO 97 STREET

Public engagement will happen as part of the concept planning that is scheduled to begin in 2019 for the area between St. Albert Trail and 97 Street. Concept planning is an important time to provide your input and help shape Yellowhead Trail.



97 STREET TO 82 STREET

Concept plans have been completed. The project is now in the early stages of design. Construction will begin in 2019.



82 STREET TO 50 STREET

A major focus of the concept planning study will be the intersection of 66 Street and Yellowhead Trail. Public engagement will happen as part of the concept plan. Concept planning is an important time to provide your input and help shape Yellowhead Trail.



FORT ROAD WIDENING (YELLOWHEAD TRAIL TO 66 STREET)

The engagement opportunities for this area are not yet determined.



50 STREET TO NORTH SASKATCHEWAN RIVER

The engagement opportunities for this area are not yet determined.

IX. WHAT WE LEARNED AND WHAT WE'RE DOING

With the results of the Fall 2018 engagement activities, the City of Edmonton now has a better understanding of general awareness of the freeway conversion, top information needs/concerns, interest in engagement, methods for communicating and what to communicate.

General Awareness

Awareness of the freeway conversion program among the various groups that participated is very high, but there was less knowledge of specific project details.

What We're Doing

The City will focus on communicating more details about the Yellowhead Trail Freeway Conversion Program as a whole, and its projects, in a variety of different ways. We will strive to connect project information with the overall freeway conversion messaging so there is a clear understanding for the project need and how it relates to making Yellowhead Trail a freeway.

We will also find new, creative opportunities to teach you about the freeway conversion as projects progress so new information isn't lost.

Top Information Needs

Construction schedules and design plans were overwhelmingly the type of information requested by engagement participants. Additional information needs included:

- Speed – final freeway speed, safety of final speed, as well as during construction
- Program impacts to traffic, businesses and communities
- Access for emergency vehicles during and after construction
- Impacts to surrounding roads and communities



What We're Doing

With construction being the time when a project is most visible to the public and has the most impact on daily activities, the City is committed to increasing the amount of communication going out prior to and during project construction for the freeway conversion. We will be looking at new ways to inform you about construction timing and work with stakeholders to mitigate impacts to the surrounding community, businesses and users of the roadway.

The information that participants prefer a shorter, condensed construction period with staged projects will also be shared with contractors for consideration.

Safety is always a top priority for the City and it is a main goal for the freeway conversion to improve safety in high collision locations. As such, safety will always be factored into design considerations. The City will also work closely with all emergency service providers to ensure access is maintained or provided during construction and upon completion of the conversion.

Public Engagement

Interest in engaging on the freeway conversion is very high but there are still barriers that stop respondents from getting involved.

What We're Doing

Receiving feedback from the public and stakeholders is crucial to the success of the freeway conversion program. The City will use various methods of engagement, including online activities, with advance notice of when and how to get involved. We will also provide a clear understanding of the purpose for our engagement, how it will be used and what else is being considered in decision making. The City will also respect your time by striving to coordinate engagement with other City projects.

Communications

Respondents confirmed that the majority have received information about the freeway conversion and want to continue receiving information through traditional media (TV, radio and print) and online channels like social media and email.

What We're Doing

The City will continue to use a variety of different methods to communicate to all users of Yellowhead Trail with a focus on traditional media and online activities. We will also strive to find creative solutions to educate and inform with visuals and using plain language. Working with community groups and business associations to help share messaging will also be key.

Thank you to everyone who participated in our engagement activities. Here's how you can stay informed and participate in the Yellowhead Trail Freeway Conversion Program conversation and future engagement opportunities.

edmonton.ca/YellowheadTrail

[Facebook](#)

[Twitter](#) – don't forget the hashtag #YHT

