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City of Edmonton

River Valley Stairs Project Survey Report

March 18, 2019

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The research involved an online survey of Edmontonians regarding stairs rehabilitation within Edmonton's river valley. There were 1,411 responses to the survey.

Usage

General usage of all embankment river valley stairs and trails:

- 31% said they use an embankment river valley stair or trail at least once per week. The same number (31%) said they did so less than once per month. About one-quarter (23%) use a stair or trail 1-3 times per month, with 14% saying they never use a river valley stair or trail.
- Embankment stairs and trails are primarily used to get to river valley trails (76% of all respondents mentioned this use), for fitness/exercise (61%) or to enjoy the views (59%). Slightly less than half (45%) of respondents said they use them to access river valley parks and facilities. Less than one-third (30%) said they use them to get to work, school, entertainment or restaurants.

Embankment stairs or trails currently earmarked for rehabilitation or construction:

- 44% of respondents said they had used the High Level Diner stairs or trails in the last 12 months, followed by Emily Murphy Park (38%), Highlands (21%) and Grandview Heights (15%). The Jackson Heights/Minchau stairs or trail was the least used at 5%. More than one-third (37%) did not use any of these stairs or trails in the last 12 months.
- Among respondents who had used one of the stairs or trails within the last 12 months, the Highlands stairs or trails were the most frequently used (23% at least once per week), followed by Grandview Heights and High Level Diner (each at 14% at least once per week), Emily Murphy Park (12% at least once per week) and Jackson Heights/Minchau (10% at least once per week).

High Level Diner stairs or trails:

- The primary use is for fitness/exercise (60%). Half of respondents (50%) said they used them to get to river valley trails and 46% used them to get to river valley parks and facilities. More than one-third (38%) used them to get to work, school, entertainment or restaurants.

- The largest minority of the written comments regarding the High Level stairs project called for providing accessibility for cyclists either via a ramp or by maintaining a trail adjacent to the stairs. Nearly two dozen people mentioned increased safety as important to them. These people suggested several safety measures including handrails and lighting, gentle stair sloping, clearing overhanging trees or brush and providing adequate stair width.

Emily Murphy Park stairs or trails:

- Nearly three-quarters of respondents (73%) said they used them to get to river valley trails. More than half (58%) said they used them for fitness/exercise and 38% used them to get to river valley parks and facilities. Only 17% used them to get to work, school, entertainment or restaurants.
- While many of those who provided written comments regarding the Emily Murphy stairs project agreed the stairs were in need of repair, several others felt it was as important to properly maintain the trails connecting or paralleling the stairs. Of the nearly 30 people who offered suggestions regarding reconstruction elements, most called for lighting to be added, providing wayfinding signage or reducing the slope of the steps.

Highlands stairs or trails:

- The primary use was for fitness/exercise (70%). Slightly less than half (48%) said they used them to get to river valley parks and facilities and 37% used them to get to river valley trails. Only 15% said they used them to get to work, school, entertainment or restaurants.
- The largest minority of the written comments reflected support for the proposed Highlands stairs project but many other comments called for adjacent trails to be maintained and integrated with the stairs to accommodate cyclists, dog walkers and those with disabilities. Several people mentioned the existing trails and roadway to the river valley are often covered with snow or ice or are muddy, making navigation difficult and unsafe. As with Emily Murphy Park, a number of people called for lighting to be added and the slope of the steps to be moderate.

Grandview Heights stairs or trails:

- The primary use was for fitness/exercise (71%). Less than half (41%) used them to access river valley trails, while 33% used them to get to river valley parks and facilities. Only 6% said they used them to get to work, school, entertainment or restaurants.



- The largest minority of written comments regarding the Grandview Heights stairs project called on increasing the width of the stairs to increase safety and accommodate a diversity of users. Almost as many people urged that the trail next to the stairs be properly maintained and/or improved to prevent erosion, muddy or icy conditions and enhance use.

Jackson Heights/Minchau stairs or trails:

- The primary use was for fitness/exercise (73%). Slightly less than half (46%) used them to access river valley trails, while 22% used them to get to river valley parks and facilities. Only 4% said they used them to get to work, school, entertainment or restaurants.
- Among those who provided written comments regarding the Jackson Heights/Minchau stairs project, many commented on the issue of need. There was a split opinion. While some felt rehabilitation of the stairs was not needed or a low priority, others felt rehabilitation of the stairs would be beneficial particularly if they accommodated a diversity of users and fit in with the natural environment. A few called for lights to be installed next to the stairs.

Importance and Priority

- Three-quarters (75%) of all respondents strongly or somewhat agreed rehabilitating river valley stairs was important to them. Only 12% somewhat or strongly disagreed.
- Similarly, a significant majority (68%) strongly or somewhat agreed rehabilitating river valley stairs should be a priority for the City of Edmonton. Seventeen percent somewhat or strongly disagreed.

Features

- Among the presented options, the majority of respondents favoured features that would enable easy access to stairs (68%), stairs that were bicycle friendly (65%), benches at the top and/or bottom of the stairs (63%) and good viewpoints (60%). Less than half (43%) selected accommodation of people with disabilities and pet friendly stairs (39%) as important features. Only 25% of respondents selected landscaping as a feature river valley stairs should have.
- Among all respondents, easy access to river valley stairs was considered the most important feature (33%), followed by bicycle friendliness (22%), viewpoints (15%) and accommodation of people with disabilities (15%). Benches, pet friendliness and landscaping were considered the least important among the presented options.



- Among those who mentioned other features they would consider important, a significant majority commented that it was important for people using the stairs to feel safe and secure. For the most part, they suggested this could be done by ensuring stairs had appropriate step heights/slopes, non-slip handrails and steps and lighting. Many of the comments mentioned the need for proper maintenance to ensure safety, particularly clearing ice and snow in the winter.
- Many other respondents called for the width of stairs to be increased to allow for easy passage of a variety of stair users. More than three dozen wanted to see benches or rest areas created in the middle of a string of stairs to allow seniors, children and others in need to rest.



INTRODUCTION

The City of Edmonton (COE) is committed to keeping the river valley accessible to Edmontonians by building, rehabilitating and maintaining stairs or trails that connect the bottom of the river valley to the top of embankments. The current River Valley Stairs Project involves the rehabilitation/construction of stairs at:

- **Emily Murphy Park** (116th Street and Saskatchewan Drive),
- **Highlands** (Ada Boulevard and 52nd Street),
- **Grandview Heights** (131th Street and Grandview Drive),
- **Jackson Heights/Minchau** (42nd Avenue and 46th Street) and,
- **High Level Diner** (109th Street and 90th Avenue).

In addition to other public engagement activities, an online survey of Edmontonians was developed to gain insights, perspectives and feedback regarding the stairs scheduled or being considered for renewal. External consulting firm Marcomm Works was contracted to conduct the public engagement, including overseeing administration of the survey.

This report provides a summary of the survey results, including methodology and key findings. Please note that it has been written from the independent and objective point of view of Marcomm Works. Any opinions, interpretations or conclusions contained within it may or may not coincide with those of the City of Edmonton.

METHODOLOGY

The survey was made available to Edmontonians from January 24 to February 28. In addition to publicizing an open link on the COE's website, a direct invitation to fill out the survey was sent to the City's Insight Community. The questionnaire, in consultation with Marcomm Works and the River Valley Stairs Project Manager, was developed and posted by the COE's Corporate Research Team.

There were 1,411 responses to the survey. Please note a margin of error cannot be assigned to non-random research. However, the response rate should be considered good given the non-controversial, low profile subject matter and a reasonable reflection of Edmontonians' views and opinions.

RESULTS

The following sections provide a summary of overall results from the survey, showing graphs and tables as appropriate. The raw data tables and all verbatim responses have been provided separately.

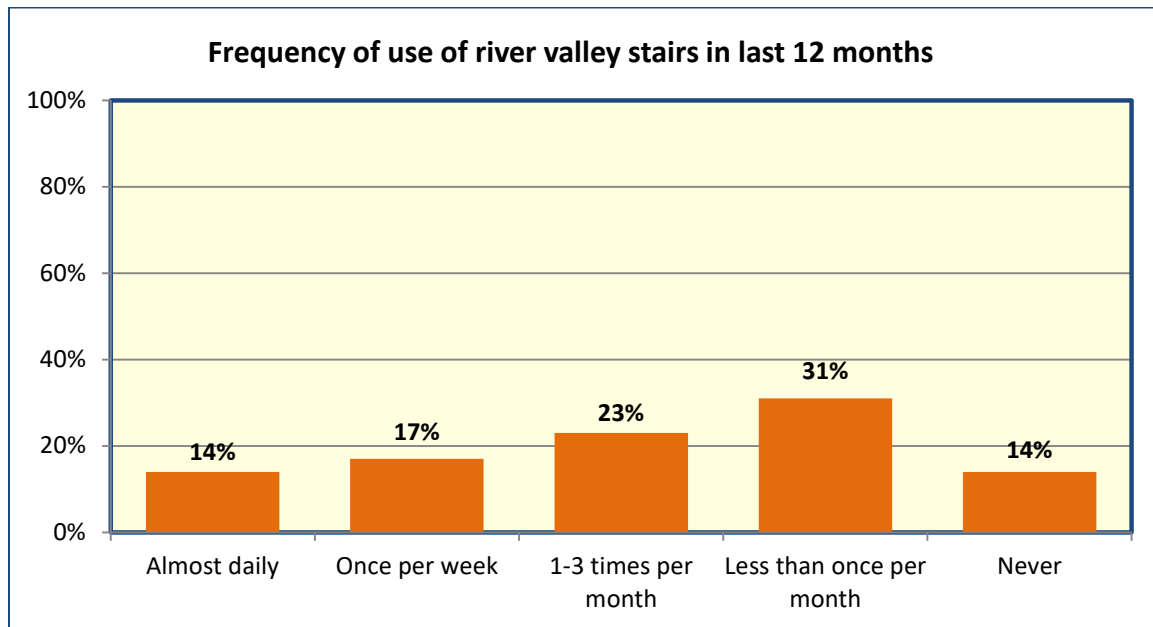
Please note that throughout this report, percentages shown may not add to 100 for a variety of reasons, including rounding; omission of “don’t know/not sure”, “no response” or “refused” categories; and/or multiple responses to certain questions where permitted.

Respondent Profile (Base = 1,411)			
Age		Member of non-profit group, club, institution, business?	
15-24 years	1%	Yes	21%
25-44 years	38%	No	79%
45-54 years	17%	Input Source	
55-64 years	24%	Insight Community	86%
65+	19%	Other	14%
Prefer not to answer	1%	Would you like to be kept informed of river valley stairs development?	
		Yes	52%
		No	48%



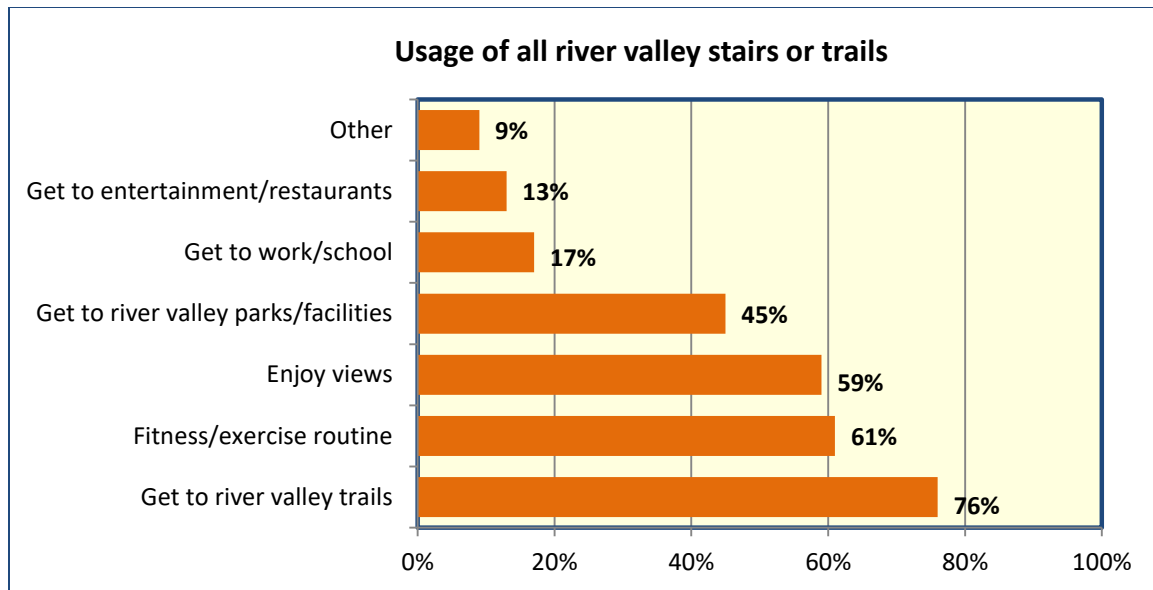
Usage

The survey began by asking questions about usage of embankment river valley stairs and trails in general. Nearly one-third (31%) said they use an embankment river valley stair or trail at least once per week. The same number (31%) said they did so less than once per month. About one-quarter (23%) use a stair or trail 1-3 times per month, with 14% saying they never use a river valley stair or trail.

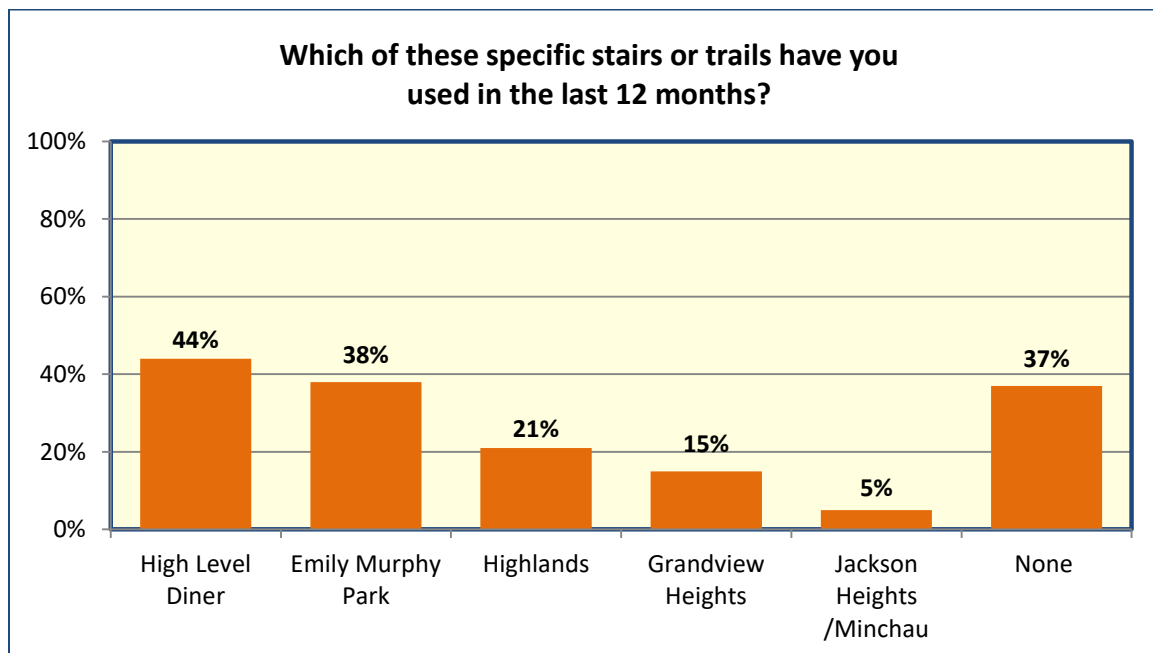


The majority of respondents said they primarily use embankment stairs and trails to get to river valley trails (76%), for fitness/exercise (61%) or to enjoy the views (59%). Slightly less than half (45%) said they use them to access river valley parks and facilities. Less than one-third (30%) said they use them to get to work, school, entertainment or restaurants.

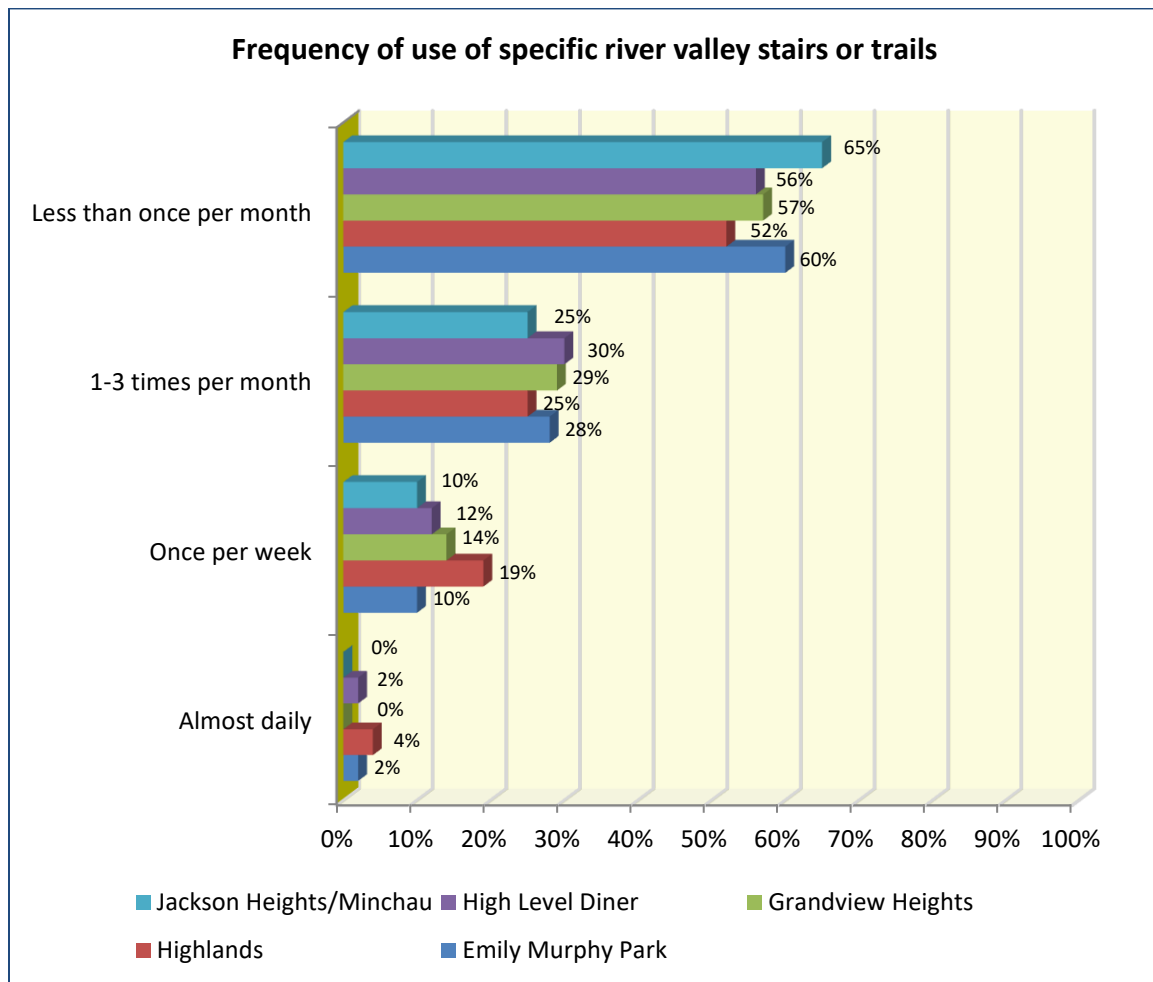




When asked about embankment stairs or trails currently earmarked for rehabilitation or construction, 44% of respondents said they had used the High Level Diner stairs or trail in the last 12 months, followed by Emily Murphy Park (38%), Highlands (21%) and Grandview Heights (15%). The Jackson Heights/Minchau stairs or trails were the least used at 5%. More than one-third (37%) did not use any of these stairs or trails in the last 12 months.



Among those who had used embankment stairs or trails currently earmarked for rehabilitation or construction in the last 12 months, the Highlands stairs or trails were the most frequently used (23% of respondents used them at least once per week), followed by Grandview Heights and High Level Diner (each at 14% at least once per week), Emily Murphy Park (12% at least once per week) and Jackson Heights/Minchau (10% at least once per week).



High Level Diner

Among those who used the High Level Diner embankment stairs or trails in the last 12 months (621 people), the primary use was for fitness/exercise (60%). Half of respondents (50%) said they used them to get to river valley trails and 46% used them to get to river valley parks and facilities. More than one-third (38%) used them to get to work, school, entertainment or restaurants.

The largest minority of written comments regarding the High Level Diner stairs (129 respondents) called for providing accessibility for cyclists either via a ramp or by maintaining a trail adjacent to the stairs. Nearly two dozen people mentioned increased safety as important to them. These people suggested several safety measures including handrails and lighting, gentle stair sloping, clearing overhanging trees or brush and providing adequate stair width.

Among those who commented on the issue, people were split on whether the stairs needed replacement as opposed to repair.

Emily Murphy Park

Among those who used the Emily Murphy Park embankment stairs or trails in the last 12 months (542 people), nearly three-quarters of respondents (73%) said they used them to get to river valley trails. More than half (58%) said they used them for fitness/exercise and 38% used them to get to river valley parks and facilities. Only 17% used them to get to work, school, entertainment or restaurants.

While many of the 139 respondents who provided written comments regarding the Emily Murphy Park stairs agreed they were in need of repair, several others felt it was as important to properly maintain the trails connecting or paralleling the stairs. Of the nearly 30 people who offered suggestions regarding reconstruction elements, most called for lighting to be added, providing wayfinding signage or reducing the slope of the steps.

Some commented on the need to keep the stairs open all year long by clearing ice and snow in the winter. A few emphasized the need to keep the surrounding environment as natural as possible.

Highlands

Among those who used the Highlands embankment stairs or trails in the last 12 months (305 people), the primary use was for fitness/exercise (70%). Slightly less than half (48%) said they used them to get to river valley parks and facilities and 37% used them to get to river valley trails. Only 15% said they used them to get to work, school, entertainment or restaurants.

The largest minority of written comments regarding the Highlands stairs (126 respondents) reflected support for the proposed project but many other comments called for adjacent trails to be maintained and integrated with the stairs to accommodate cyclists, dog walkers and those with disabilities. Several people mentioned the existing trails and roadway to the river valley are often covered with snow or ice or are muddy, making navigation difficult and unsafe.



As with Emily Murphy Park, a number of people called for lighting to be added and the slope of the steps to be moderate.

Grandview Heights

Among those who used the Grandview Heights embankment stairs or trails in the last 12 months (222 people), the primary use was also for fitness/exercise (71%). Less than half (41%) used them to access river valley trails, while 33% used them to get to river valley parks and facilities. Only 6% said they used them to get to work, school, entertainment or restaurants.

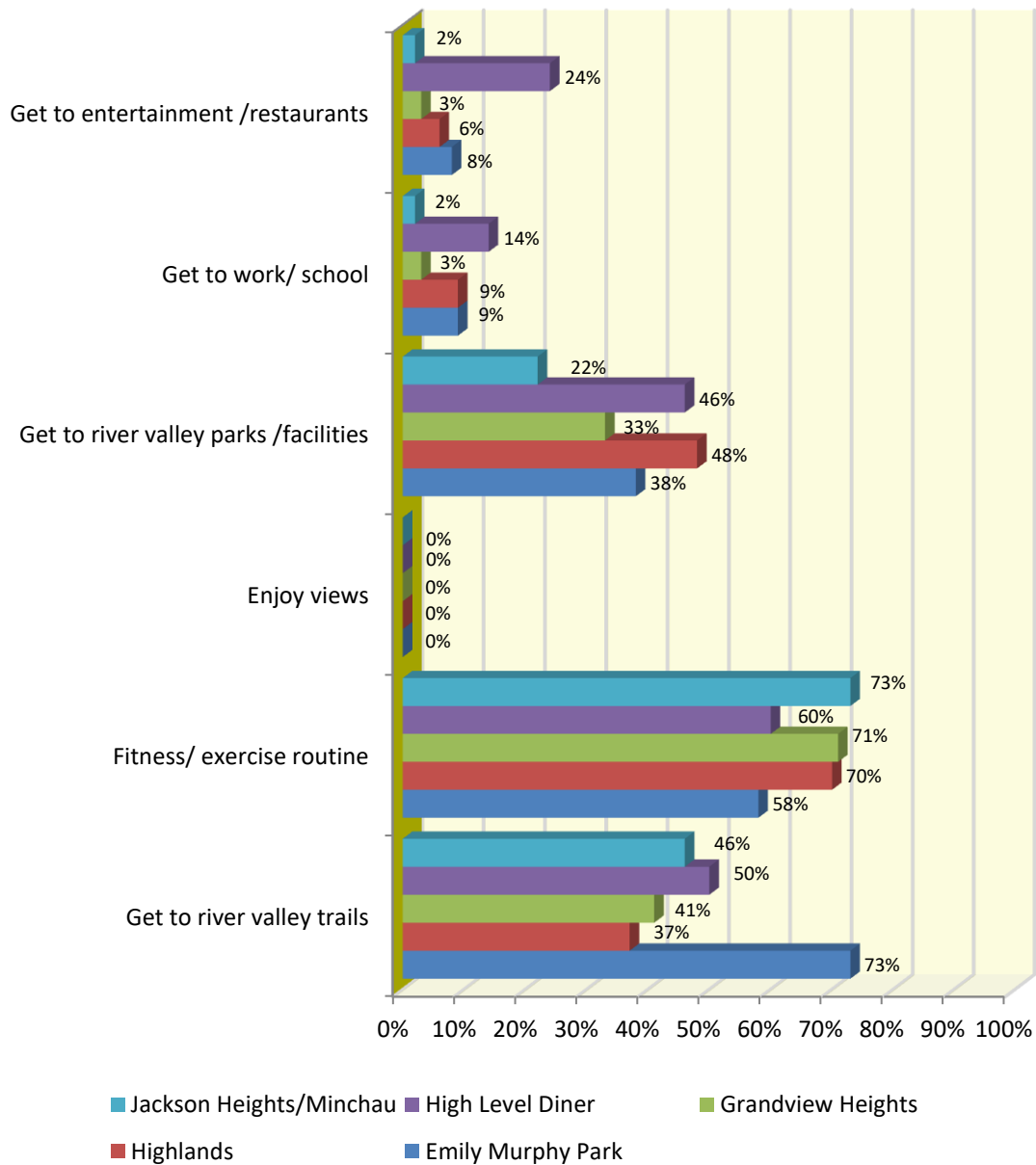
The largest minority of written comments regarding the Grandview Heights stairs (95 respondents) called on increasing the width of the stairs to increase safety and accommodate a diversity of users. Almost as many people urged that the trail next to the stairs be properly maintained and/or improved to prevent erosion, muddy or icy conditions and enhance use. Among those who commented on the issue, people were split on whether the stairs needed replacement as opposed to repair. A few suggested lights be added to the stairs to increase safety.

Jackson Heights/Minchau

Among those who used the Jackson Heights/Minchau embankment stairs or trails in the last 12 months (69 people), the primary use was for fitness/exercise (73%). Slightly less than half (46%) used them to access river valley trails, while 22% used them to get to river valley parks and facilities. Only 4% said they used them to get to work, school, entertainment or restaurants.

Among those who provided written comments regarding the Jackson Heights/Minchau stairs (62 respondents), many commented on the issue of need. There was a split opinion. While some felt rehabilitation of the stairs was not needed or a low priority, others felt rehabilitation of the stairs would be beneficial particularly if they accommodated a diversity of users and fit in with the natural environment. A few called for lights to be installed next to the stairs.

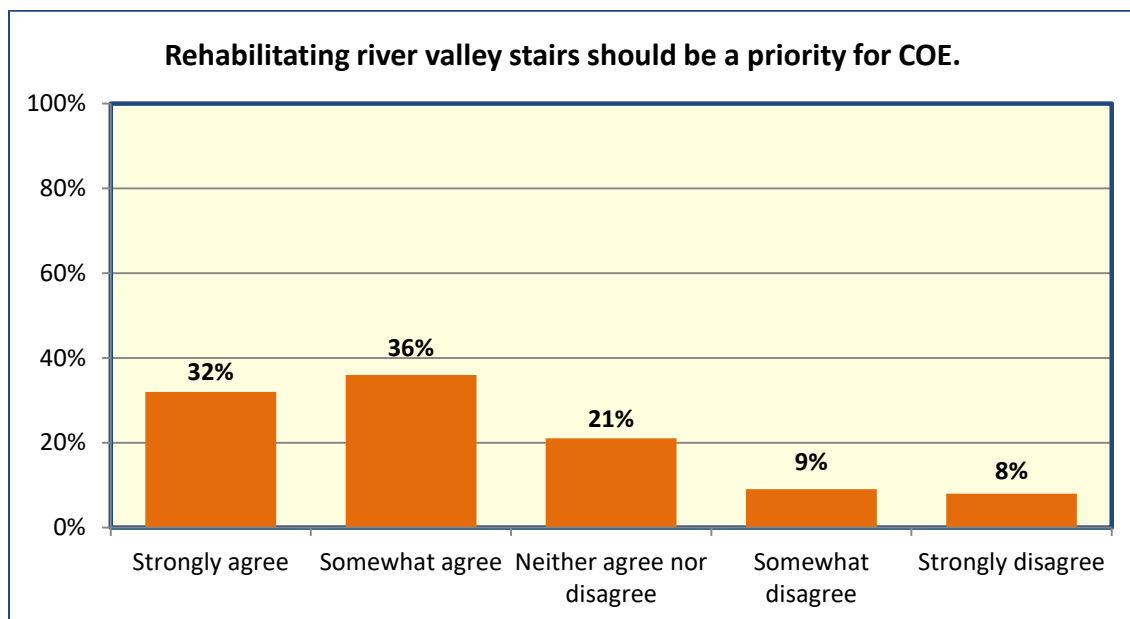
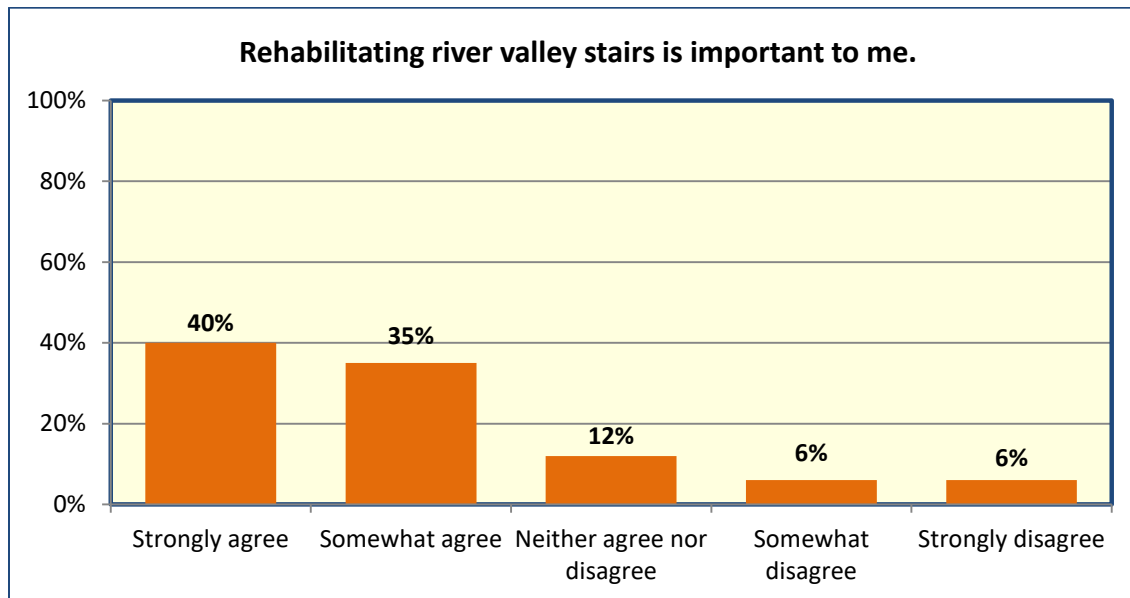
Usage of specific river valley stairs or trails



Importance and Priority

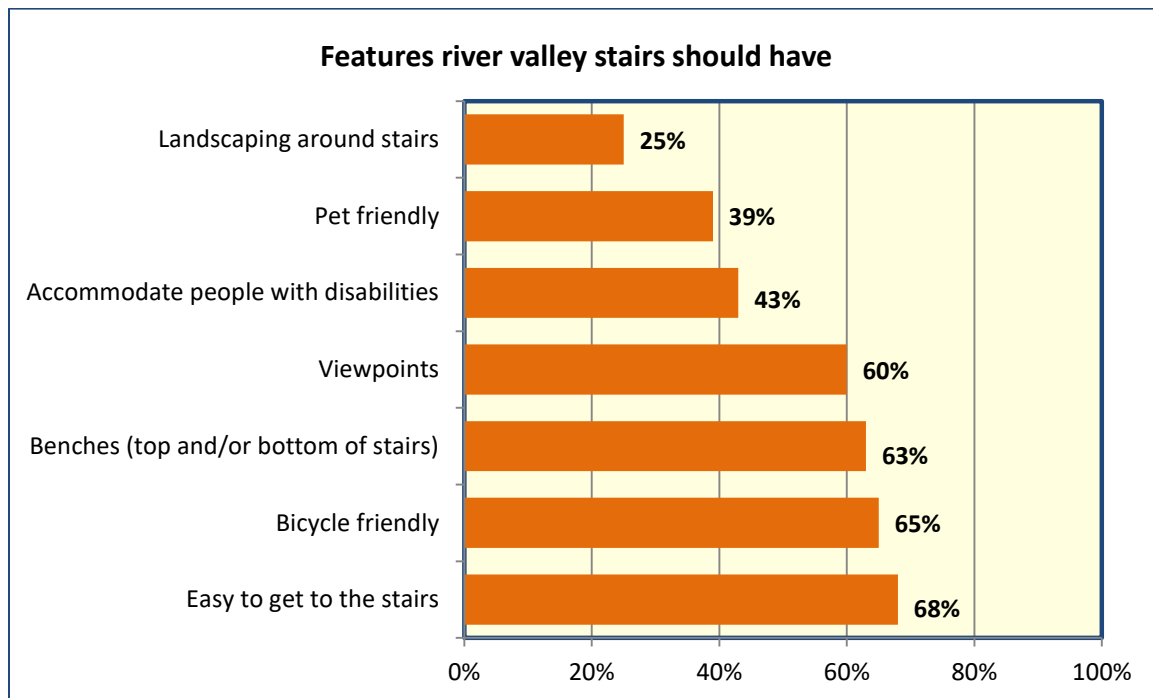
Two questions in the survey asked Edmontonians about the importance and priority of rehabilitating river valley stairs. Three-quarters (75%) of respondents strongly or somewhat agreed rehabilitating river valley stairs was important to them. Only 12% somewhat or strongly disagreed.

Similarly, a significant majority (68%) strongly or somewhat agreed rehabilitating river valley stairs should be a priority for the City of Edmonton. Seventeen percent somewhat or strongly disagreed.

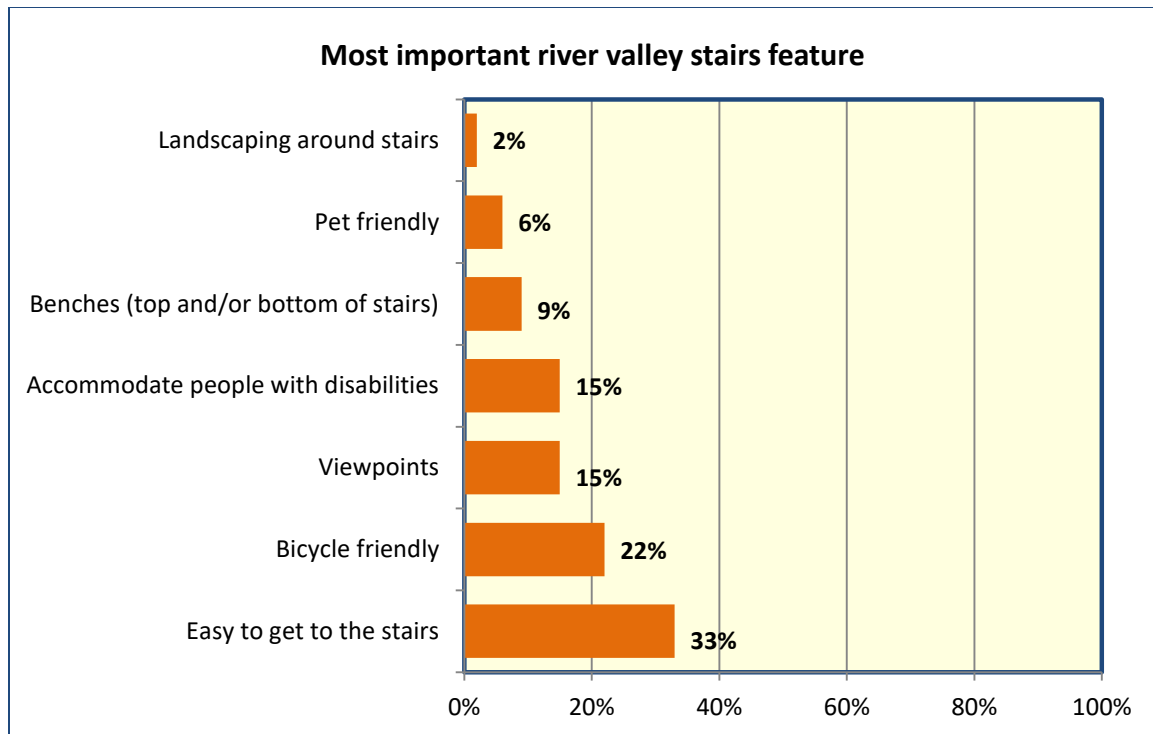


Features

One section of the survey asked Edmontonians about select features they would like to see as part of river valley stairs rehabilitation. Among the presented options, the majority favoured features that would enable easy access to the stairs (68%), stairs that were bicycle friendly (65%), benches at the top and/or bottom of the stairs (63%) and good viewpoints (60%). Less than half (43%) selected accommodation of people with disabilities and pet friendly stairs (39%) as important features. Only 25% of respondents selected landscaping as a feature river valley stairs should have.



Among all respondents, easy access to river valley stairs was considered the most important feature (33%), followed by bicycle friendliness (22%), viewpoints (15%) and accommodation of people with disabilities (15%). Benches, pet friendliness and landscaping were considered the least important among the presented options.



Among the 502 respondents who mentioned other features they would consider important, a significant majority commented that it was important for people using the stairs to feel safe and secure. For the most part, they suggested this could be done by ensuring the stairs had appropriate step heights/slopes, non-slip handrails and steps and lighting. Many of the comments mentioned the need for proper maintenance to ensure safety, particularly clearing ice and snow in the winter.

Many respondents called for the width of stairs to be increased to allow for easy passage of a variety of stair users. More than three dozen wanted to see benches or rest areas created in the middle of a string of stairs to allow seniors, children and others in need to rest. Among other suggestions offered by four or more respondents:

- Add wayfinding signage.
- Place bathrooms and garbage cans at the top or bottom of stairs.
- Provide parking nearby.