



Guelph Downtown Infrastructure Renewal

Summer 2023 Engagement Summary

August 2023

Introduction

Background

Downtown Guelph is the heart of the city. A place residents and visitors come to play, live, shop and work. Let's make it even better and give new life to downtown.

The City of Guelph has a vibrant and thriving downtown, and we want it to stay that way for years to come. There are also aging water and sewer pipes, roads and sidewalks that must be replaced; some underground pipes are over 100 years old! The City is replacing aging infrastructure and upgrading utility services, and before they put the roads back together, they will have an opportunity to modernize and upgrade the streetscape.

Improving this important infrastructure is expected to have a significant positive ripple effect on the local economy, the environment, and the social well-being of people living and working in, and visiting downtown, and the wider community.

Work like this takes time. It takes years to research, engage with the community, plan and replace the infrastructure. This important project will improve our downtown for all businesses, residents, users and visitors. Let's work together to create a place for everyone downtown.

The [Downtown Infrastructure Renewal](#) project is one of many projects under the overarching Downtown Renewal efforts. The [Downtown Renewal](#) program will transform and revitalize how Downtown looks, feels and functions, making it future-ready to support growth to 2051 and beyond.

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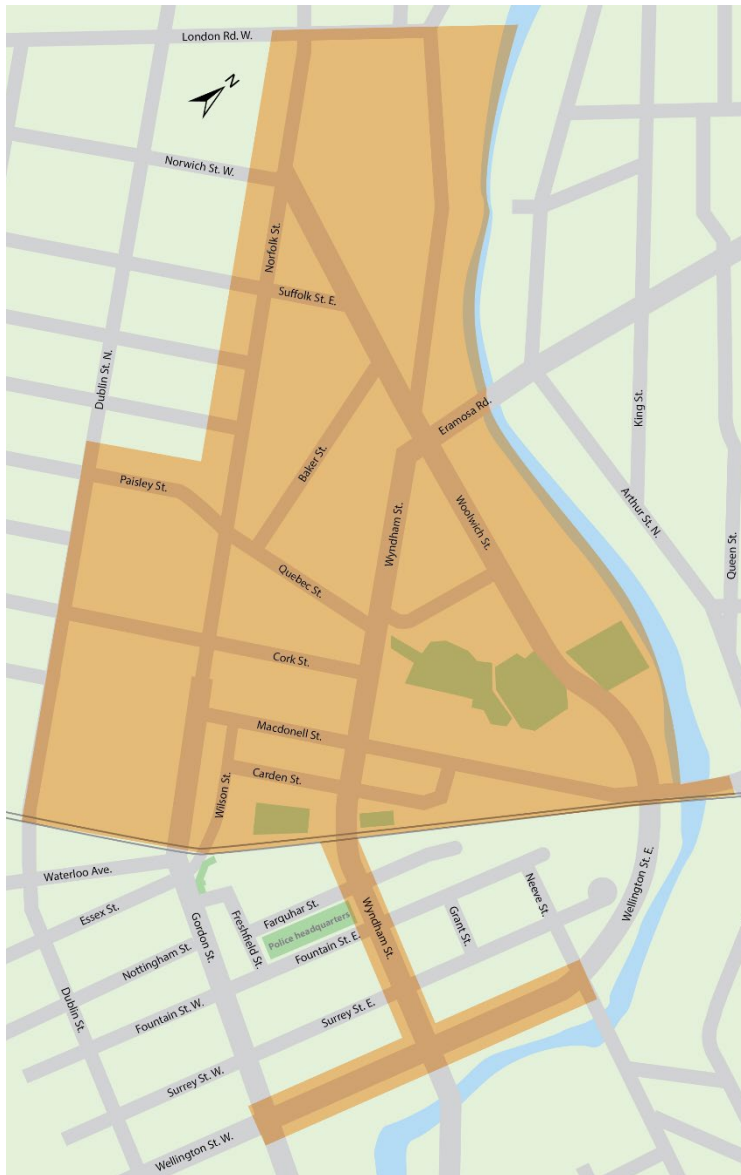


Figure 1: Map of Study Area

Planning for Downtown Infrastructure Renewal began in the spring of 2021. During the planning phase, the study looks at the existing infrastructure and the future needs of downtown to determine what needs to be updated.

The City is completing two Municipal Class Environment Assessments (EAs) as part of the planning work. Environmental assessments involve collaborating with the community to support planning and decision-making for large projects.

- The [Wyndham Street EA](#) examines the function of the road for all users, including the number of traffic lanes and available active transportation infrastructure.

- The [Macdonell and Allan Dam structures EA](#) across the Speed River to confirm required improvements and the preferred solution for each.

The City expects to present the preferred options for the two EAs to Council in 2024. Once the EAs are completed and have been approved by the Province, phasing and staging will be determined through the development of the Capital Implementation Plan in 2024. Detailed design will begin in 2025 and construction will begin no sooner than 2026. The overall design and construction process is expected to last approximately eight to 10 years. A better estimate of construction timeline will be set keeping in mind the needs and wants of Guelph’s community as well as the pace and capacity for construction.

What We Did

Throughout June and July 2023, the City and consulting team was in front of Old Quebec Street Shoppes with life-sized examples of what street condition options may feel like. Participants were asked about their comfort level as pedestrians, cyclists, or in a vehicle in each of the design conditions presented. This information and technical review will be used to narrow down design options for further conversations with the community later this year.

Participants were asked to react to three conditions, shown in the table below. For more specific details about the project and design conditions discussed, please see the design condition [options panel document](#).

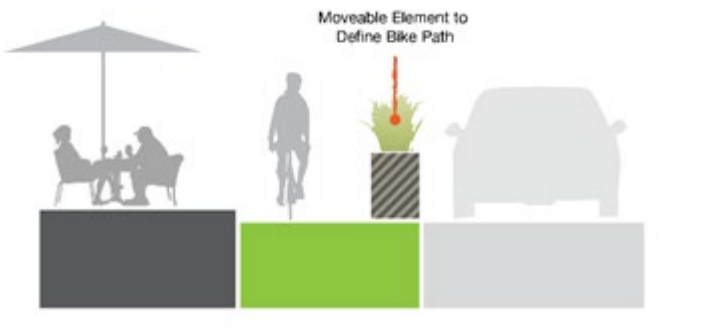
Condition 1: No Bike Path

This is similar to the existing conditions and options that have no dedicated cycling facilities.



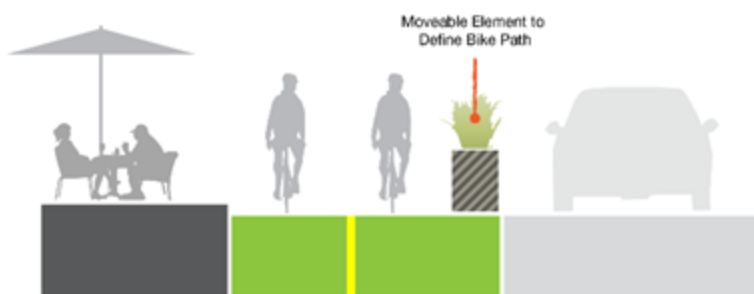
Condition 2: Uni-Directional Bike Path

This is similar to options that have single-direction dedicated cycling facilities on both sides of the street.



Condition 3: Bi-Directional Bike Path

This is similar to the option that has a two-way dedicated cycling facility on one side of the street.



At the in-person events, staff from the City and consulting team were on hand to discuss the project in more depth and engage participants in the conversation or answer questions. Participants were invited to complete a survey on the design condition options. In addition, participants were offered handouts about the project with a QR code/URL to the Have Your Say webpage.

Following the in-person events, the public could provide input on the three conditions through the City of Guelph’s engagement website ([Have Your Say](#)). The webpage provides an overview of the project background, study area and future engagement opportunities. Participants of the webpage could participate in the same engagement exercise conducted for the in-person engagement sessions and were given the option to sign up for the project mailing list.

Date	Activity	Participation
June 24, 2023	In-person event	200 individuals
July 7, 2023	In-person event	26 individuals
July 14, 2023	In-person event	37 individuals
June 24 – July 21, 2023	Have Your Say – online survey	138 surveys completed
June 24 – July 21, 2023	Have Your Say – online ideas board	82 ideas contributed

Engagement Purpose

The purpose of these engagement activities was to:

- Inform the public about the project (planning, environmental assessments and engagement opportunities)
- Provide an opportunity for residents to ask questions
- Gather insight on the condition options
- Receive input on comfort level as pedestrians, cyclists, or in a vehicle in each of the design conditions presented

What We Heard

Moving Around Downtown

Participants were asked to indicate how they usually move around downtown by selecting a single option. It is anticipated many participants use other secondary methods to move around downtown in addition to their usual method. As shown in Figure 2, the majority of participants indicated that they walk or roll downtown (including using a wheelchair, scooter, skateboard, etc.).

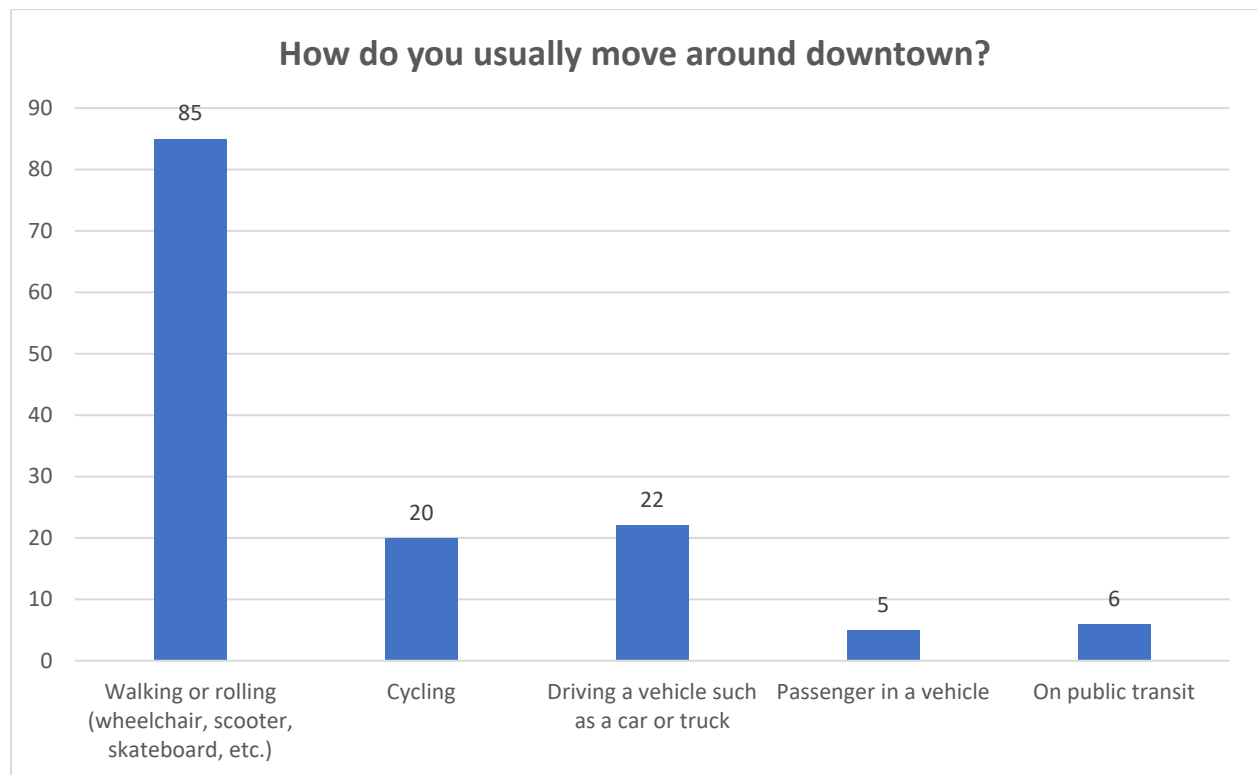


Figure 2: Participant responses to how they usually move around downtown (n=138).

Level of Comfort

Next, participants were asked to indicate their comfort level in the three conditions. Participants were asked to answer based on each mode of travel (walking or rolling, cycling, driving a car, as a passenger in a car, or on public transit).

As shown in the series of graphs below:

- When walking or rolling, participants indicated they would be most comfortable in Condition 2
- When cycling, participants indicated they would be most comfortable in Condition 2
- When driving a car, participants indicated they would be most comfortable in Condition 2
- When a passenger in a car, participants indicated they would be most comfortable in Condition 2
- When on public transit, participants indicated they would be most comfortable in Condition 2

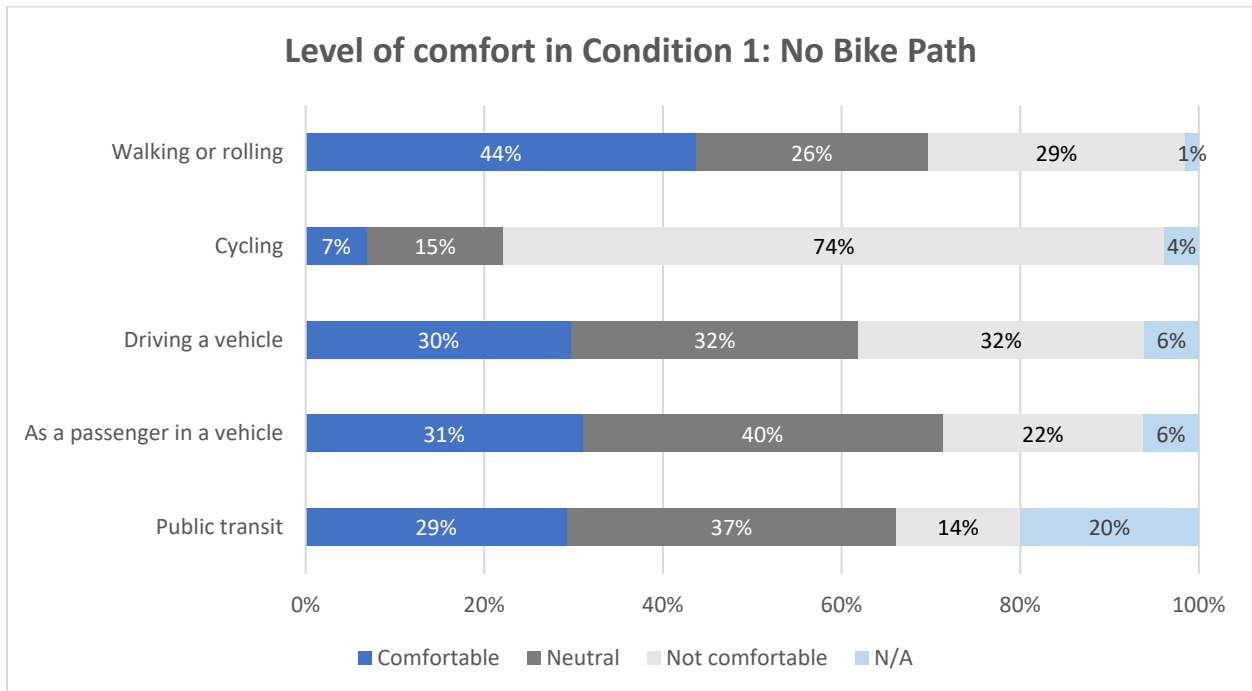


Figure 3: Participant responses to how comfortable they would feel when travelling in Condition 1 (n=135)

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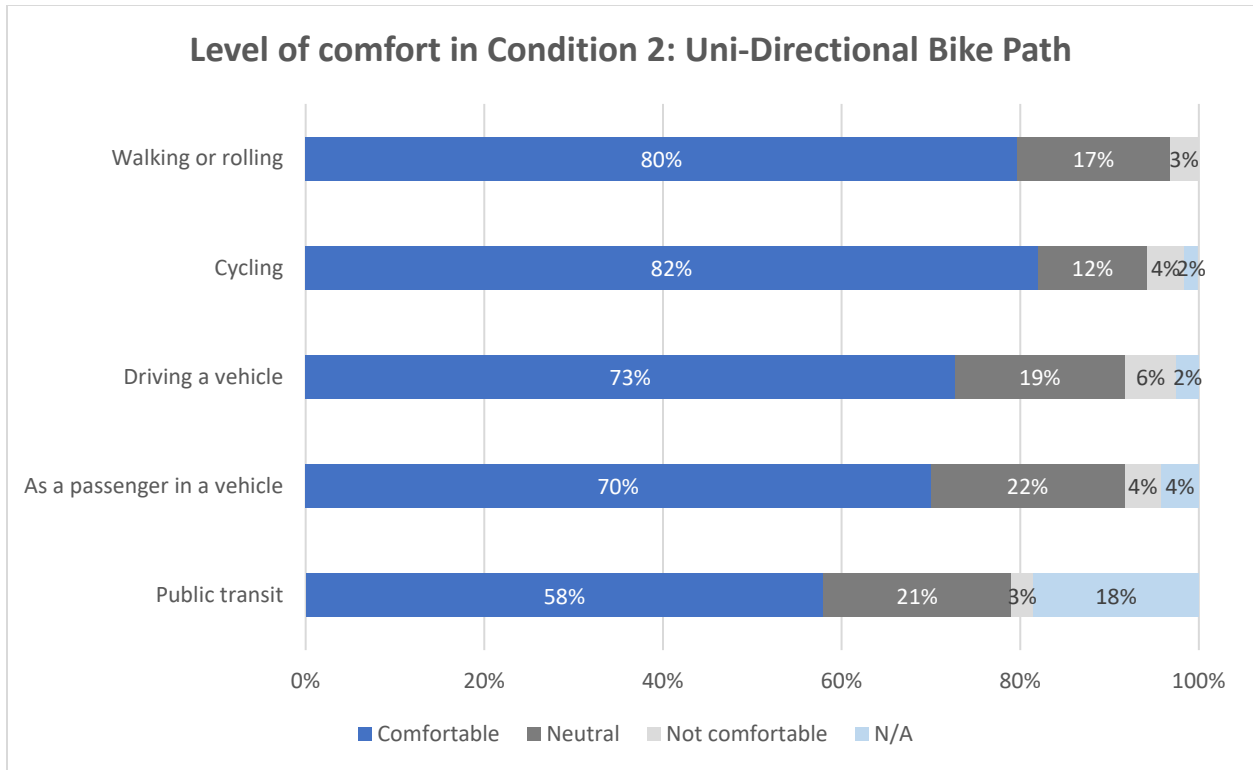


Figure 4: Participant responses to how comfortable they would feel when travelling in Condition 2 (n=123)

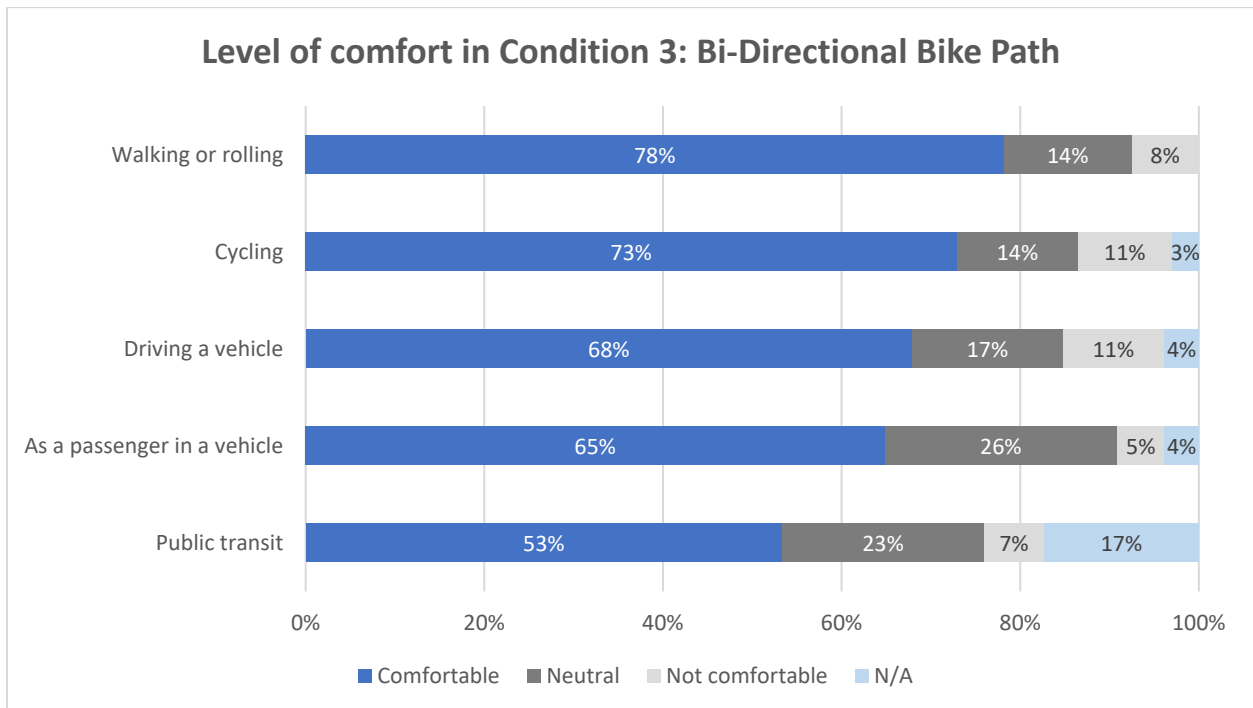


Figure 5: Participant responses to how comfortable they would feel when travelling in Condition 3 (n=133)

Feedback on Condition 1: No Bike Path

- Most participants felt this condition was unsafe for all road users.
 - Cyclists feel unsafe using spaces shared with vehicles, given speeds, congestion and unpredictable car behaviour.
 - Pedestrians are closer to traffic in this condition, which was seen as a negative. Cyclists may also be motivated to use the sidewalk in this condition, making the pedestrian environment less inviting.
 - Condition 1 is also a challenge for drivers as they have to maneuver around cyclists.
- Some participants were concerned about having cyclists navigate around parked cars, particularly those angled with their “nose in”, as it is challenging to predict driver behaviour.
- A few participants supported this condition if the streets were narrowed and traffic speeds were reduced.
- There was a lack of support for this option, given there was no dedicated bike path.
 - The majority of participants indicated a preference for a separated bike path so that all road users would have their own space and know what to expect from other users.

Feedback on Condition 2: Uni-Directional Bike Path

- Participants were generally supportive of this condition, given the physical separation of cyclists from vehicles. It was noted that this condition is safer for all road users since everyone has their own space.
- Participants expressed enthusiasm that by improving safety for cyclists, this condition would motivate more people to cycle downtown and reduce the number of vehicles on the road.
- Participants were concerned about the width of the bike path, with some thinking it might be too narrow. Participants indicated that they feel safer cycling in a bike path when there is room for faster cyclists to go around them within the bike path.
- Some participants wanted to know what material would be used for the movable barriers. Concerns were raised about potential conflicts between road users at intersections, crosswalks, and transit stops, particularly if the barriers reduce road users’ line-of-sight.
- Participants were unclear whether the uni-directional bike path would be mirrored on both sides of the street, causing concerns for connections and usability. Some participants shared concern that this option reduces the amount of space for pedestrians.

Feedback on Condition 3: Bi-Directional Bike Path

- Participants were mixed in their support for this option.
- Some participants liked that this option provided more space for cyclists and allowed for passing in the bike path.
- While some were supportive, others were concerned about having cyclists moving in the opposite direction as vehicle traffic. This could be confusing to drivers, and lead to safety concerns, particularly at intersections.
- Participants also questioned how bi-directional bike paths would connect to other streets downtown.
- Having a bi-directional bike path would leave one side of the street without cycling infrastructure, making it difficult for cyclists to access businesses on that side of the road.
- Overall, this condition received less support than Condition 2.

Comfort Downtown

Participants were asked to indicate what would make their experience downtown more comfortable. As shown by Figure 6, planters and trees, protected bike lanes, wide sidewalks and outdoor patios were the most popular responses.



Figure 6: Participant responses to what would make their experience downtown more comfortable (n=126)

Other Feedback

Participants who completed the survey were invited to submit other feedback. A summary of responses is provided below.

- Many participants emphasized the need to design a pedestrian-friendly downtown, prioritizing active transportation. There is a desire to focus on the human experience.
 - Bicycle parking should be considered as part of the design.
- Many participants felt that downtown should not be car-centric.
 - A number of participants would like to see a car-free downtown, with only public transit, deliveries and those with accessibility needs permitted to drive.
 - Many participants would like to see parking focused on the parking garages rather than on-street. Participants felt this would encourage individuals to spend more time downtown and visit more shops. This could be encouraged by making it cheaper to use the parking garages than on-street parking.
 - Traffic calming and reduced vehicle speeds are a priority. The movement of cars should not be a focus.
 - A number of participants noted that vehicles detract from the overall experience downtown. Sitting on a patio near car traffic is not enjoyable due to noise and poor air quality.
- Some participants were generally not supportive of the traffic circle for St. George's Square.
 - It is noted that there is confusion about the difference between the traffic circle and the roundabout options.

Ideas

Participants were asked to submit other ideas for street design options both in-person and online. A summary of responses is listed below.

- Reduce the focus on cars. Narrow the road and reduce vehicle speeds. Prioritize roads for cyclists and pedestrians.
- Encourage the use of parking garages over on-street parking.
- Lack of support for traffic circle in St. George's Square.
- Desire for more activated public space, including public art.
- Prioritize improvements that would support downtown businesses.
- Consider how to ensure accessibility for people with mobility constraints.
- General support for separated bike paths to increase feelings of safety. Consider connectivity of bike paths throughout downtown.
- Support for flexible / seasonal patios.
- Desire for more green space, trees and flowers.
- Support for patio program.
- Some participants used this opportunity to express their support for one or more of the options for the Wyndham Street corridor.
 - Of those who shared their perspectives, participants were most supportive of Option 3: Two Lanes, Uni-Directional Bike Path, followed by Option 4: Two Lanes, Bi-Directional Bike Path.
 - Participants were less supportive of Option 2: Two Lanes, Shared Use, Angled Parking.
 - A number of participants were actively opposed to Option 1: Existing Conditions (aka Do Nothing).
- Some participants used this opportunity to share their thoughts on the Wyndham / Quebec / Douglas / Intersection & St. George's Square
 - Some participants indicated they were not in favor of a traffic circle as they were concerned about safety, pedestrian access, and how the space would be used.
 - Other participants indicated they could support the traffic circle if pedestrian crossings are easy and it creates improvements to the existing configuration.
 - One participant noted they thought the realignment of Douglas would be expensive and would mean more patio space for the bank, which can't really benefit from it.
 - Some participants were supportive of standard improvements and realignment.
 - A couple of participants noted they liked the 'pedestrian scramble'
 - One participant suggested doing what works best for businesses.

Who We Heard From

In total 138 individuals completed the survey. Most participants were Guelph residents (residing within or outside Downtown). A handful of business owners, students and visitors also completed the survey.

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Participants ranged in age from under 18 to over 75, with the majority falling between 25 and 54.

Supplementary Engagement Activities

Downtown Guelph Business Association Meeting

A meeting was held with the Downtown Guelph Business Association on May 29, 2023, to complement the feedback collected from the public.

The History of Downtown Infrastructure Quiz

Between June 1st and July 23rd, 2023, 81 members of the public learned more about the project and 24 tested their knowledge of downtown infrastructure by taking the History of Downtown Infrastructure quiz. The quiz asked the following:

- How old is the underground infrastructure (water and sewer pipes) in Downtown Guelph?
- What year was the Macdonell Bridge constructed?
- True or False – Guelph’s first City Hall was located at the corner of Carden and Wyndham.
- Which of the following is included in a "streetscape"?
- What is the Downtown Infrastructure Renewal project about?

Guelph Multicultural Festival

Between June 9th and 11th, 2023, the Downtown Infrastructure Renewal Program staff attended the Guelph Multicultural Festival to raise awareness about the project. Approximately 500 individuals were made aware of the initiative.

Participants “described their ideal Downtown Guelph in one word”. Common themes included:

- A desire for more (free) parking downtown;
- A welcoming and accessible environment for people who walk and bike (including bike lanes);
- More trees and greenspace;
- Increased safety; and
- More mental health and addiction services.

Next Steps

Feedback will be used by the City and its consultants to inform the information gathering studies (i.e., Capital Implementation Plan, Environmental Assessments of the Macdonell Street bridge and Wyndham Street). Additional opportunities for public and stakeholder engagement will continue as the project progresses.