Guelph Downtown Renewal

Winter Engagement 2024 Summary

December 2024

What We Heard – Winter 2024: Downtown Infrastructure Renewal – Macdonell and Allan Structures Municipal Class Environmental Assessment

January 2025

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What We Heard – Winter 2024: Downtown Infrastructure Renewal – Macdonell and Allan Structures Municipal Class Environmental Assessment

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Introduction

Background

The Macdonell Bridge (Structure No. 112), located on Macdonell Street over the Speed River and known to many community members as Allan's Bridge, is a main route for vehicles, pedestrians and cyclists travelling to Downtown Guelph.

Constructed in 1963 and rehabilitated in 1988, recent inspections of the Macdonell Bridge identified the need to repair or replace the structure. Rehabilitation, improvements and modifications to the Allans Dam Bridge (Structure 131) and Allans Dam (Structure No. 320), located at the Speed River immediately south of the Macdonell Bridge, are also required.

In response, and as part of the broader Downtown Infrastructure Renewal Program, the City of Guelph initiated a Municipal Class Environmental Assessment (Class EA) for improvements and modifications to the Macdonell and Allan structures. The study considers options for the entire Macdonell Street Bridge area, including all three structures and the intersections of Macdonell Street/Woolwich Street and Macdonell Street/Arthur Street North/Elizabeth Street.

The project is being completed as a Schedule "B" project in accordance with the Municipal Class Environmental Assessment (October 2000, amended in 2007, 2011, 2015, 2023, and 2024).

The Downtown Infrastructure Renewal Program 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.

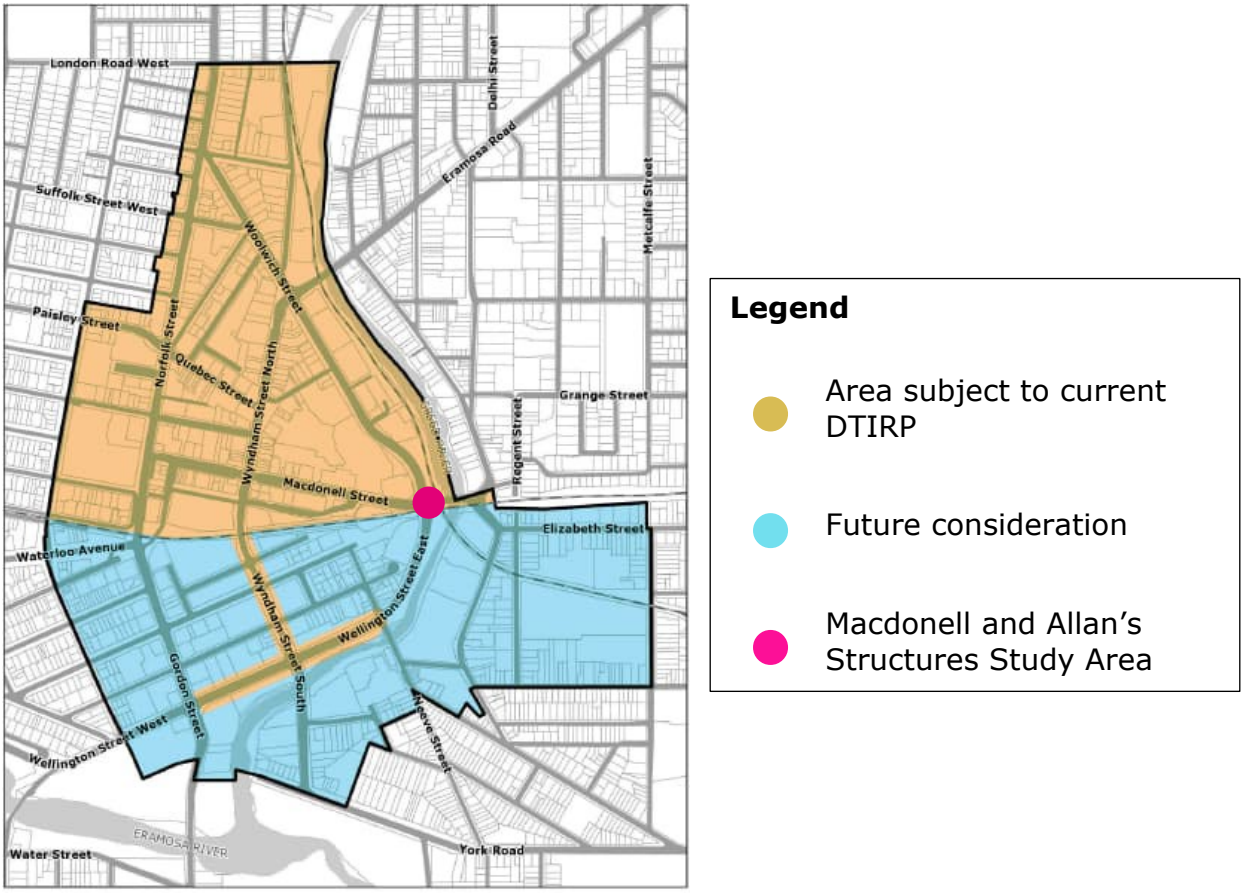

Figure 1: Map of the Downtown Infrastructural Renewal Program (DTIRP) and the Macdonell and Allan's Structures Study Areas

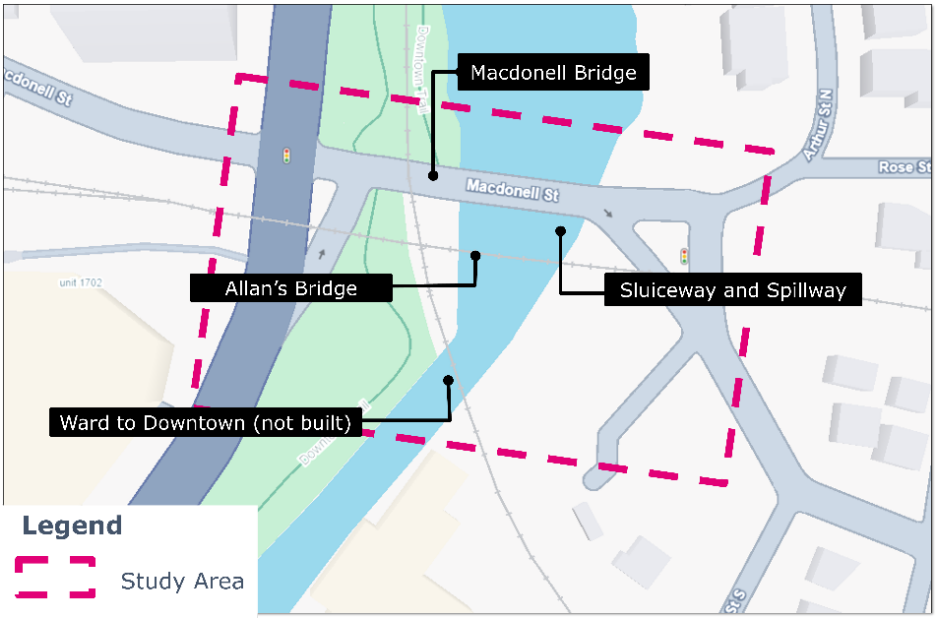

Figure 2: Close-up map of the Macdonell and Allan's Structures Study Areas, highlighting the different structures

Figure 1 and 2 show the location of the DTIRP project study area in relation to the Macdonell and Allan Structures Study Area.

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

The goals of the Macdonell and Allan Structures environmental assessment include addressing structural deficiencies identified in recent bridge inspections for the Macdonell Bridge, the Allan's Bridge, and the Sluiceway and Spillway. It also includes reviewing options for the Ward to Downtown pedestrian/cyclist crossing and enhancing road safety, operations, and connectivity for vehicles, pedestrians, cyclists, and transit to support the community-building goals of the City.

After evaluating options for what to do with each structure, project staff have put forward the following recommendations:

- **Macdonell Bridge -** Replace and widen the bridge to accommodate active transportation on the north side.
- **Allan's Dam Bridge Structure -** Remove the bridge and have its heritage commemorated in some way.
- **Sluiceway and Spillway -** Rehabilitate and repair the structures.
- **Ward to Downtown Bridge -** Construct a new pedestrian and cyclist crossing south of the Guelph Junction Railway (GJR) rail bridge, with a simpler design than the previously proposed Ward to Downtown bridge.

What we did

The City hosted the fifth public open house as part of the Downtown Infrastructure Renewal Program (DTIRP) on December 9, 2024. The event shared space with several other concurrent city projects that impact the Downtown area. Along with the DTIRP project purpose and goals, the open house shared the options considered for each structure, the criteria used to evaluate each option, and the recommendations for the structures. In addition, ideas for commemorating the Allan's Dam Bridge, including potentially forming a heritage committee, were presented. The open house followed a "drop-in" style format, where materials were displayed in-person and online for public review. Project team members were available in person throughout the open house to provide additional context and answer questions.

After reviewing the display materials, the public was invited to provide feedback through:

- a hard-copy survey at the open house, or
- the Have Your Say webpage.

The survey solicited thoughts and feedback as the recommendations for the Macdonell and Allan Structures Municipal Class EA become finalized.

Open house and survey feedback are incorporated in the summary below.

- The open house was held on December 9, 2024. At least 75 individuals were in attendance.
- The Have Your Say survey was available from December 9, 2024 – January 12, 2025. Two hundred and three (203) visitors contributed to the survey.

Who we heard from

Almost all (98% of survey respondents) identified themselves as Guelph residents (residing within or outside Downtown).

Survey participants replied to the demographic questions as follows:

Ninety-two (92) were Guelph residents living Downtown, one-hundred-and-seven (107) lived in Guelph outside of Downtown, and four (4) lived outside of Guelph. A few respondents further specified their occupation or relation to Downtown, with eight (8) identifying as students, nine (9) as business owners or operators in the Downtown area, and eight (8) as business owners or operators outside of the Downtown area.

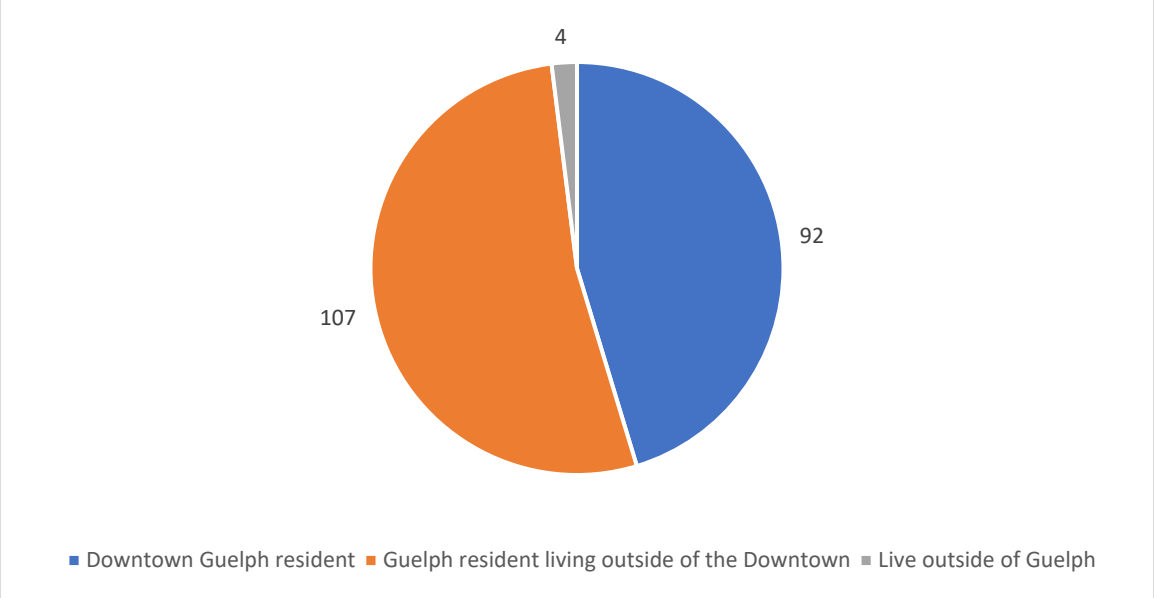

Figure 3: Share of participants who reside in Guelph inside or outside of Downtown or live outside of Guelph (n=203)

What we heard

All structures

Each recommendation for the structures received support from most participants, with an average of 72% of participants choosing "strongly or somewhat agree" across all structures. The Macdonell Bridge's recommendation received the strongest support, with 82% selecting "strongly or somewhat agree," while the

Allan's Dam Structure received the weakest support, 59% selecting "strongly or somewhat agree."

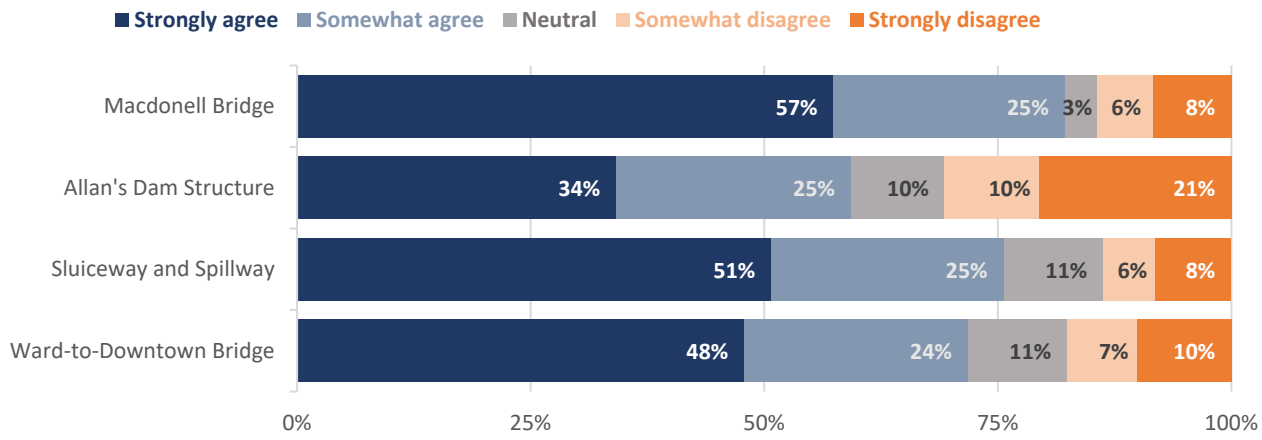

Figure 4: Comparing the Likert-scale scores of the recommendations for each structure.

Comparing sentiment amongst residents and businesses

Average ratings were calculated for each demographic to compare how they rated the recommendations for the structures. The ratings correspond to 1 for strongly disapprove and 5 for strongly approve.

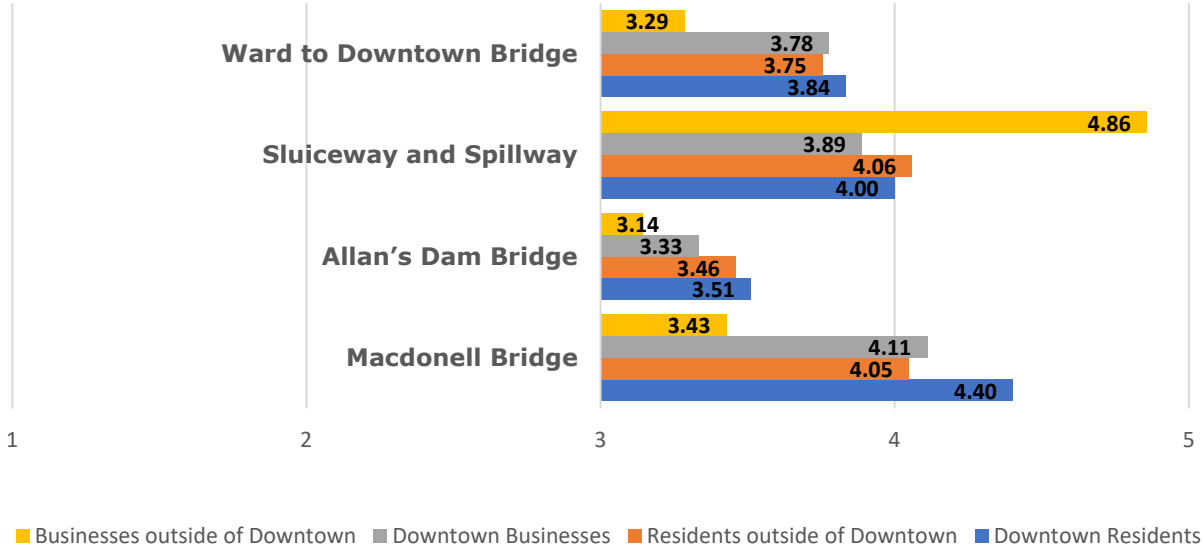

Figure 5: Average rating out of 5 of recommendations for each structure per participant demographic.

Residents living downtown and outside the Downtown rated the recommendations for each structure similarly, with the difference in average rating hovering around 2% for the Ward to Downtown Bridge, the Sluiceway and Spillway, and the Allan's

Dam Bridge. The largest difference in average rating was with the Macdonell Bridge, where the average approval rating among Downtown residents was around 8% higher with downtown residents. The lower rating from residents outside of Downtown may be explained by those residents' higher usage of the Macdonell Bridge to access Downtown. Suggestions to improve the recommendation provided by some participants do not clarify the difference in rating, as the responses are similar regardless of the residents' location.

The differences in rating were higher between businesses outside of Downtown and within Downtown, as well as between businesses and residents. However, the sample size of businesses was small, with only 17 out of 203 identifying as business owners or operators, and about each half representing a business inside or outside of downtown. Therefore, each answer had a heavier weight when calculating the average. Businesses outside of Downtown gave the recommendations the lowest ratings for all structures except the sluiceway and spillway, where they gave the highest average rating. Very few participants provided detailed reasoning for their rating and echoed sentiments similar to other participants. The large difference in ratings compared to other demographics may simply be due to the low sample size and not indicative of businesses outside of Downtown having a common unique concern. On the other hand, the average rating provided by businesses in the Downtown area was more aligned with the average rating of residents both outside and inside the Downtown.

Both the average ratings and the detailed feedback provided by residents indicate that sentiment about the recommendations for the structures is generally shared among these different groups.

Macdonell Bridge

Recommendation

The EA recommends the removal of the current Macdonell Bridge and replacing it with a new, wider bridge that would accommodate a multi-use path on the north side and a wider sidewalk on the south side.

This recommendation received strong support. Ideas to enhance the recommendation are captured below:

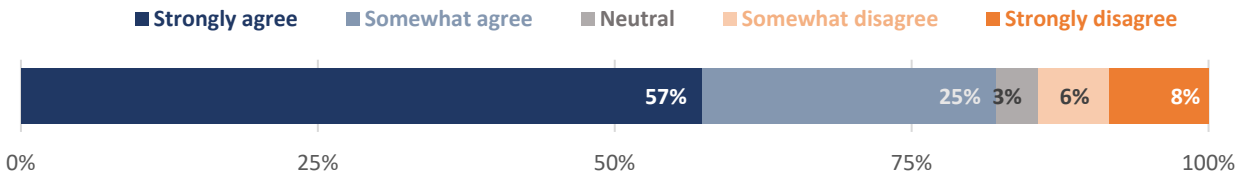

Figure 6: Likert-scale scores for the recommendation for the Macdonell Bridge.

Amongst those who agreed with the recommendation

Improved safety for all users

Most participants called for improved safety by widening the bridge and reconfiguring adjacent intersections. Some ideas include providing more opportunities to cross the street, removing slip lanes, and adding more traffic lights.

Improvements for pedestrians and active transportation

Along with safety, many participants provided specific suggestions for a better experience for non-vehicular road users, resulting in improved safety for all. For the active transportation route, many participants encouraged separating it as much as possible from vehicles, through grade separating the path, using barriers and bollards. For pedestrians, many participants suggested wide sidewalks on both sides of the bridge to help avoid conflicts between pedestrians and faster-moving cyclists on the active transportation path.

Leisure and heritage

Some participants suggested considering the bridge as a destination rather than something to pass through. Ideas included adding seating to watch the water, considering sightlines to important landmarks, and designing the bridge to reflect the area's heritage.

Amongst those who disagreed with the recommendation

Location of bike lanes

Some participants were against bike lanes on the Macdonell Bridge and felt that adding them was unnecessary. Some suggested that bike lanes or active transportation routes should be completely separated and provided on another structure.

Costs and need for change

A few participants expressed that funds should not be spent on the bridge and should be kept the way it is.

Evaluation criteria

When evaluating the options for the Macdonell Bridge, participants ranked traffic and environmental and climate change impacts as the two most important evaluation criteria. While still deemed important, costs, heritage, archaeological and cultural impacts were ranked lower, with about 25% of participants ranking each as very important.

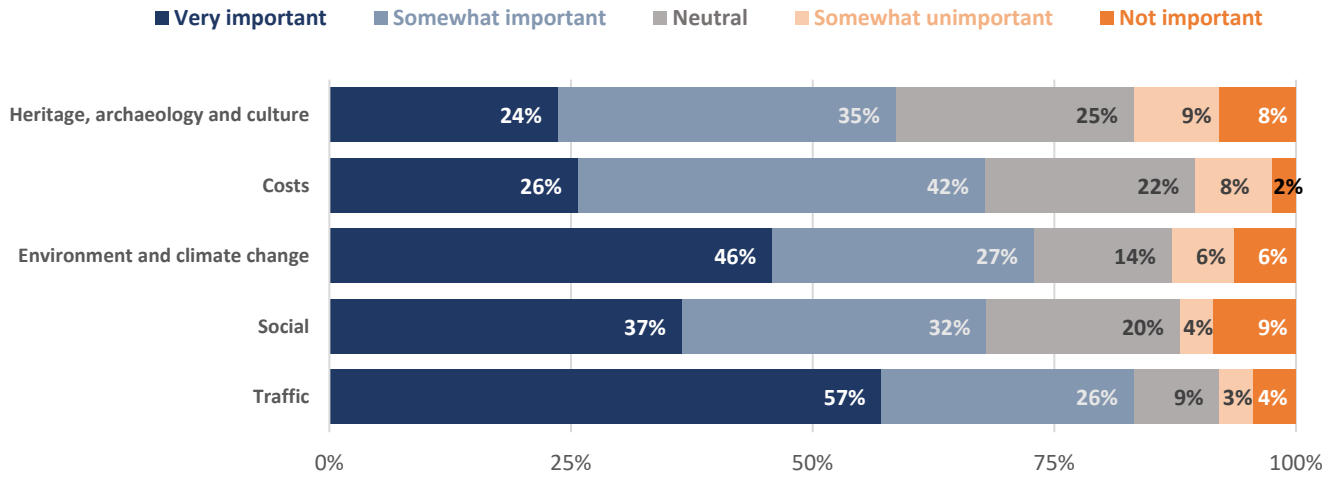

Figure 7: Likert-scale scores for each evaluation criterion for the MacDonnell Bridge.

Participants were asked to share their thoughts about the evaluation criteria and were invited to suggest new criteria for consideration.

Participants overwhelmingly commented on the need for improved safety for all road users, especially pedestrians and cyclists, on the Macdonell Bridge and surrounding intersections. Participants proposed an explicit safety criterion or clearly defining the existing traffic criterion to include traffic calming, accommodating all road users, and not designing around increasing vehicle use.

A few participants also proposed a criteria for visual appeal, though they acknowledged that this may be part of the social or heritage, archaeological and cultural impacts criteria.

Allan's Dam Bridge

Recommendation

The EA recommends fully removing the Allan's Dam Bridge and exploring opportunities to commemorate the bridge's heritage.

This recommendation was supported by most participants, with over half choosing strongly or somewhat agreeing. Compared to the other structures in the study, it is the most controversial, with the lowest proportion of participants choosing "strongly agree" votes and the highest proportion of "strongly disagree." Ideas and suggestions to support or reject the recommendation are summarized below:

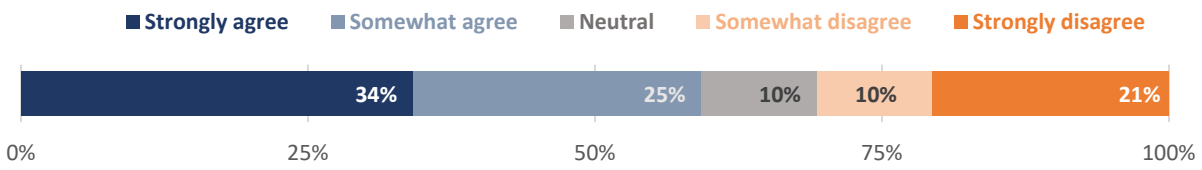

Figure 8: Likert-scale scores for the Allan's Dam Bridge recommendation.

Among those who agreed with the recommendation

Heritage considerations

Many participants are against spending resources on heritage commemoration for the bridge, with a few specifying that a plaque would be enough.

Active transportation

A few participants who agreed with the recommendation noted that the area's pedestrian and active transportation capacity is improved through other means, as planned with the Macdonell Bridge and the Ward to Downtown Bridge.

Among those who disagreed with the recommendation

Repurpose

Most participants who disagreed with the recommendation want the bridge preserved and repurposed into a vehicle-free space. Ideas include turning the Allan's Dam Bridge into a park, a spot for fishing, or watching the water. Many suggested the bridge should be dedicated as an exclusive active transportation route instead of on the Macdonell Bridge and the Ward to Downtown Bridge.

Heritage

Most participants who disagreed also wanted to preserve the bridge for its heritage value, expressing that keeping the bridge was preferred over heritage commemoration.

Evaluation criteria

Most participants who provided feedback on the evaluation criteria expressed confusion about why traffic was evaluated, resulting in 29% of respondents deeming it unimportant. Otherwise, feedback on the other criteria focused on heritage, archeological and cultural impacts, echoed the sentiment shared in the feedback for the recommendation regarding preservation and repurposing instead of removing the bridge.

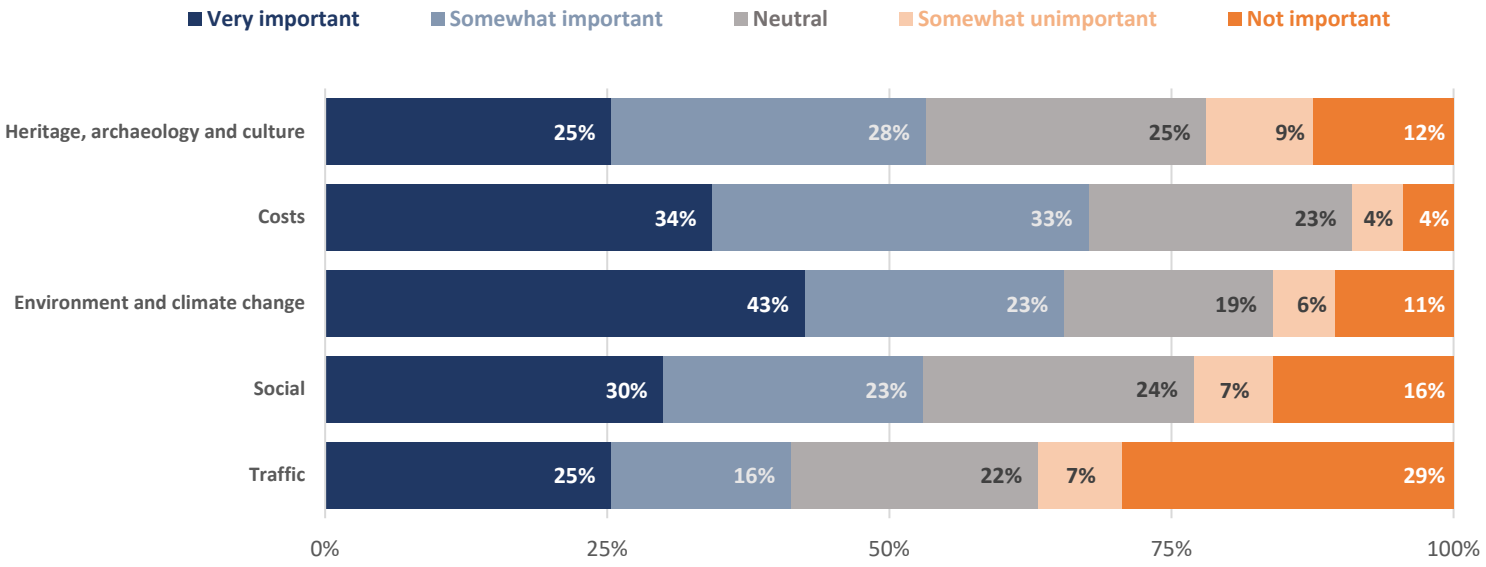

Figure 9: Likert-scale scores for each Allan's Dam bridge evaluation criteria.

Heritage commemoration and formation of a committee

Participants were asked if they would support the development of a heritage commemoration committee as part of the recommendation for the Allan's Dam Bridge, if they were interested in being contacted by the City, and if and when they were ready to form a committee.

The chart below compares the support for forming a committee between participants who agreed with the recommendation and those who disagreed. For the sake of comparison, neutral responses were excluded from this chart. While approximately two-thirds of participants agreed and one-third disagreed, support for forming a committee was nearly evenly split among respondents, with just over half not in favour. A larger portion of those opposed to forming a committee came from those who agreed with the recommendation. This outcome is reflected in the feedback for enhancing the recommendation, where many participants wanted the bridge removed without further resources to be spent on forming the committee. Interestingly, a small portion of respondents opposed to forming a committee were still interested in participating in joining if the City forms one.

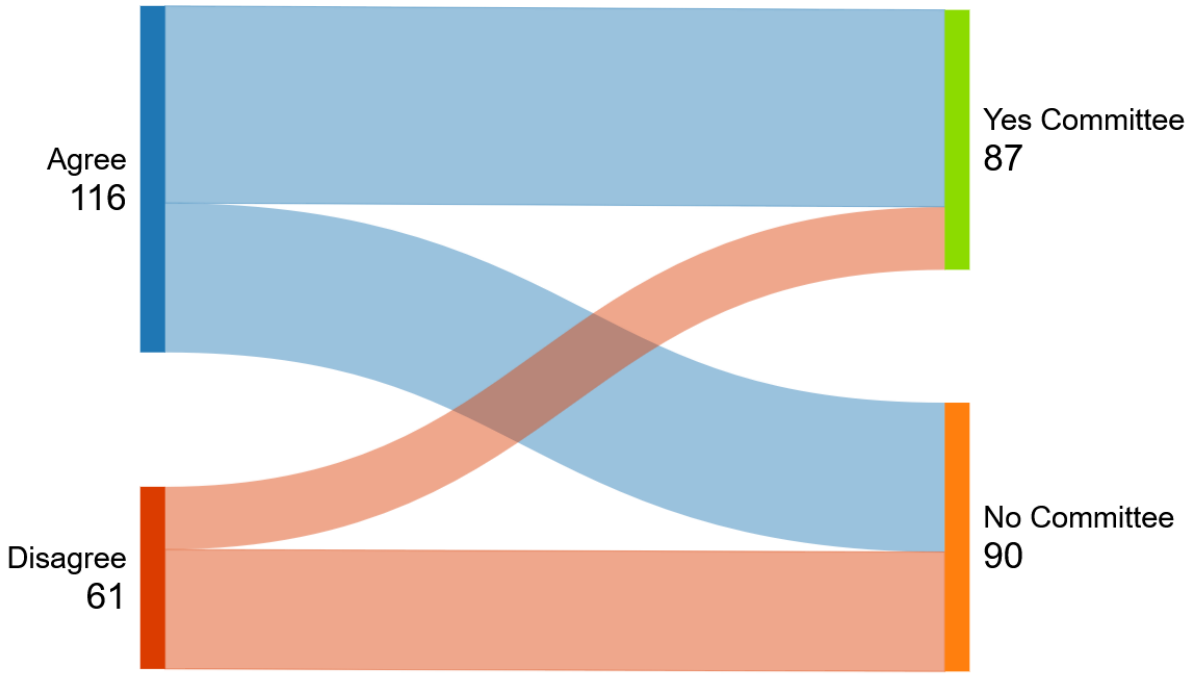

Figure 10: Chart following participants' responses on agreeing or disagreeing with the Allan's Dam Bridge recommendation and creating a heritage committee.

Sluiceway and Spillway

Recommendation and further considerations

The EA recommends undertaking necessary repairs to the existing sluiceway and spillway with full rehabilitation.

This recommendation received strong support. Participants commonly expressed a need to improve the river's health, with different ideas on how to achieve this from participants who agreed or disagreed with the recommendation. These ideas and other themes are captured below:

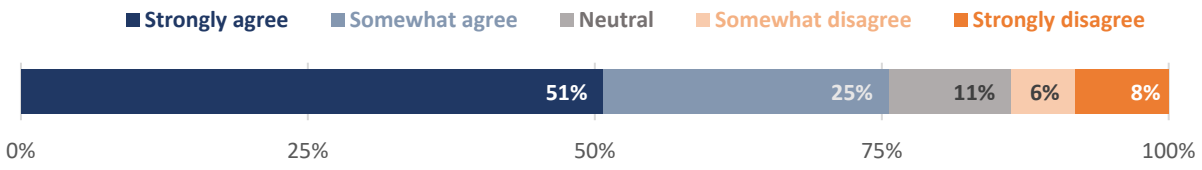

Figure 11:Likert-scale scores for the recommendation for the sluiceway and spillway.

Among those who agreed with the recommendation

Water interactions

A few participants suggested modifying the structures to allow fish and even people in boats to pass through.

Visual aesthetics and cleanliness

Some participants hoped rehabilitation would improve the current sluiceway and spillway structures' aesthetics and suggested using natural materials such as stone. In addition, a few participants suggested finding a design that could prevent debris from building up and make it easily cleanable if it does.

Among those who disagreed with the recommendation

Naturalization

Most participants who disagreed with the recommendation advocated for fully removing the structure. This would allow for the naturalization of the river. Participants suggested that this would improve the river's health, cleanliness, and natural habitats and avoid flooding in the event of a large surge of water.

Cost

Relatedly, some participants raised concerns over the ongoing and lifetime costs of keeping the sluiceway and spillway instead of removing them.

Evaluation criteria

Participants chose environmental and climate change impacts as the most important evaluation criterion. Feedback on the criteria was aligned with the feedback on the recommendations. Whether they agreed or disagreed with the recommendation, most participants felt that the sluiceway and spillway had an important impact on the environment and future climate change events that could affect water levels.

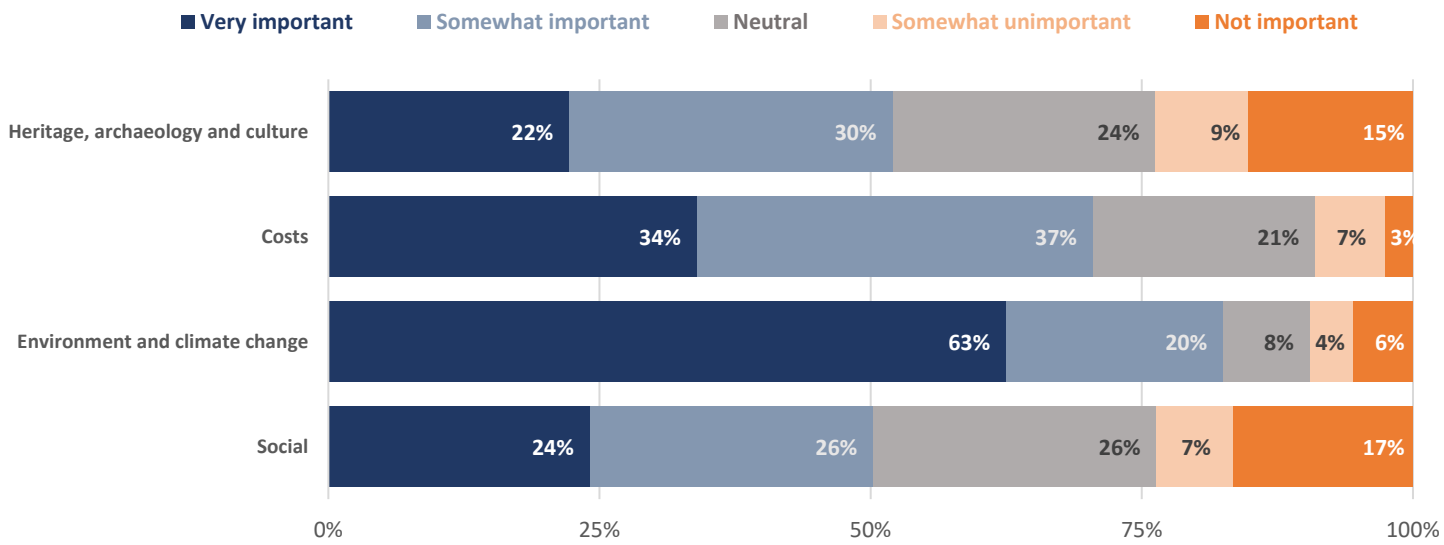

Figure 12: Likert-scale scores for each evaluation criteria for the sluiceway and spillway.

Ward to Downtown Bridge

Recommendation and further considerations

The EA recommends constructing a multi-use trail bridge on the south side of the GJR Rail Bridge based on a modified design that is simpler than the original design which was cancelled in 2023.

This recommendation received general support. Those who supported the recommendation emphasized that it would enhance the safety of the study area. Participants who disagreed felt it was redundant with the other structures. Further ideas to support or disagree with the recommendation are provided below:

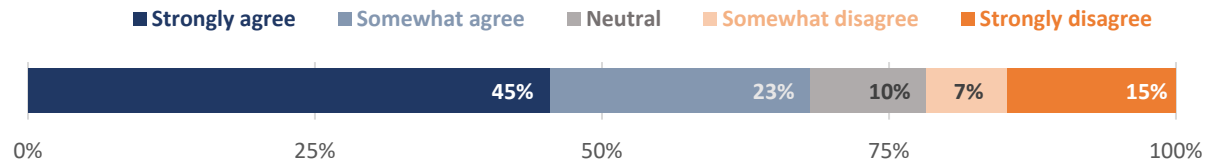

Figure 13: Likert-scale scores for the Ward to Downtown Bridge recommendation.

Among those who agreed with the recommendation

A few participants recommended adding a widened portion to the bridge to allow for a lookout onto the river, which could include benches. When considering cost, some participants suggested that savings from going with a simpler bridge design can go towards improving active transportation infrastructure in the connecting areas. Finally, numerous participants emphasized the importance of a good visual aesthetic for the bridge that honours the area's heritage while still achieving the goal of a simpler design.

Among those who disagreed with the recommendation

Participants who disagreed with the recommendation generally felt it was unnecessary due to the other structures nearby in the study area. Many felt that the active transportation path included in a widened Macdonell Bridge would make a Ward to Downtown crossing redundant. Another idea shared by a few participants is to use the Allan's Dam Bridge as a dedicated vehicle-free crossing instead of removing it.

Evaluation criteria

The criteria were ranked in a fairly balanced manner, with traffic, social, and environmental and climate change impacts ranking as the most important.

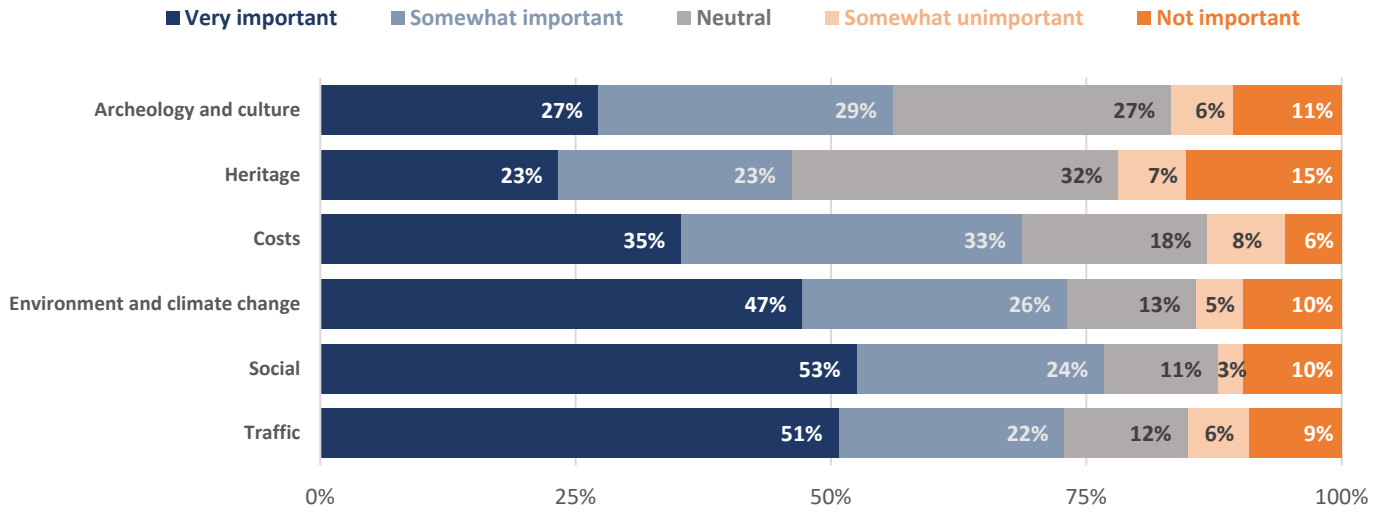

Figure 14: Likert-scale scores for each Ward to Downtown Bridge evaluation criteria.

Feedback on the evaluation criteria echoes the same sentiments as the feedback shared for the recommendation, namely the concern over the cost when there are other crossing options close by.

Regarding neutral feedback

Throughout this report, feedback on the recommendations for the structures was categorized by those who "agree" and "disagree." Most participants who selected "neutral" did not leave further feedback that could be included in the report. For the few that did, their feedback was incorporated into the category that fit best.

Next steps

As part of the Class Environmental Assessment process, the City and its consultants will review all input from the open house and the Have Your Say survey to inform the final recommendations.