



BEDFORD HIGHWAY FUNCTIONAL PLAN

Phase 1 Public Engagement Report
January 2019



UPLAND

INTRODUCTION

The Bedford Highway is among the most important roadways in the Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM). It provides a key north-south connection for both local and regional travel, directly linking the regional centre and several suburban communities.

The Bedford Highway Functional Plan will provide a corridor-wide vision that informs how transportation infrastructure is built and maintained. The plan will examine how the right-of-way is used and how space can be allocated to serve all modes of travel, including autos, trucks, transit, pedestrians, and cyclists. The plan will also inform land use development that enables strategic growth along the roadway and surrounding areas.

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT OVERVIEW

Public engagement for this plan is being carried out in two phases. Phase 1 objectives were to:

- + Provide information about the historic and existing conditions.
- + Provide information about the Integrated Mobility Plan, integrated transportation and land use planning, and multimodal level of service targets.
- + Gather public and stakeholder input to develop an understanding of the typical current user experiences, and the ideal user experiences.

The Phase 1 public engagement activities included open house meetings, an online survey and online information materials.

Phase 2 public engagement will occur during the latter stages of the project and will present the draft functional plan options to the public for review and comment.



Open house meetings were held November 19th, 2018 at the Sunnyside Mall and November 20th, 2018 at the Rockingham United Church on Flamingo Drive. Each meeting was two hours in duration, and was a drop-in format. Seventy people attended the session on the 19th and fifty people came out on the 20th.

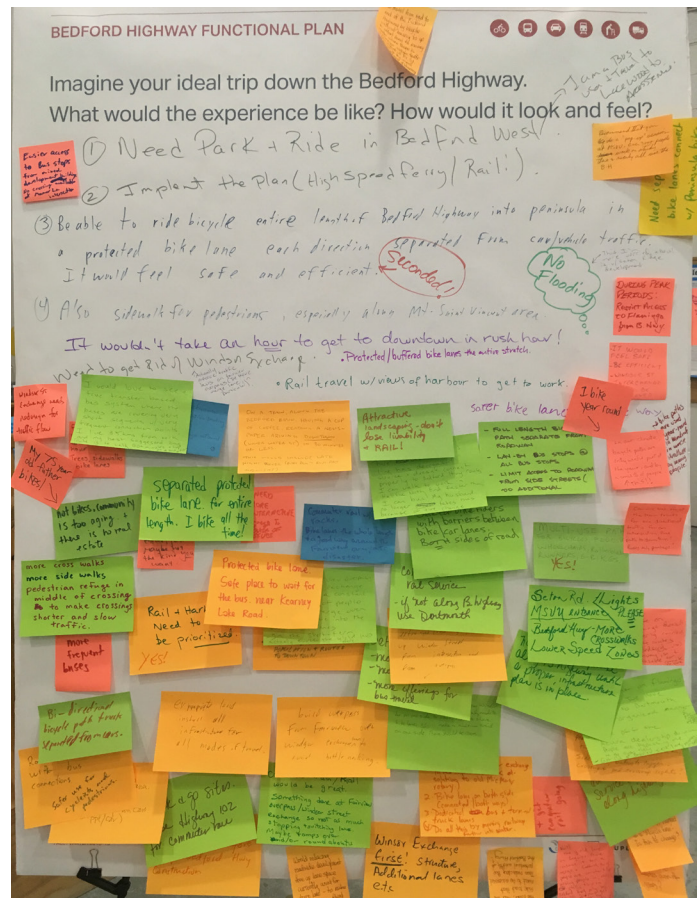
- + Panels and digital presentations provided information about the project, the existing conditions along the Bedford Highway, and the surrounding communities.
- + Input about physical conditions was collected on maps.
- + Ideas for improvement were written on an open comment board
- + Travel mode priorities were identified using a sticker-voting template.

The municipal civic engagement website, Shape Your City, offered information about the project and the existing conditions by showing the same panels that were presented at the open house. There were 60 people who viewed these materials. On social media, including Facebook and Twitter, 42 individual comments were received.

An online survey, promoted and shared through Shape Your City, was open to responses from November 19th to 30th. Over 800 people participated in the survey. Many of the respondents (44%) frequently travel the Bedford Highway by private vehicle, for both commuting to school or work, and leisure reasons. By comparison, 16% of respondents frequently commute by transit, and 4% frequently commute by bicycle. Some respondents travel by a combination of modes and/or only travel the Bedford Highway occasionally or rarely.

The following section describes recurring themes heard through the open house meetings and survey responses, including:

- + Mode Priorities
- + Bicyclist and Pedestrians
- + Bus Transit
- + Commuter Rail or Ferry
- + Vehicle and Traffic Management
- + Land Development and Character



Public meeting attendees provided open-ended comments describing their ideal experience of travelling the Bedford Highway.

MODE PRIORITIES

Understanding how people prioritize modes of transportation (i.e. walking, biking, transit, driving) along the corridor was an important part of the engagement process.

At the public meetings, participants were asked for their opinion on the level of priority that should be given to each mode of travel. They placed a sticker on a continuum from low to high priority, with instructions to consider the potential trade-offs between modes. The online survey asked respondents to list their top three priorities from the options indicated in Figure 1.

Many open-ended responses touched on trade-offs and priorities, both at the public meetings and through the survey. The findings from the two sources (meetings and survey) were generally similar, with a few subtle differences.

In the online survey, “reducing traffic congestion and delays” was the most frequently listed priority, with 65% of respondents identifying it as one of their top three priorities. Transit related priorities were the next most frequent with “rapid transit service” and bus convenience and reliability” being identified by 45% and 37% of respondents, respectively. Active transportation priorities were identified less frequently. “Cyclist comfort and safety” and “pedestrian comfort and safety” were identified as priorities by 30% and 23% of respondents, respectively (Fig.1). These results indicate that most respondents view vehicle and bus travel as the top priorities for the Bedford Highway, with a smaller number of respondents viewing cycling and walking as priorities. It is interesting to note that while only 16% of respondents identified themselves as frequent transit users, 29% listed transit as a priority.

At the public meetings, most participants ranked transit, cycling, and walking as mid to high priorities, with very few indicating these modes were low priority. For automobiles, stickers were spread along the entire continuum, slightly clustered in the middle, indicating a more mixed response to the importance of accommodating vehicle traffic on the Bedford Highway. In both public meetings, transport trucks were identified as a low priority.

In summary, from both sources of input, the strongest priorities for the Bedford Highway are improving public transit service and traffic congestion and safety, followed by improving cyclist comfort and safety. Generally, improvements to pedestrian facilities are recognized as a priority by some, but to a lower extent than other modes.

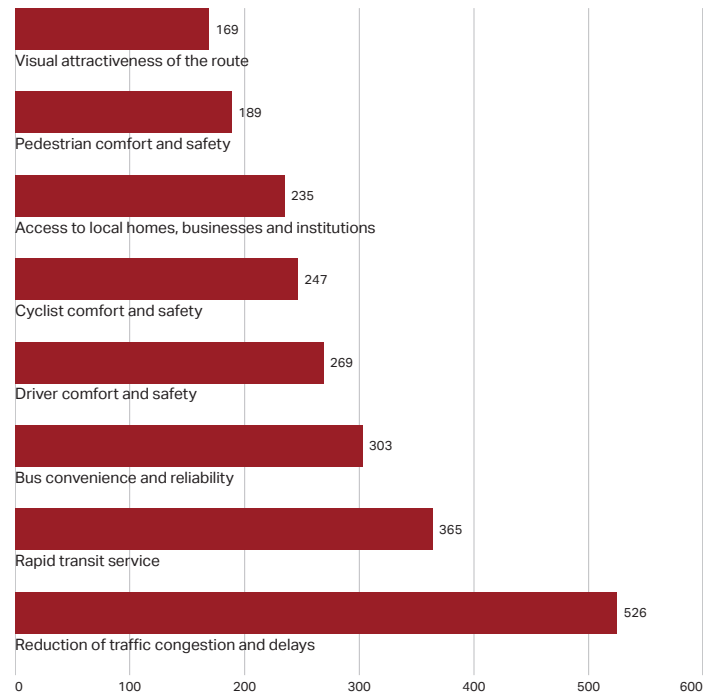


Fig. 1 Top priorities for travel along the Bedford Highway corridor. Source: Shape Your City online survey.

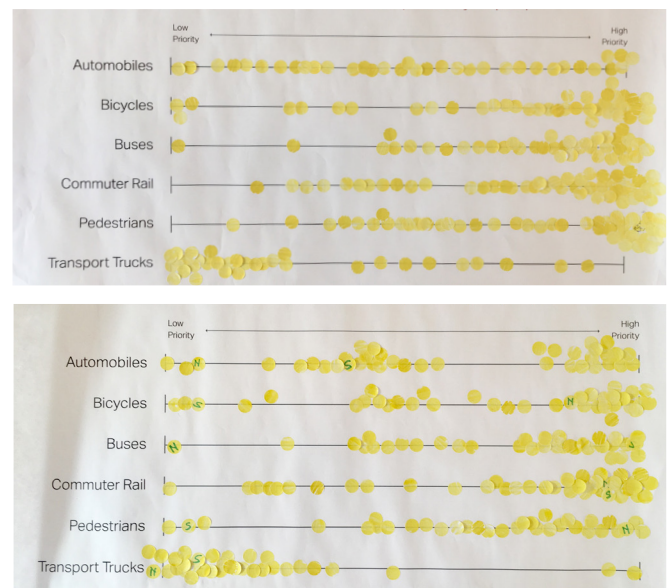


Fig. 2 Continuum of mode priority from public meetings.

WALKING AND BICYCLING

There was a strong desire for safe and comfortable cycling and pedestrian infrastructure that would make it easy for anyone to travel by these modes. Figure 3 shows that 68% of survey respondents accept public spending to improve active transportation options. However, as shown in Figure 12, respondents were split as to the acceptability of improving active transportation facilities if it would result in increased traffic delays.

For some people active transportation was associated with a sense of place and access to the many shops and services in Bedford. However, for most it is viewed as a mode for commuting, with particular attention paid to cycling. Valuable findings emerged about on-road bicycling infrastructure, insights about the potential influence of active transportation infrastructure, and nuances around the acceptability of trade-offs.

Throughout the meetings and survey a popular option was separated bike lanes or multi-use pathway (Fig. 4 and 5) physically separated from traffic. Overall, the desire was for separate multi-use pathways and proper links to the peninsula's system of pathways. The survey indicated that a multi-use pathway is more likely to increase cycling than painted or separated bike lanes, with 53% of respondents indicating that a pathway would increase their likelihood of cycling and walking. Some participants envisioned a multi-purpose pathway along the western shore of the Bedford Basin. Such a trail was seen as having potential as an attraction, a place for enjoying the view of the Basin, and as a part of a route that could be a complete connection from the peninsula to Lower Sackville.

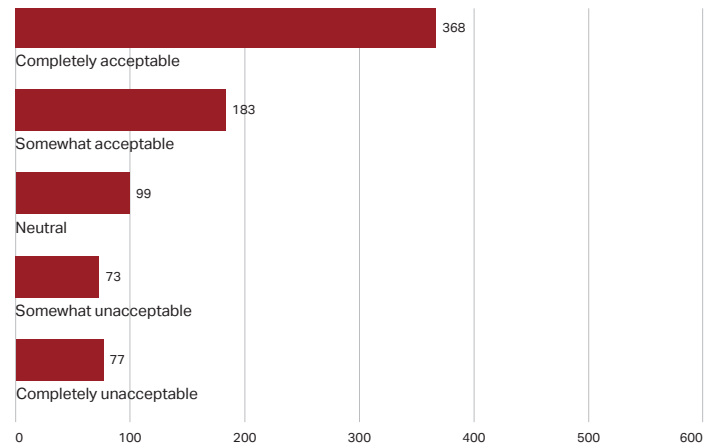


Fig. 3 Acceptability of public spending to improve active transportation options (multi-use pathways, bike lanes, etc.)
Source: Shape Your City online survey

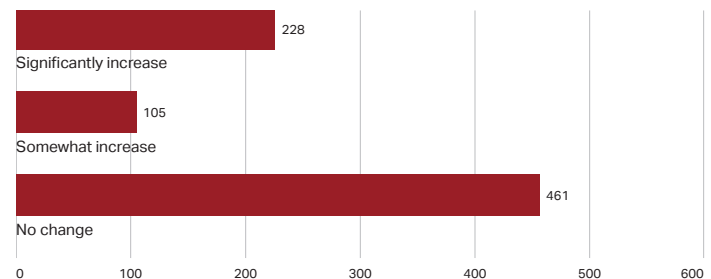


Fig. 4 Extent to which separated bicycle lanes would increase the likelihood to cycle. Source: Shape Your City online survey.

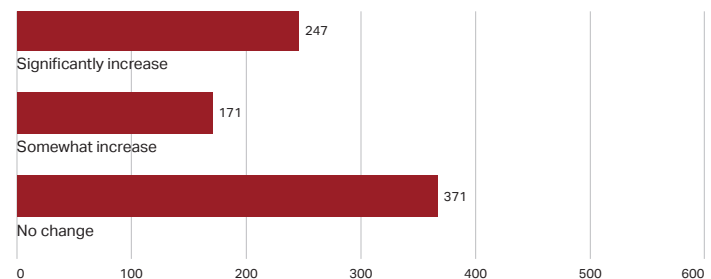


Fig. 5 Extent to which a separated multi-use pathway would increase the likelihood to walk / cycle. Source: Shape Your City online survey.

A low percentage (30%) of survey respondents indicated that painted bicycle lanes without physical separation would influence their likelihood to cycle (Fig 6). The survey's open-ended responses helped to illuminate some of the concerns associated with active transportation investments or certain types of facilities, such as:

- + Cyclist safety is a major concern.
- + Delays to transit or compromising transit improvements for on-street cycling lanes are generally undesirable.
- + There was some concern from respondents that cycling offers a poor benefit-cost (especially in comparison to transit) and that cycling is only a viable commuting option during summer and shoulder seasons.

Slightly more than half of survey respondents (54%) indicated more connected sidewalks would encourage them to walk more frequently on the Bedford Highway (Fig. 7). Public comments on pedestrian needs indicated the need to:

- + Fill in gaps between sections of sidewalks.
- + Install more crosswalks.
- + Improve access to transit with safer and more connected pedestrian routes to transit stops.
- + Create pedestrian refuge areas in the middle of wide crossings to make the crossing distance shorter and to slow traffic.

The areas around Mount Saint Vincent University (MSVU) and the access to the future Seton Ridge development were identified as priority areas for improvements to pedestrian safety.

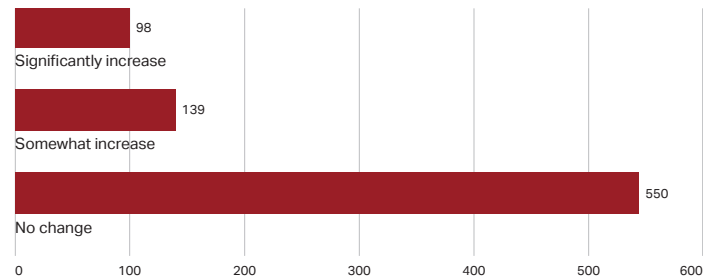


Fig. 6 Extent to which painted bicycle lanes would increase the likelihood to cycle. Source: Shape Your City online survey.

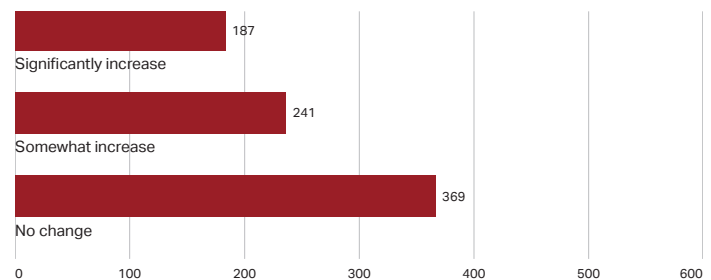


Fig. 7 Extent to which extending sidewalks (adding sidewalks in areas where they don't currently exist) would increase the likelihood to walk. Source: Shape Your City online survey.

"My ideal trip would be to travel from end to end of the Bedford Highway by bicycle, without having to up effort level to racing mode where there is only one traffic lane"

- Public meeting participant comment.

BUS TRANSIT

There is strong support for significant improvements to the bus system. Many participants agreed that any future growth in Bedford and other communities in the area is reliant on high quality transit. More than 80% of respondents considered additional public spending for transit facilities and services to be acceptable (Fig. 8). There were many specific comments and suggestions for how to make bus transit more desirable. In general, the two main ideas were to improve how buses move through traffic, and to improve the bus routes and schedules.

There is strong support for bus priority measures, such as intermittent or dedicated bus lanes, with the purpose of alleviating the rush hour delays. A majority of respondents (58%) indicated that they would be more likely to take transit if there were dedicated bus lanes, including 32% who said they would be significantly more likely to take transit (Fig. 9).

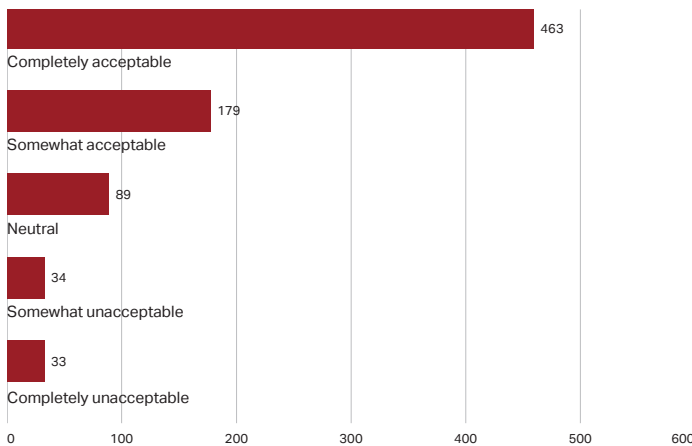


Fig. 8 Acceptability of public spending to improve transit facilities and services. Source: Shape Your City online survey.

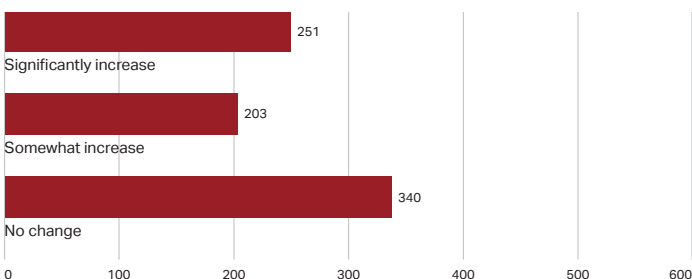


Fig. 9 Extent to which dedicated bus lanes would increase the likelihood to take transit. Source: Shape Your City online survey.

Suggestions for scheduling generally focused on higher frequency, and specifically included:

- + More frequent north bound routes in the afternoon and evening
- + Service later into the night
- + More frequent route 80 service
- + More express-bus routes from Bedford to Halifax, with very few stops until the Peninsula.

There is a desire for safer and more comfortable places to wait for the bus, with lay-bys, convenient crosswalks, continuous sidewalks, and trees, especially near Kearney Lake Road, Mount Saint Vincent University, and the southern end of the Bedford Highway corridor. Participants at meetings also identified a need for easier access to bus stops from commercial and mixed-use areas in order to reach these destinations.

In open-ended responses, some participants envisioned an efficient transit system with strong local connection routes with convenient timing. Small shuttle buses were suggested, rather than large transit buses, as an alternative that could be more agile and run more frequently through the side streets. Use of Highway 102 for commuter buses was also suggested, perhaps bypassing the Bedford Highway in the most congested areas.

It was also noted that buses, vehicles, bicycles and other transit options like rail or ferry need to work together to facilitate inter-modal transportation, particularly by providing appropriate and convenient transit connections. More park and ride facilities, especially in Bedford West, are desired.

"My ideal trip would be a true transfer-based system where the buses are covering very short segments with very frequent connection points to destinations beyond".

- Survey respondent comment.

COMMUTER RAIL OR FERRY

There was a great deal of support for creating a way to transport people from Bedford to downtown Halifax other than by road. The rail corridor and harbour are identified as significant public assets, with terrific views, that should be put to use for the public good. In open ended responses, preference for rail appears most frequently, followed by ferry. There is evidence in the survey that commuter rail has the potential to be an attractive mode choice, with 53% of respondents who indicated that they would likely use commuter rail if it was available (Fig 10). Most participants also understood that establishing a higher order public transit service between Bedford and Halifax would be a significant undertaking for the municipality, and that the transit options identified would be costly to implement.

Many respondents described a desire for a rapid transit option that is well-connected to park and ride facilities, local buses and active transportation routes, so that residents are able to easily reach terminals. Similarly, there is also support for directed density in new development that would enable transit-oriented communities. This is demonstrated in Figure 15, with a high degree of acceptance for more mid-to-high-rise condos/apartments near station stops to justify commuter rail service.

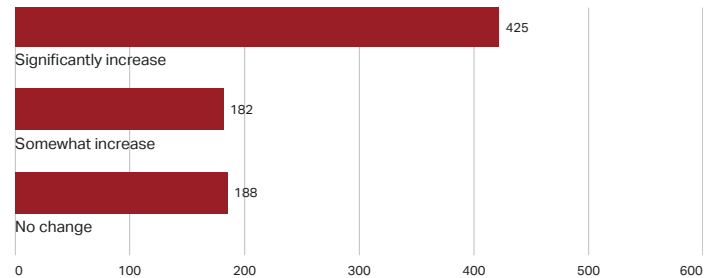


Fig. 10 Extent to which the availability of commuter rail would increase the likelihood of using this service. Source: Shape Your City online survey.

"My ideal trip would be on a train, along the Bedford Basin, having a cup of coffee, reading a newspaper, arriving downtown at Lower Water Street in 30 minutes or less."

- Survey respondent comment.

VEHICLE AND TRAFFIC MANAGEMENT

Many participants had ideas about how to change and improve the ways that vehicles use the road, with approximately 3 in 4 respondents supporting additional public spending to improve traffic flow on Bedford Highway (Fig. 11). By notable comparison, more people felt public spending would be “completely acceptable” for transit improvements (Fig. 8).

The majority of suggestions for traffic management were related to infrastructure. Highway 102 was a point of deliberation. Some participants thought it would be useful to divert traffic to the 102 at peak times, but there was concern about access for local residents. Others debated the merits and costs of widening the highway to create space for public transit and active transportation modes to exist alongside the current vehicle traffic. Figure 12 demonstrates that while many people indicated strong desire for improved walking and cycling amenities, there was mixed reaction to the acceptability of making these improvements if they would result in added traffic congestion.

Some input focused on improving the flow of traffic by reducing the number of cars during peak hours. The main strategy identified to achieve this was to disincentivize single occupant cars and introduce ways to encourage carpooling. Suggestions included using “congestion pricing,” like rush hour tolls or a surcharge for single passenger vehicles at peak times, as well the opposing approach of rewarding carpooling by providing dedicated high occupancy priority lanes.

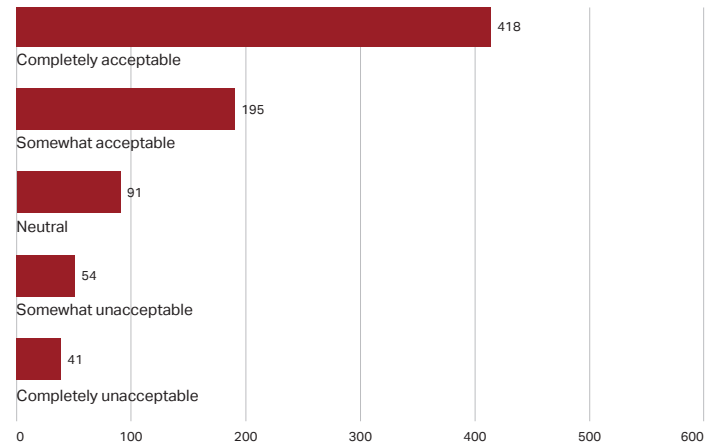


Fig. 11 Acceptability of public spending to improve traffic flow.
Source: Shape Your City online survey.

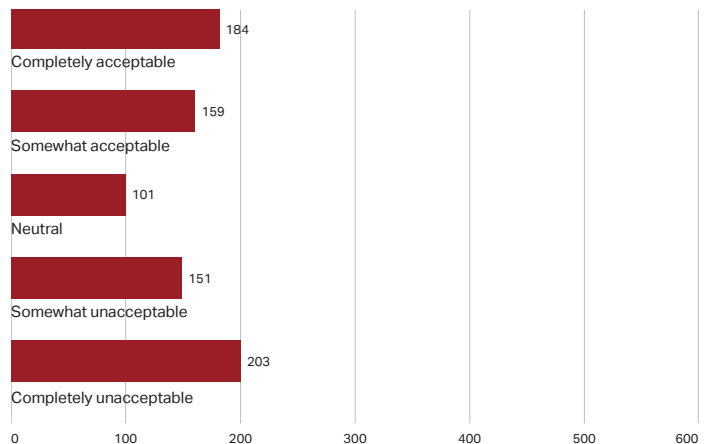


Fig. 12 Acceptability of public spending that would increase delays for traffic to improve walking and cycling amenities.
Source: Shape Your City online survey.

The Windsor Street Exchange was the most frequent point of driver annoyance, and was a focal point for ideas about vehicle infrastructure. Some participants expressed concern that other improvements along the corridor would be rendered ineffective due to a bottleneck at this intersection. Traffic flow in the Joseph Howe Drive/ Kempt Road/ Windsor Street lanes is a major challenge for drivers who feel there is too much stopping and switching lanes. Suggestions included constructing overpasses or roundabouts in place of the intersection. Many participants expressed that even if expensive infrastructure would be necessary to create smooth traffic flow at this location, it would be worth it. It was also clear that increased delays from maintaining the status quo was not viewed favourably by survey respondents (Fig. 13).

A wide range of other specific suggestions were also made:

- + Install more speed limit signs, and lower speed limits
- + Install interactive or real-time signage to advise of issues
- + Better directional signage overhead at MSVU, Bayview and the Icon Bay building
- + Synchronize and rationalize traffic lights in Bedford
- + Do not allow drive-through restaurants near intersections
- + Do not allow any more side streets or access points
- + Better use of the 3rd centre lane for left turning
- + Consider a reversible lane system

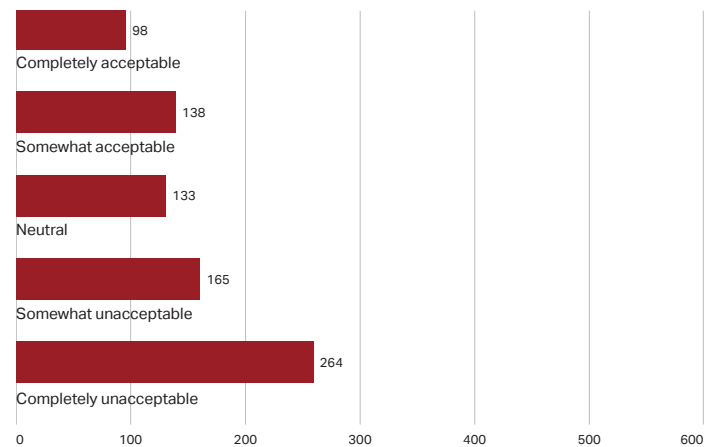


Fig. 13 Acceptability of increased delays for traffic (due to additional development, lack of automobile capacity expansion). Source: Shape Your City online survey.

"My ideal trip down the highway would be smooth and efficient movement of vehicles"

- Survey respondent comment.

LAND DEVELOPMENT AND CHARACTER

Among some participants, developing vacant lots was seen as a wise way to increase density and support transit-oriented communities. These individuals envisioned the area as a community with convenient commercial areas and affordable apartments, with an identity as more than a vehicle corridor. Some felt that there is great potential to make the Bedford Highway a bustling center while still offering an efficient travel route. While there is support for widening the roadway even if this affects abutting properties (Fig. 14), open-ended responses revealed that a minority of individuals are in support of widening specifically for increased traffic capacity. The open-ended responses provide strong qualification that this ought only be done to accommodate transit or active transportation infrastructure, and with sensitivity to the quality of place.

Some participants felt that certain segments of the Bedford Highway actually function as a “main street”, with lots of shops and services. These places could be treated differently from the traffic corridor areas, with changes such as improved landscaping, underground utility lines, traffic calming or angled parking. It was also suggested that changing the name from “Highway” to the Bedford “Road” would better reflect the type of corridor it actually is.

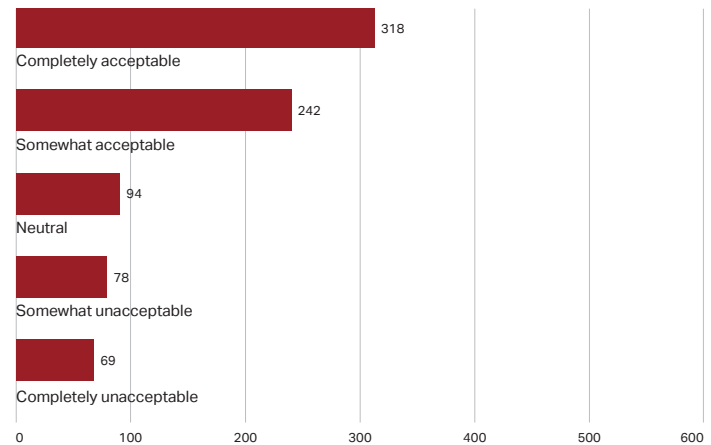


Fig. 14 Acceptability of road widening and impacts to adjacent properties. Source: Shape Your City online survey.

“Bedford highway has the potential to become an iconic landmark if more attention will be paid to the aesthetics”

- Public meeting participant.

There were mixed feelings about the changing nature of the development character, and the decline of the suburban lifestyle. For some people, any new development raises fears of further exacerbating traffic congestion. Some participants felt that an infrastructure plan needs to be in place before any more construction can proceed. While there is general support for mid-to-high rise development to justify commuter rail or bus service (Fig. 15 and 16), there is also concern about high-rise development on the eastern side of the roadway which could impede views of the basin from the road and the currently existing businesses and homes along it.

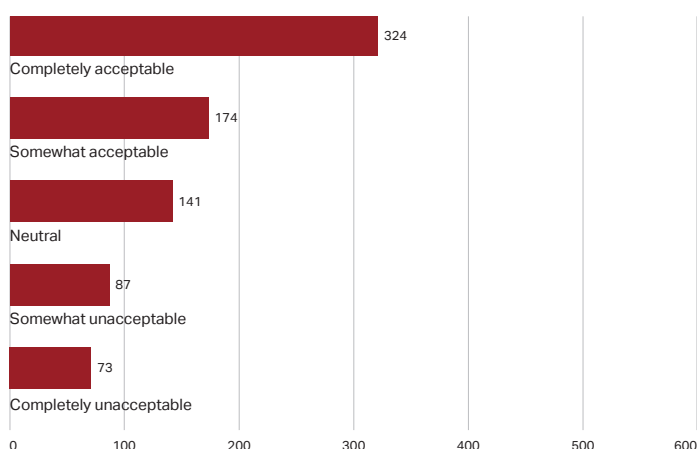


Fig. 15 Acceptability of more mid-to-high rise condos/apartments to justify commuter rail service. Source: Shape Your City online survey.

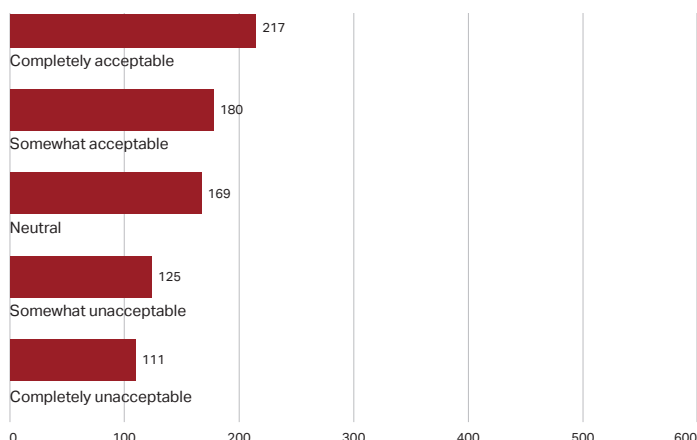


Fig. 16 Acceptability of more mid-to-high rise condos/apartments along sections of the Bedford Highway to justify more reliable bus service. Source: Shape Your City online survey.

CONCLUSION

Phase 1 public engagement for the Bedford Highway Functional Plan attracted meaningful input from a significant number of citizens. Participants in the process gained an awareness of how the project is being undertaken, as well as historic and existing conditions. The engagement findings illuminated public opinions about the experience of travelling the Bedford Highway by different modes, and priorities for improvement to the corridor.

For many engagement participants, the current experience travelling the Bedford Highway by any mode is challenging, due to delays and concerns about safety. Drivers experience traffic congestion and long trip times during peak periods. Cyclists and pedestrians describe encountering conditions that feel uncomfortable and difficult to safely navigate. Transit users also face unreliable transit service, as well as inconvenience in timing and locations of stops and terminals.

The strongest priorities for the Bedford Highway are improving public transit service and traffic congestion and safety. Generally, improvements to cyclist and pedestrian facilities are recognized as a priority to a lower extent than the other modes.

Enthusiasm for commuter train service is high, as well as strong support for significant improvements to the bus system. In particular, there is support for bus priority measures to alleviate peak period delays. There is also a desire for more frequent bus service and express service during high-demand times of day.

When considering different types of cycling infrastructure improvement, there is a preference for separated multi-purpose pathways versus painted or separated bike lanes. Pedestrian infrastructure improvements would also influence people to walk more often, especially in combination with transit.

Overall, the community aspires for travel experiences on the Bedford Highway that are smooth, efficient, and safe, and less reliant on private vehicles.

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