

ACTIVE TRANSPORTATION CONNECTIONS

for Grahams Grove, Penhorn, Westphal, & Main

What We Heard Report
January 2023



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What We Did

Engagement for the Active Transportation Functional Plan included various activities throughout October and November of 2022. The purpose of this phase of engagement was to collect input on existing conditions and experiences with active transportation in the study area. Comments focused on key destinations and routes, and barriers to walking and cycling. Participants also offered ideas for improvements and opportunities. Engagement included the following activities:

Conversations with Community Leaders

To kick off engagement the project team had conversations with several key community leaders to inform them about the project, get initial input on the challenges in the study area, and hear feedback on the engagement strategy. Leaders included:

- Tony Mancini, Councillor for Harbourview-Burnside-Dartmouth East
- Sam Austin, Deputy Mayor and Councillor for Dartmouth Centre
- Representatives of Village on Main Business Improvement District
- Representatives of the Penhorn Lakes and Area Trails Association

Walking Tours

The project team hosted three walking tours with community leaders as well as representatives from the Nova Scotia Department of Public Works, Walk and Roll Halifax, Bicycle Nova Scotia, and the Ecology Action Centre. Three walks were held at various times of day.

Pop-up Events

One pop-up was set up on a Saturday morning at the Lake Banook Trail outside Cottage Cafe, and a second afternoon pop-up was held in Shubie Park by the Fairbanks Centre. People passing by were able to stop for a coffee, check out a map of the study area, and chat with the project team about the project. In total, approximately 100 people stopped in to provide their comments, with the afternoon pop-up drawing about twice as many people as the morning pop-up.



Walking tour over the Braemar overpass



Pop-up event at Shubie Park

Workshops

Three online workshops were held to collect feedback from key stakeholders. Each workshop began with a short introduction to the project followed by discussion questions. One workshop included members of HRM's Technical Committee, which represents staff from various municipal departments. This workshop had 16 participants.

Two workshops with external stakeholders had four and three participants each, including representatives from the following:

- The Nova Scotia Department of Public Works
- Bicycle Nova Scotia
- Ecology Action Centre
- Walk and Roll

Online Survey

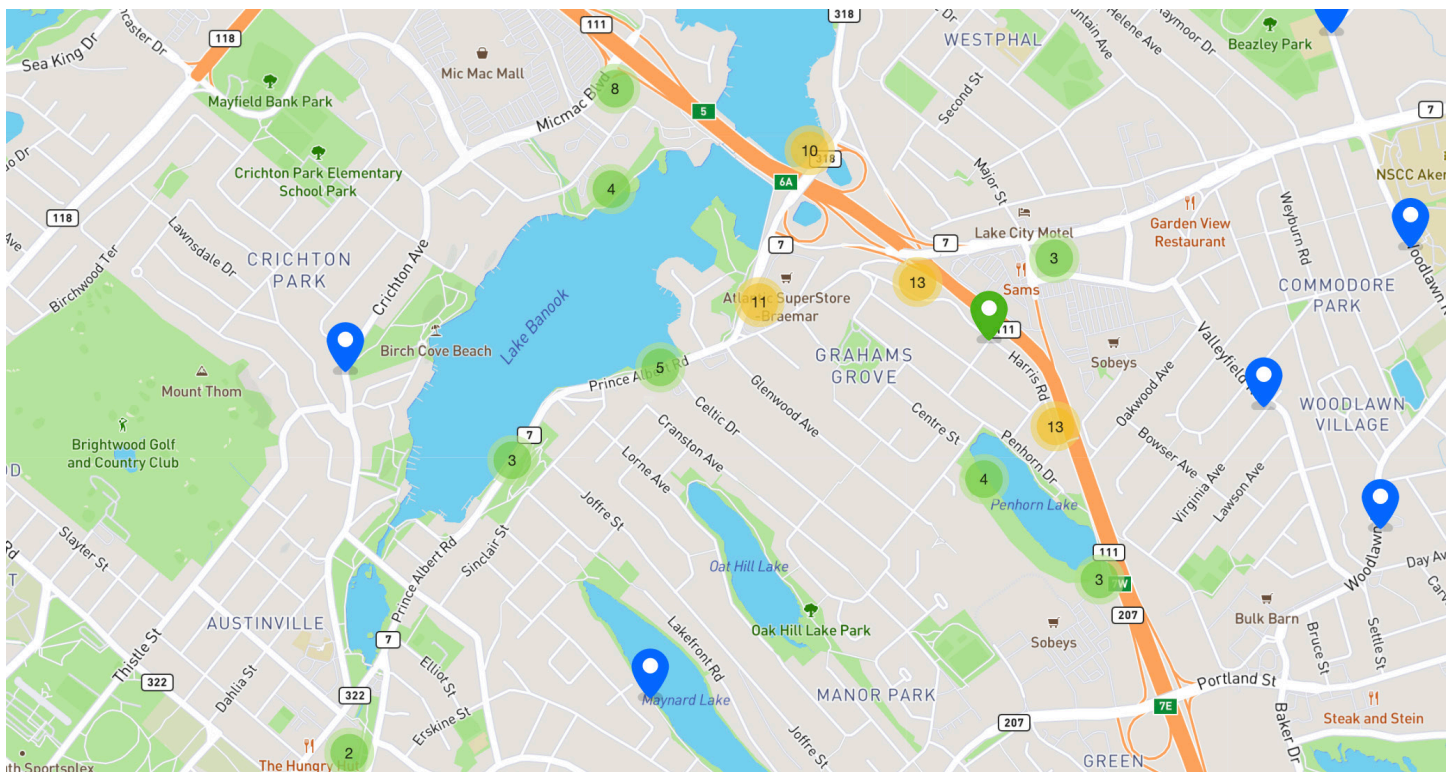
The survey was hosted through Shape Your City and open from November 14th to 30th. It received responses from 164 people.

Interactive Map

An online interactive map of the project area was linked on the Shape Your City Halifax website. The map invited members of the public to zoom in, place comments, read comments left by others, and comment on other people's comments. The map was open for comment from November 14th to 30th, and it received 157 comments from 20 people.

Promotions

Information on the project and engagement opportunities were promoted through the Municipality's Shape Your City page for the project, social media, newsletters for local Councillors and stakeholders, a mail out to residents within the study area, and informally through stakeholder's personal and professional networks.



Pins placed on the interactive map

Major Themes

Key Destinations

Throughout engagement, participants made it clear that their priority is to have a well-connected, continuous network of active transportation facilities. Engagement participants identified the study area as a major destination for residents throughout HRM due to the lakes, boating festivals, trails, shopping centres, and other amenities. At the same time, many said the area feels like an island—nearly impossible to access without a car. Some noted that the quiet residential streets in the community serve as good connections for young people biking between friends houses and other destinations. Some key destinations that people want to see better connected include:

- Grocery stores and shopping areas including Main Street, Tacoma Plaza, Penhorn Plaza, and Micmac Mall
- Commercial areas outside the study area like Woodside, Dartmouth Crossing, Burnside Industrial Park
- Healthcare offices and personal services
- Kiwanis Grahams Grove Park & ice cream stand
- Cottage Cafe
- Transit terminals
- Canada Post community boxes
- Shubie Park
- Beazley Fields
- Lake Banook
- Penhorn Lake
- Beaches
- Cole Harbour Trails
- Downtown Dartmouth
- Halifax peninsula

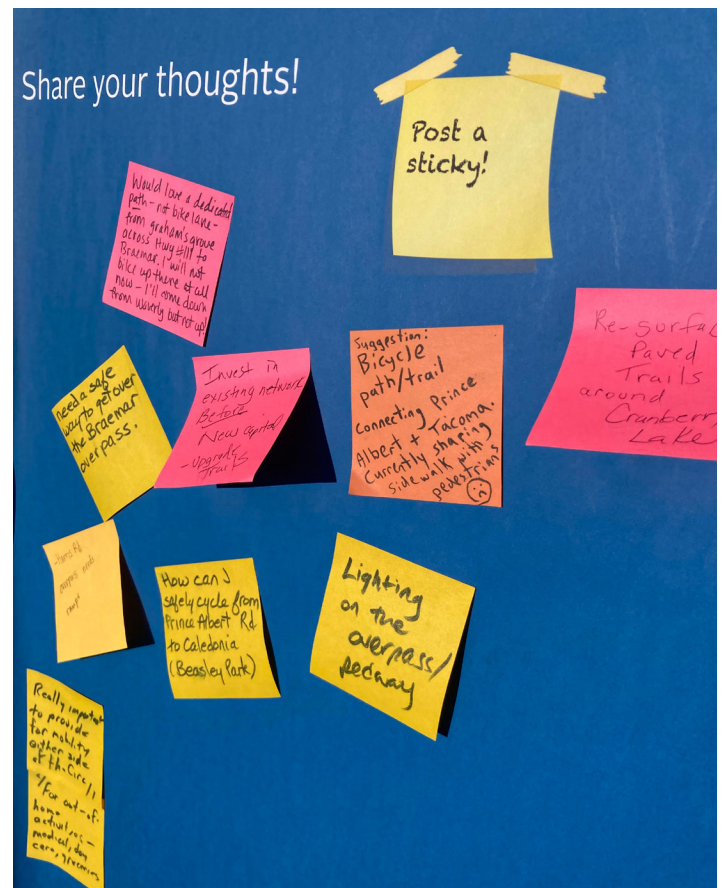
Conflict with vehicles

Engagement participants noted a lack of separation from vehicles as the number one barrier for both cycling and walking in the study area. Busy roads and high speeds are an issue throughout the area, but major roads connecting to the highway interchange are the biggest challenge. Participants suggested speed radar and traffic calming to help reduce conflicts.

Intersections & Crosswalks

To avoid gaps in the network, community members want to see good crosswalks provided wherever active transportation facilities connect. One stakeholder suggested an intersection inventory that would look at the spatial constraints to determine what facility types and crossing treatments the roads could accommodate.

Other concerns around intersections in the study area are traffic signals that don't sense bicycles (forcing cyclists to dismount), proper snow clearing, and crosswalk time that are too short to allow pedestrians to cross comfortably.



Comments provided at pop-up events

Parking

Stakeholders commented on parking lots in the study area, noting that the amount of surface parking and asphalt negatively impacts walkability in the community. Another suggested that regulatory updates could ensure future development considers active transportation connections within and adjacent to the parking lots. Online engagement participants suggested that property owners should provide bicycle parking in parking lots close to entrances, and ensure racks are properly secured to the ground.

Accessibility

Existing pedestrian infrastructure in the study area presents serious accessibility barriers for people with disabilities, and these concerns were raised throughout the engagement activities. Key priorities for engagement participants were addressing areas where stairs or steep slopes are the only access to major connections, reducing conflict with vehicles, and improving connections between existing pedestrian and cycling facilities. In particular, existing highway crossings were highlighted as lacking accessibility.

One stakeholder noted that an audible pedestrian signal was recently installed on Grahams Grove at the Braemar Superstore, but suggested that many more are needed. The noise of heavy traffic can be a challenge for pedestrians who are blind or have low vision, and the highways which intersect this study area create major navigation challenges.

The stakeholder added that installing low rollover curbs in the centre lane of multi-use paths and between separated bike lanes and adjacent sidewalks would also improve accessibility in the area by providing a tactile warning for pedestrians close to oncoming cycling traffic.

Conflict between cyclists and pedestrians came up throughout engagement, and participants suggested that providing dedicated cycling facilities would help eliminate hazards where cyclists are traveling full speed on sidewalks or multi-use paths.

Grades

The study area features many hills and steep slopes, so grades are a major consideration in the design of any future active transportation connections. Engagement participants identified some routes with steep grades that may pose particular challenges as cycling routes, including:

- Mic Mac Boulevard & Mic Mac underpass
- Harris Road
- Glenwood Avenue
- Waverley to Lakecrest

Stakeholders expanded on these concerns noting that cyclists making their way uphill should be separated from cars as they tend to sway, while cyclists going downhill take up speed and should be separated from pedestrians. They added that intersections which require cyclists to stop on steep hills should also be avoided.

Maintenance

Many engagement participants pointed out maintenance needs for local active transportation routes, and one pop-up participant suggested that the Municipality should invest in the current network before spending on new capital infrastructure. Maintenance concerns included:

- Maintenance and surfacing of trails and paths
- Sweeping of bike lanes and shoulders
- Snow clearing
- Upgrades to existing pedway structures
- Fixing street lighting

Amenities

One stakeholder suggested that signage is needed to help active transportation users navigate the area, particularly if local street bikeways are implemented off major roads. Pop-up participants also proposed more regulatory signage along trails which could alert users of off-leash areas, passing rules for cyclists, and reminders of where to dismount. They added that increased signage where there is two-way traffic could help cue trail users to watch for oncoming cyclists and pedestrians. Another participant suggested signage along active transportation routes which provides territorial acknowledgments.

Bike and scooter rentals or bikeshare were also suggested as an amenity that could help increase active transportation use for residents and visitors.

Lighting came up throughout engagement as a priority, and some residents remarked that they avoid walking at night because of the low visibility. Participants of an evening walking tour pointed out where lighting is needed, including the pedways, Braemar overpass, and sections of Shubie Park, Lake Banook, and Penhorn Lake trails.

Public washrooms were also identified as a key amenity for active transportation users, and participants suggested that existing facilities need extended hours. Survey respondents added that waste bins would be a welcome addition.

Traffic noise is an issue throughout the study area, impacting not only the atmosphere but also accessibility for people with sensory disabilities. Some engagement participants recommend plantings and tree lines between active transportation facilities and major roads or highways.

Transit

Several engagement participants reminded us of the importance of strong connections with transit, including both conventional transit routes and access-a-bus stops. One stakeholder suggested changes to transit routes could improve links and align with the proposed concept designs. A survey respondent remarked that steep hills make the area inaccessible by bike for many people, highlighting the need to improve transit options for those not comfortable cycling.

Conversations with Halifax Transit also revealed opportunities to align road improvements with improvements to the accessibility of bus stops in the study area. Halifax Transit will also be consulted around the feasibility of local street bikeways on transit routes.

At a pop-up event, one participant suggested that increased transit frequency is needed, particularly along Waverley Road. They noted that transit connections between the study area and local universities poses a challenge for post-secondary students living in the community. Connections between Waverley Road neighbourhoods and Grahams Grove were identified as another gap in transit. Another participant noted that there are not enough places in the study area to buy bus tickets.

Local Street Bikeways

Local street bikeways are bicycle routes on local (often residential) streets, which may be modified to lower vehicle speeds and volumes, allowing people to share the road comfortably without the need for designated bicycle lanes. Cycling connections along Prince Albert Road and Harris Road were proposed as local street bikeways within the Integrated Mobility Plan, as part of the Regional Centre AAA Cycling Network—the suitability of local street bikeways in these locations is still being reviewed.

12 survey respondents live on Prince Albert Road or Harris Road, making up 7% of respondents. Of these residents, the majority found the routes not suitable for local street bikeways, at 33%, though 25% found them very suitable. Overall, the majority of survey respondents found the routes very suitable for the facilities at 30%, followed by somewhat suitable at 29%.

Fig 1. Survey question to **all respondents**:
How suitable do you feel these routes are for local street bikeways?

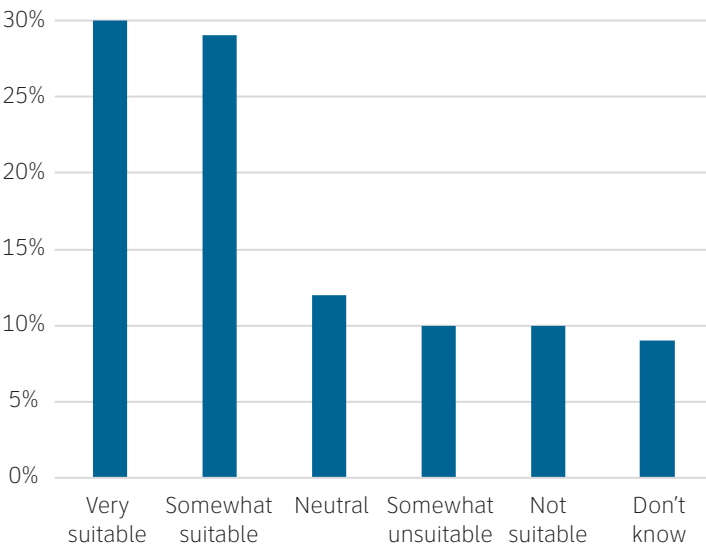
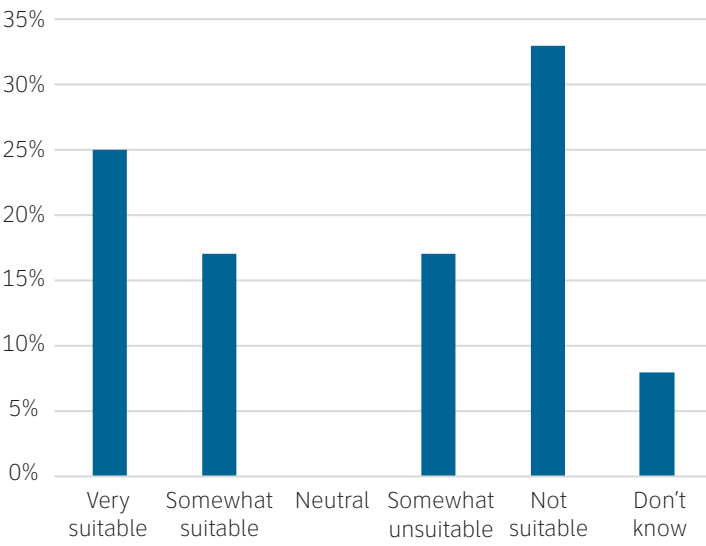


Fig 2. Survey question to **street residents only**:
How suitable do you feel these routes are for local street bikeways?



While the majority of respondents cycle these routes “never” (43%) or “occasionally” (25%), these numbers shifted when asked “how often would you cycle these routes if local street bikeways were developed?”, with the leading answers moving to “occasionally” (31%), and “frequently” (30%).

Residents and visitors of the streets alike emphasized that traffic calming will be essential to the success of any local street bikeways, and many survey respondents feel that pedestrian infrastructure should also be prioritized on these streets. Expanding on this, some survey respondents suggested curb bump outs, raised crossings, and speed bumps which provide a gap for bicycle wheels.

Several respondents commented that road paint and signage do not sufficiently protect active transportation users, and some added that they would prefer to see highway crossings and separated bike lanes prioritized. In contrast, one respondent pointed out that local street bikeways should supplement protected bike lanes on main roads.

Fig 3. Survey question:
How often do you cycle on these routes?

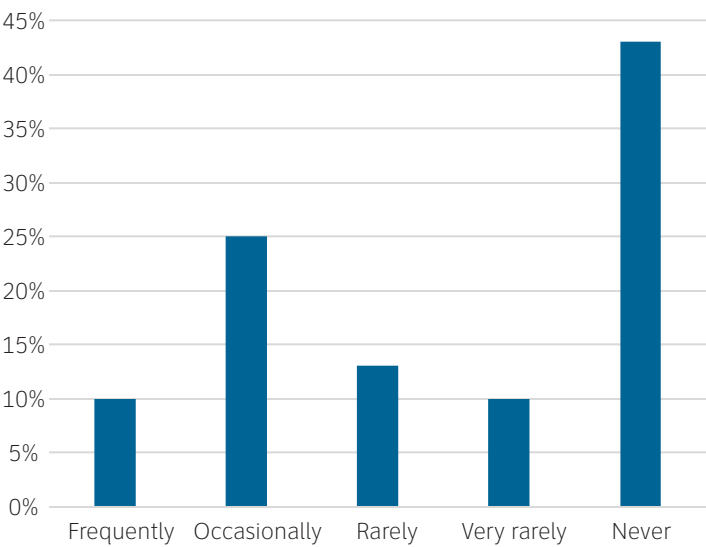
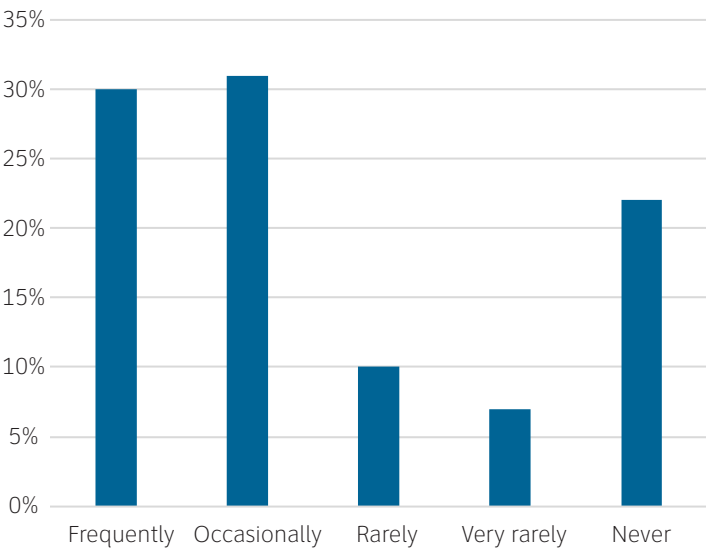


Fig 4. Survey question:
How often would you cycle on these routes if local street bikeways were developed?



Street-by-Street Breakdown

Braemar Overpass

The highway cuts off several communities within the study area, and most engagement participants agreed that the Braemar overpass is one of the biggest, most challenging barriers for active transportation. Although beyond the scope of this project, one stakeholder suggested that a full redesign of the highway interchange (similar to the Cogswell redevelopment in Halifax) would address the root problems of transportation in the area and free up new land.

Because this overpass is considered so dangerous, even most experienced cyclists reported that they avoid riding on the road here. For cyclists who do use the route, they are forced to take the centre lane to avoid traffic merging onto the highway. The sliplane between Waverley Road and Main Street was also identified as a major hazard. Participants reported that as cyclists, they tend to ride on the sidewalk or avoid the overpass altogether by taking the Trans Canada Trail into Shubie Park. Issues identified during engagement included:

- Lack of separation from vehicles
- Narrow sidewalk, low guardrail
- Traffic noise
- High winds
- No direct connection to Lake Banook Trail

One stakeholder suggested that if separate AT bridges are considered at the overpass or pedways, these could become a destination and help showcase views of the lake. Others noted that it would be ideal to remove one lane of traffic in either direction within the existing overpass, or narrow the existing lanes to make room for a cycling facility.

Stakeholders added that the planned Port Wallace subdivision will increase traffic along Waverley Road and into the interchange, and the Municipality should aim to complete improvements before residents move in.



View of the Braemar overpass from Waverley Road

Prince Albert Rd

Although the existing painted lane on Prince Albert is not a designated cycling facility, engagement participants noted that some experienced cyclists prefer this to the adjacent multi-use path. While this lane is used by some cyclists, participants suggested that the abrupt end creates a hazard to the south.

Stakeholders suggested that an improved crossing is needed at the intersection of Grahams Grove and Prince Albert Road, and added that the driveway accesses at the planned hotel development will make the existing crossing worse for cyclists and pedestrians. One stakeholder added that buses already get held up here in traffic, contributing to the congestion. Similarly, one pop-up participant reported that the existing gas station on Prince Albert has too many driveway accesses, making it dangerous for pedestrians.

When asked about a potential local street bikeway on the road, many participants were positive about the potential facility, but several survey respondents noted that cars often speed on Prince Albert Road going downhill.

Waverley Rd

Waverley Road is a very scenic road and an important connection, but pop-up participants warned that existing facilities are very tight for cyclists, with cars regularly turning into the painted bike lane. One stakeholder added that sight lines can also be a hazard for cyclists where the road bends, particularly approaching intersections. Engagement participants suggested that the road needs a separated cycling facility and sidewalks on both sides of the street, in addition to traffic calming measures. They added that connections into the Braemar overpass and Lake Banook Trail would bridge gaps in the network.

One stakeholder noted that, if feasible, a connection to Lakecrest over the hill would keep cyclists away from cars and provide a view of the lake.



Prince Albert Road behind Braemar Superstore

Main St

Engagement participants noted a lack of crosswalks along Main Street, and identified the Gordon Avenue and Main Street intersection as a hazardous location where pedestrians cross three to six lanes of heavy traffic, and where the routing for cyclists is very unclear.

Main Street currently features a narrow paved shoulder which transitions to a painted bike lane just outside the study area. One stakeholder complained that the shoulder and bike lane tend to get littered with gravel and glass washed off from the road, and added that the curb apron creates further hazards for cyclists. Participants suggested that many cyclists avoid Main Street, instead using side streets as alternate routes. Several stakeholders agreed that Tacoma Drive and Lakecrest Drive are good candidates for cycling facilities parallel to Main Street, both of which have high traffic volumes and no cycling infrastructure. On the other hand, one survey respondent added that cycling infrastructure is needed along both Main Street and Tacoma Drive, as people need access to shopping and services along these major roads.

Several residential developments are planned for along Main Street, which stakeholders noted will increase the need for active transportation

facilities. They added that the planned Hartlen Street extension to Lakecrest Drive will be an important active transportation link.

Harris Rd

Harris Road is a wide, low traffic route, which many stakeholders suggested make it a good option for active transportation. On the other hand, some noted that slope and sight lines can be an issue, and interaction between cyclists and transit needs to be considered. The intersections of Harris with Prince Albert Road and Beacon Street were also identified as a confusing and dangerous. Some stakeholders feel that in order to promote this road as an active transportation route, a sidewalk is needed between Jean Avenue and the Penhorn Lake Trail, as well as traffic calming measures. Some survey respondents suggested that a local street bikeway would only make sense on Harris if ramps are added to the connecting pedway over Highway 111.

As an alternative to Harris Road, some participants suggested that a cycling connection following Braemar Superstore sidewalk along the highway would provide a more direct link to Main Street.



Tacoma Drive

Main St Pedway

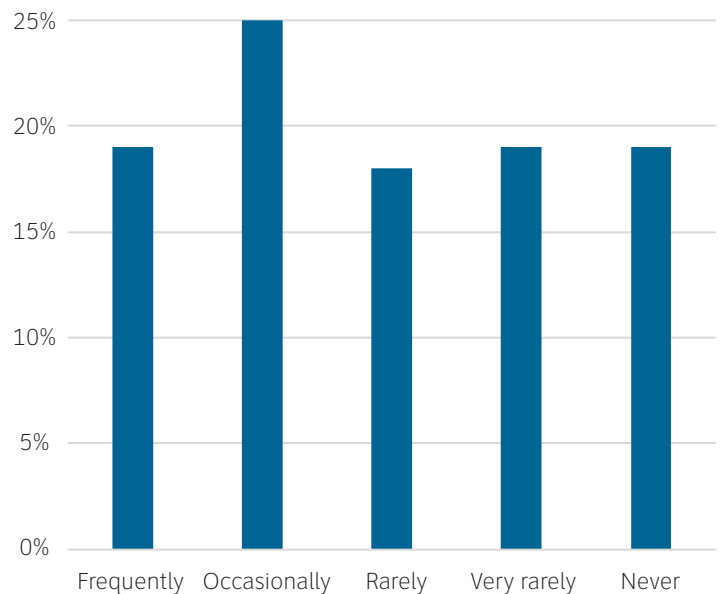
Both pedways were a key topic of conversation throughout engagement. Participants noted that the narrow structures create many physical barriers for the people who use them, while the industrial design should be improved to be more welcoming. Some suggested that these pedways could be opportunities for beautification and public art, and need maintenance to repair cracking concrete.

The Main Street pedway is well-used and serves an important connection in the study area. Survey respondents reported various levels of familiarity with the pedway but highlighted three main factors that stop them from using the overpass more often, including the lack of access for bicycles (44%), lack of connections to their intended destinations (41%), and safety concerns at the entrance or exit to the overpass (39%). Other issues identified with this route included:

- Connects to a narrow elevated sidewalk with no separation from vehicles
- Snow piles are created where the Municipal and Provincial snow clearing routes meet
- Sharp turns are difficult for cyclists and people using mobility devices

The Village on Main has some funding for small improvements like lighting, and other suggestions for upgrades included widening the connecting sidewalk on Main, or replacing the sidewalk with a multi-use path.

Fig 5. Survey question:
How often do you travel over the Main Street pedway?

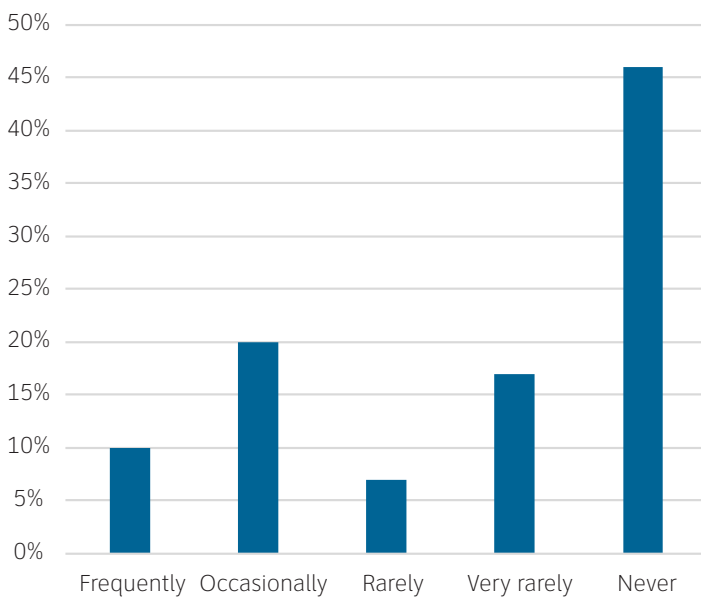


Main Street Pedway

Harris Rd Pedway

Walking tour participants suggested that the Harris Road pedway is used mainly by local residents living on either side, with some kids commuting over it to get to school. This structure serves as a connection between residential neighbourhoods and also provides a link to the Penhorn Lake Trail and Tacoma Plaza.

Fig 6. Survey question:
How often do you travel over the Harris Street pedway?



The majority of survey respondents reported never using the pedway, but suggested three main factors that discourage them from using it more often, including a lack of connections to their destinations (50%), inaccessibility provided by steep staircases on either side of the pedway (49%), and lack of lighting (18%). One stakeholder noted that steps should never be the only option, making it inaccessible for so many pedestrians and cyclists. Participants of a walking tour suggested that switchback ramps or elevators would provide a more accessible option. One survey respondent noted that bicycle wheel ramps could improve accessibility for cyclists in the short-term.

On the east side of the pedway, a gravel trail connects into Tacoma Plaza. Stakeholders and pop-up participants reported that this path is muddy most of the year and not plowed in the winter, with a steep slope creating a hazard for users. One stakeholder suggested that providing signage at either side of the pedway would help direct users to the connecting facilities. On the west side of the trail, participants noted that a sidewalk and crosswalk are needed to connect into the Penhorn Lake Trail.



Harris Road Pedway

Lake Banook Multi-use Path

Some pop-up participants noted that the Lake Banook Trail is not wide enough for the amount of traffic it gets. In response to this concern, some participants suggested separating users here.

There is a gap in this network at the Micmac Boulevard on-ramp between the Lake Banook Trail and the Trans Canada Trail that one pop-up participant suggested would be an easy fix to connect these two major routes. This crossing was identified as a dangerous node for cyclists, with high vehicle speeds and low visibility.

Another small gap exists at Kiwanis Park where the trail crosses through a parking lot, but Municipal stakeholders noted that this will be addressed in upcoming park upgrades. Other participants suggested that the parking lot at Paddlers Cove also creates hazards, where no clear trail crossing is provided. Participants added that vehicles parking at the Micmac Aquatics Club create another risk, with vehicle doors opening into the trail.

In a stakeholder workshop, one participated recommended cycling improvements on Micmac Blvd which would give people the option to travel on the west side of Lake Banook. There is a small portion of trail here, though participants noted that it has dangerous blind corners and lacks clear connections.

Other Routes

Other routes identified as challenges included:

- Glenwood Avenue, Chittick Avenue, and Somerset Street need sidewalks
- Valleyfield Road, Woodlawn Road, Mount Edward Road, Caledonia Road, and Crichton Park Road need bike lanes
- A formal connection is needed from the Penhorn Lake Trail to Penhorn Plaza, a link which stakeholders suggested will be addressed through the ongoing development process
- The Lake Banook Trail could be extended all the way around the lake in a loop



The Lake Banook Trail

Survey Responses

The majority of survey respondents self-identified as a property owner (59%), commuter (55%), and/or resident (49%). The majority get around by driving or carpooling (86%), while 74% walk or use assistive devices, 57% cycle, and 39% use transit. Many respondents use a mix of transportation modes to get around the study area, and their comments reflected challenges from these various perspectives.

Fig 7. Survey question:
What is your connection to the study area?
Check all that apply.

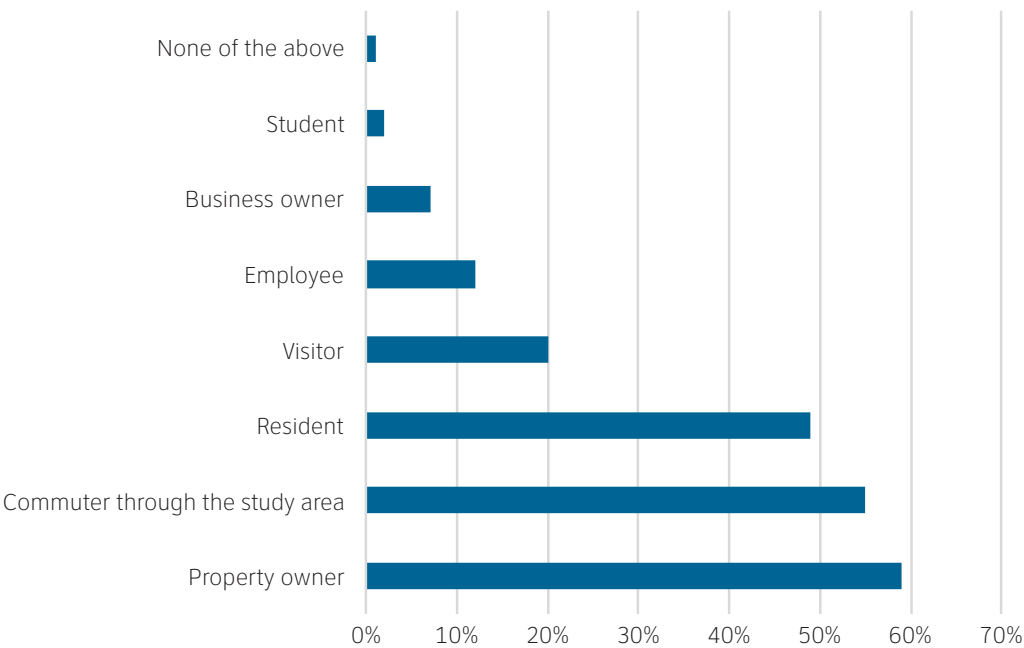
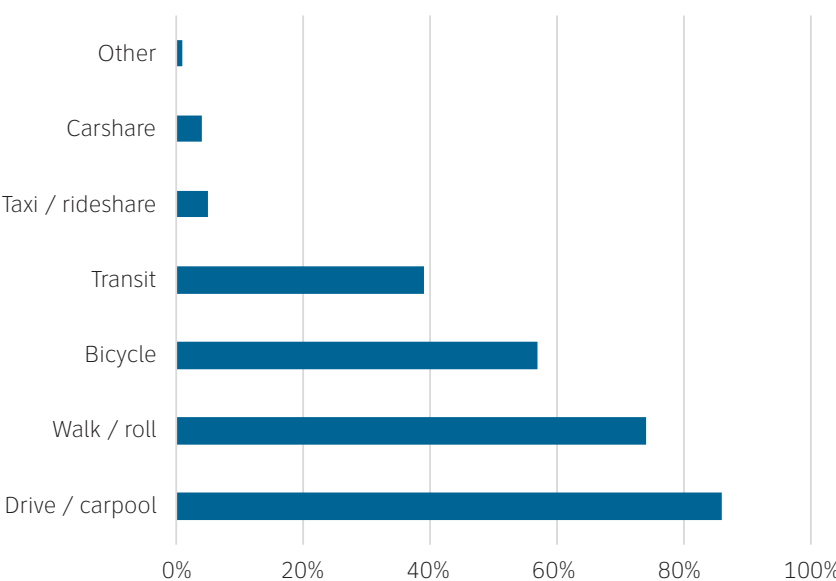


Fig 8. Survey question:
How do you get around the study area?
Check all that apply.



Almost two thirds of survey respondents indicated they use active transportation frequently for recreation / leisure (62%), as opposed to slightly more than one third who indicated using it frequently for commuting to school / work (37%). Slightly less than half of survey respondents indicated they use active transportation frequently for other daily trips (47%).

A minority of survey respondents indicated they rarely, very rarely, or never use active transportation for recreation / leisure (14%), while 13% indicated they never use it for other daily trips. One third of survey respondents indicated they never use active transportation for commuting to school / work (33%).

When asked about their level of comfort with respect to cycling in the city, the largest proportion of survey respondents indicated they are “interested but concerned” while slightly less than one third indicated they are “enthusiastic and confident” (27%).

The survey responses reflect the input of other engagement participants in terms of the top barriers to using active transportation. The most selected responses were:

- High traffic and speed on roads (71%)
- Lack of bike routes (63%)
- Drivers don’t give enough space on roads (45%)
- Lack of sidewalks, trails, crosswalks (39%)
- Issues with maintenance or snow clearing (32%)
- Weather conditions (32%)

Fig 9. Survey question: How often do you travel in the study area using active transportation for recreation / leisure?

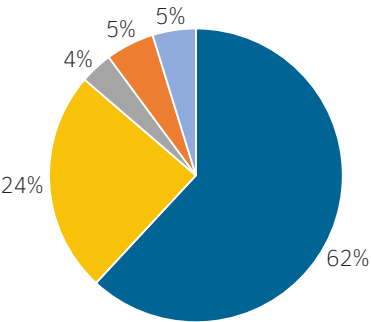


Fig 10. Survey question: How often do you travel in the study area using active transportation for commuting to school / work?

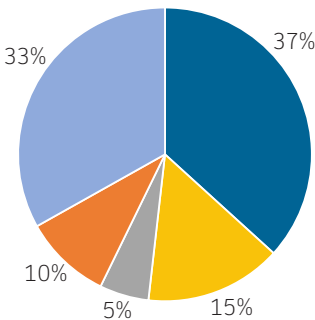


Fig 11. Survey question: How often do you travel in the study area using active transportation for other daily trips?

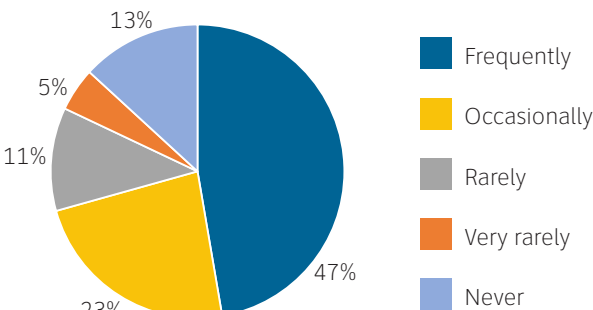
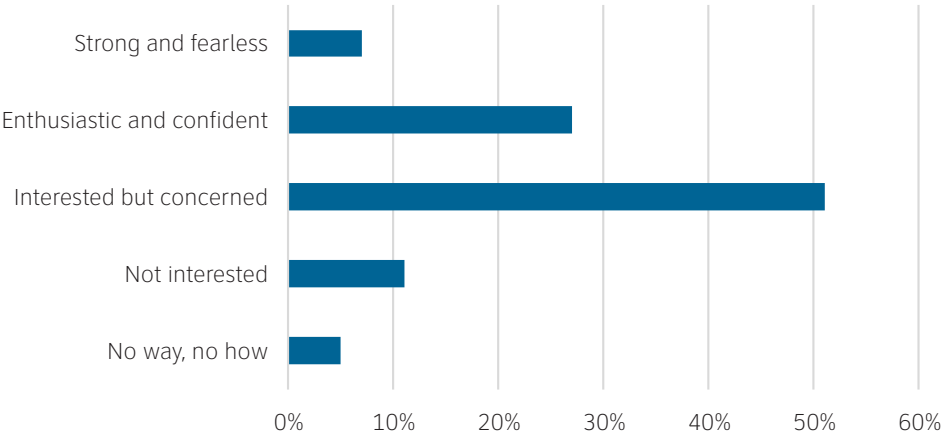


Fig 12. Survey question: What is your level of comfort when it comes to cycling in the city?



Other Comments

Some feedback was not directly related to the project but will be useful for the Municipality to consider as additional infrastructure is developed.

Problem areas outside the study scope

Engagement reached residents of communities throughout HRM, and through these conversations participants highlighted many routes outside the study area which require active transportation improvements. These included:

- Penhorn Sobeys
- Connections to Penhorn bus terminal
- Portland Street and pedway
- Pleasant Street
- The intersection of Hawthorne Street & Prince Albert Road
- Main Street between Woodlawn Road and Forest Hills Parkway

Participants also made the following suggestions:

- Sidewalks on Locks Road
- Resurfacing of Cranberry Lake trails
- Bike lanes on Ochterloney Street
- A connection between Starr Park and the Waterfront Trail
- Multi-use path along Maynard Lake
- Opportunities for walking and cycling in Eastern Passage
- Opportunities for walking, cycling, and transit connections in Lawrencetown
- Extension of the Mainland Trail into Bedford along the existing utility corridor
- A cycling facility on the Bayers Road bridge where it meets the 102 on-ramp

Engagement suggestions

Some stakeholders made suggestions for the project team to consider in the second round of engagement:

- Partner with local institutions, including faith-based groups
- Connect with newcomers and provide interpreters at engagement events
- Host targeted youth engagement
- Conduct consultation with HRM Recreation and the Kiwanis Club
- Collect input from HRM's Design team to confirm upcoming development plans
- Initiate early communications with NS Power where electrical poles may need to be moved
- Indicate grade thresholds for cycling on concept design maps
- Promote the Shape Your City platform more widely
- Improve navigation on the Municipal website

Next Steps

The draft concept designs will be presented to the public in the spring of 2023, and engagement opportunities will be promoted through Shape Your City, social media, mail outs, and more. Engagement on the concept designs may include stakeholder workshops and Technical Committee meetings, presentations to HRM Active Transportation and Accessibility Advisory Committees, online engagement, and a combination of pop-up events, walking tours, and public open houses. Engagement events or conversations may also be scheduled with local groups and institutions such as schools, faith-based organizations, and seniors homes, where interest allows.

Once engagement on the draft is complete, the project team will select the preferred concept design and develop the final Functional Plan. The preferred option will be selected using the evaluation criteria and feedback collected through the engagement.



Active Transportation bridge crossing Lake Banook



HALIFAX