

What We Heard Report

Edmonton - Strathcona County Footbridge

Online Engagement
Event 1 - April 2021



Edmonton

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A. Project Overview

A proposed new footbridge will be designed and constructed across the North Saskatchewan River.

The North Saskatchewan River Valley (NSRV) is one of the Edmonton Metropolitan Regional's most cherished amenities, renowned for its ecological, recreational and cultural value. The River Valley Alliance's guiding strategic plan, [A Plan of Action for the Capital Region River Valley Park](#), articulates a vision for a continuous, connected park system in the Edmonton Metropolitan region, with emphasis on building a continuous trail system within the NSRV. Currently, northeast Edmonton and western Strathcona County are underserved by active transportation infrastructure and opportunities for recreation and celebration within the NSRV. While the recently constructed East End Trails in the City of Edmonton and new segments of the Strathcona County Regional Trail in Strathcona County have improved access and connectivity, the North Saskatchewan River (NSR) remains a significant barrier towards the vision of a continuous, connected park system.

To support the enhancement of local and regional connectivity and access to the NSRV, provide enhanced opportunities for recreation and celebration, as well as advance other policy priorities, the River Valley Alliance (RVA), the City of Edmonton and Strathcona County have identified an opportunity to build an active mode connection between the two municipalities across the NSR at approximately the location of 167 Avenue in Edmonton / Twp. Rd. 540 in Strathcona County.

The RVA, Edmonton and Strathcona County have agreed to advance this active mode connection across the NSR. They are partners in the funding of the planning and design of a new proposed footbridge over the NSR. Shared-use path connections and supporting open space / recreational upgrades on both sides of the river will also be included.

The proposed footbridge will meet the goals outlined in a variety of plans and policies.

The primary goals for this proposed footbridge are to:

- o enhance access and connectivity and contribute towards building a continuous trail system between Devon and Fort Saskatchewan,
- o help to incrementally achieve Edmonton's four strategic goals of Healthy City, Urban Places, Regional Prosperity and Climate Resilience, and
- o meet additional goals found in Edmonton's [Ribbon of Green](#), the [Strathcona County Trail Strategy](#), the [RVA Strategic Plan 2021 - 2024](#), and other related Edmonton and Strathcona County plans and policies.

B. Public Engagement

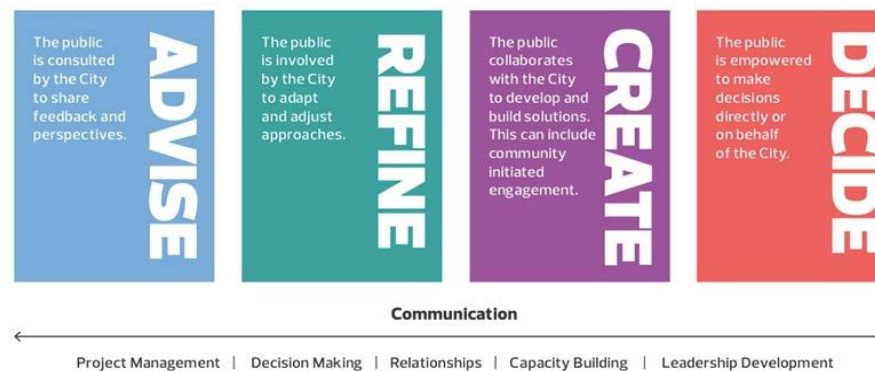
Many project decisions will be made by the technical design team and will be based primarily on engineering/technical factors, such as, but not limited to: design and construction standards, technical requirements, environmental considerations; regulatory requirements; and to meet the guiding plans and policies of the project partners.

Stakeholders and the general public will be engaged regarding local knowledge of the site; the aesthetic of the proposed footbridge; potential connection requirements; potential recreational amenities, site furnishings; public art locations; and other site amenities at the **ADVISE** level of the City of Edmonton Engagement Spectrum.

Engagement will be at the ADVISE level.

The City of Edmonton's Public Engagement Spectrum.

Increasing influence of the public



The first phase of engagement was designed to provide background information on the project so all participants had a similar understanding of the project. In addition, a survey was utilized to capture information about the current and future uses at the two sites on opposite banks of the NSR as well as the proposed footbridge. Questions about what might be celebrated on each site, environmental concerns, and what was 'special', or the 'essence' of each site were also asked.

C. How We Engaged

An online survey was used to capture comments about specific topics at the Advise level.

Landowners within the immediately adjacent area were mailed a letter introducing the project in early February 2021. Several stakeholders were met to discuss specific impacts to their immediately adjacent properties.

Two weeks before the event, ten road signs advertising the event and survey were placed at a variety of locations in NE Edmonton and in Strathcona County, including both riverside sites.

Postcards were sent out approximately two weeks in advance of the event to residents and businesses within the area. These provided information about the event and the survey. Social media was used by both Edmonton and Strathcona County (twitter and Facebook).

Ads in the Edmonton Journal and Sherwood Park News were placed a week in advance of the event.

External stakeholder groups, such as recreational, community leagues and environmental groups, were emailed on March 31, 2021 about the upcoming online presentation and survey. They were provided information for posting on their webpages, if desired. Registration for the event was required.

Information was posted by the City of Fort Saskatchewan and Sturgeon County on their websites.

On April 14, 2021, an online presentation, followed by an online survey, were used to capture information regarding the bridge experience, local knowledge about the two sites (East End Trail site in Edmonton and Strathcona County Riverside Nature Trail site), preferred footbridge use and site amenities, and comments about the environment as per the requirements of the River Valley Bylaw 7188. Questions about what might be celebrated on each site, and what was 'special', or the 'essence' of each site, and what would bring them to the site were also asked.

The survey was created through the City of Edmonton's Sparq platform and was open from April 14, 2021 to midnight, April 29, 2021. The Insight Community was offered the option of completing the survey as well. Two questions were about the footbridge and nine questions each were about the two riverside sites. Three questions gathered demographics, and two questions were directed towards joining the Insight Community.

D. Who Was Engaged

*1053 people
responded to the
online survey.*

The online presentation and survey were open to all residents of Edmonton, Strathcona County, City of Fort Saskatchewan and Sturgeon County and any other interested parties. Identified stakeholders (immediately adjacent landowners, recreational, community and environmental groups) were also engaged. There were 209 attendees at the online presentation. The Insight Community was also advised of the survey and had the option to sign up for the survey.

The online presentation and survey were available after the event through the project webpage:

www.edmonton.ca/edmontonstrathconafootbridge

A link to the project webpage was provided by Strathcona County, the River Valley Alliance, City of Fort Saskatchewan, and various stakeholder groups on their websites. An interview about the project was held on CBC Morning Show and with the Sherwood Park News and Mix 107 out of Fort Saskatchewan with the project managers before the event. Ads were placed in the Sherwood Park News and the Edmonton Journal.

There were 1053 survey respondents, including 671 from the Insight Community. 85% were from Edmonton, 12% resided in Strathcona County, and 2% were from Fort Saskatchewan. The remainder were from the City of St. Albert. A number of respondents identified their membership with a recreational or environmental group. 15 groups were identified in the survey results.

39% of respondents heard about the event from the City of Edmonton webpage. This includes the respondents from the Insight Community. 16% heard about the event from the RVA website and 13% from the Strathcona County website. The remainder were notified of the event via word of mouth, group webpages, newspaper ads, road signs, postcards, and interviews.

E. What We Asked and What We Heard Summary



Aerial of Project Site

The online survey sought information about future footbridge use, desired site amenities on and/or near the footbridge on either side of the river, site improvements and additions, topics for celebration, what would bring users to the site, and knowledge about potential sensitive environmental sites, wildlife and plants on land and in the river.

The key themes about the proposed footbridge and the two sites were:

- The natural, quiet setting is very important and is the main draw for users. This must be retained as much as possible.
- Low key development is preferred with a focus on protecting the existing natural environment. Restoration of any construction damages to the natural environment must be undertaken.
- The proposed footbridge and adjacent sites will be used for a variety of year round activities, including but not limited to: crossing the river by a variety of modes, enjoying the views, meeting friends and family, connecting to existing trails within the two sites, and other recreation activities.
- Site amenities, such as waste receptacles, benches, picnic tables, etc., were considered the most important additions to both sites.
- Washrooms and parking were considered as very important improvements and/or additions to both sites.
- Trail improvements and connections, including wayfinding and interpretive signage, were desired. Accessibility for all levels of mobility was important. Many of the trail

Themes were similar for both riverside sites and the footbridge.

- connections requested were outside of the project scope.
- Cycling amenities, such as separate trails, bike repair stations and racks, were requested.
 - Improved water access and amenities, such as ramps, launches and fishing areas, were identified for the Riverside Nature Trail site.
 - Celebrating the natural environment, history of the area, and Indigenous culture and history was important.
 - Wildlife and plants of interest were identified in the river and around the footbridge sites. Identified wildlife included but was not limited to: eagles, sturgeon, beaver, deer, moose, and numerous birds. Plants included, but were not limited to: Lady Slipper orchids, wild asparagus, Morel mushrooms, and Prairie crocus.

F. Summary of Results and Findings by Question

All responses are a summary of information provided by the survey respondents for the footbridge and riverside sites questions. The two sites were separated to determine if there were any differences that needed to be considered in the concept designs.

There were 382 open link survey respondents and 671 Insight Community respondents for a total of 1053 respondents. The Edmonton Insight Community is an inclusive and accessible online citizen panel made up of diverse Edmontonians who provide feedback on City policies, initiatives and issues. The community members had the option of signing up to complete the online survey for this project.

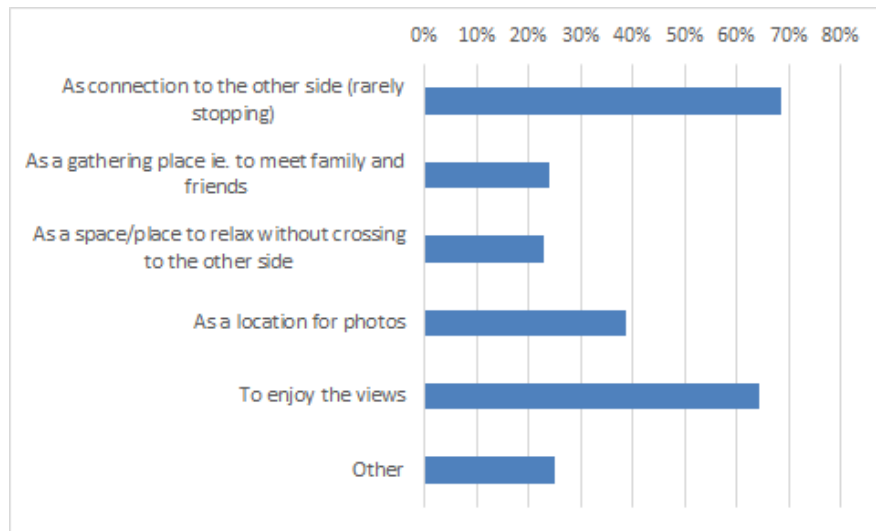
Demographic questions/responses are covered in Section D Who We Engaged.

THE FOOTBRIDGE



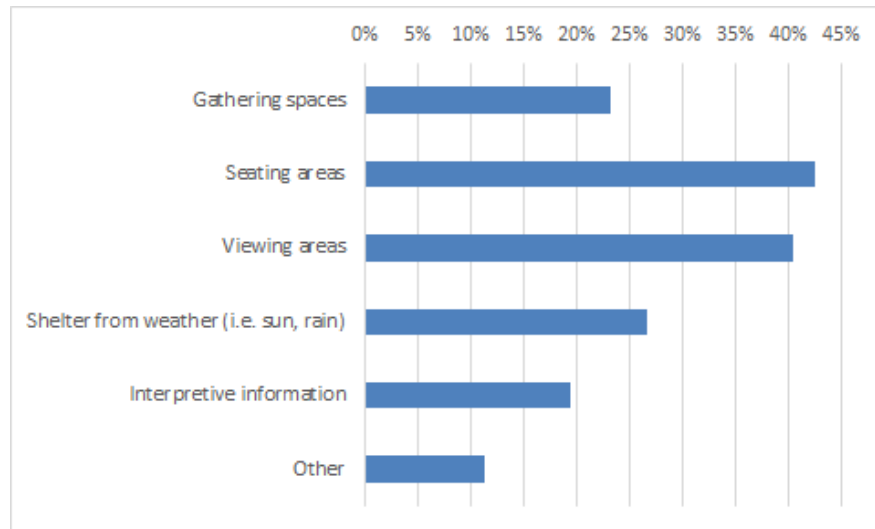
Concept Alignment (subject to change during preliminary design)

Q1 How will you use the footbridge once it is built?



'Other' included, but was not limited to: cycling and walking/running/commuting, or they would not use the footbridge.

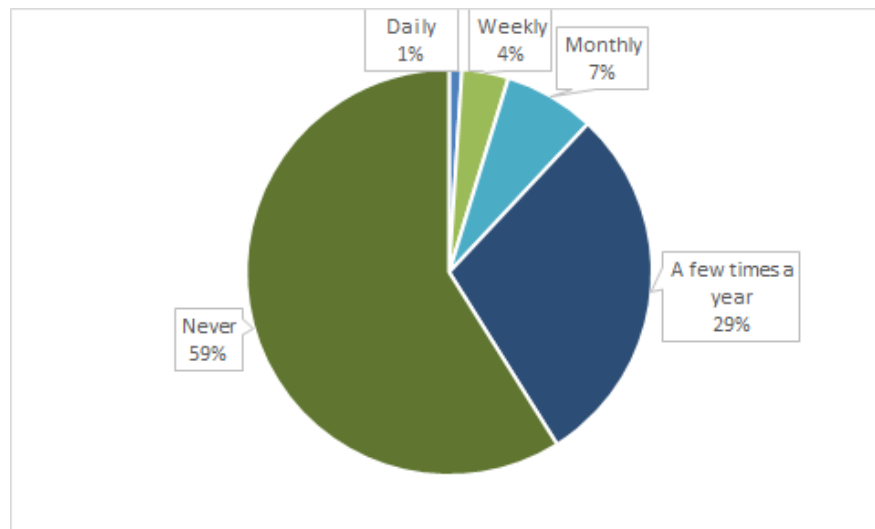
Q2 What would you like to see on or near the footbridge?



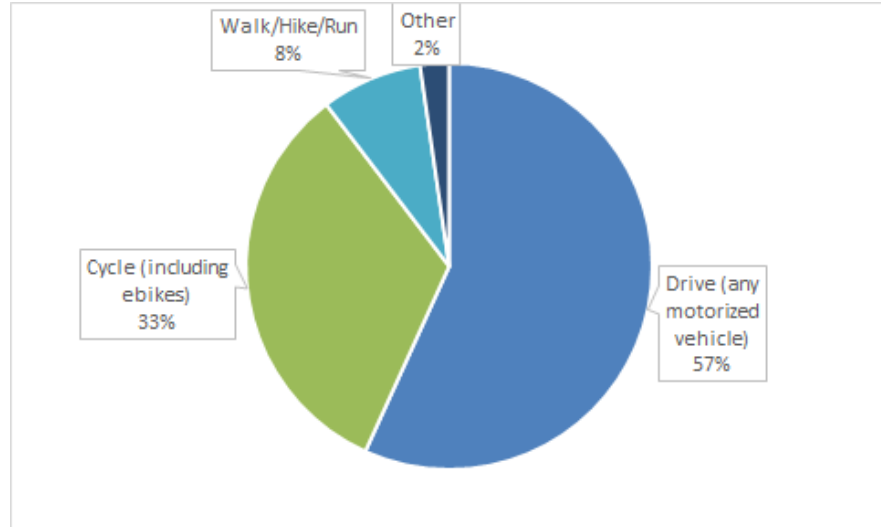
'Other' items identified included, but were not limited to: washrooms, cycling amenities and water access for fishing and non-motorized watercraft.

STRATHCONA COUNTY RIVERSIDE NATURE TRAIL SITE

Q3 Over the past 3 years, how often have you visited the Riverside Nature Trail site in Strathcona County?

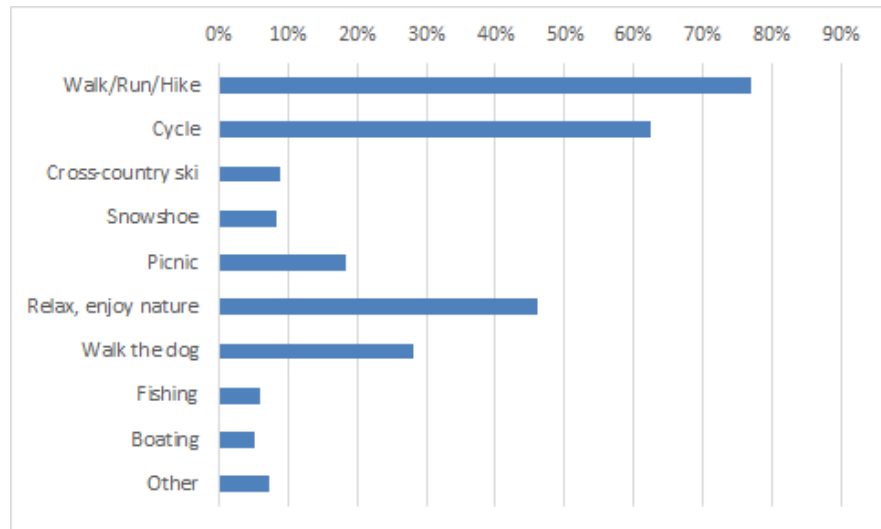


Q4 What is your main transportation mode to get to the Riverside Nature Trail site?



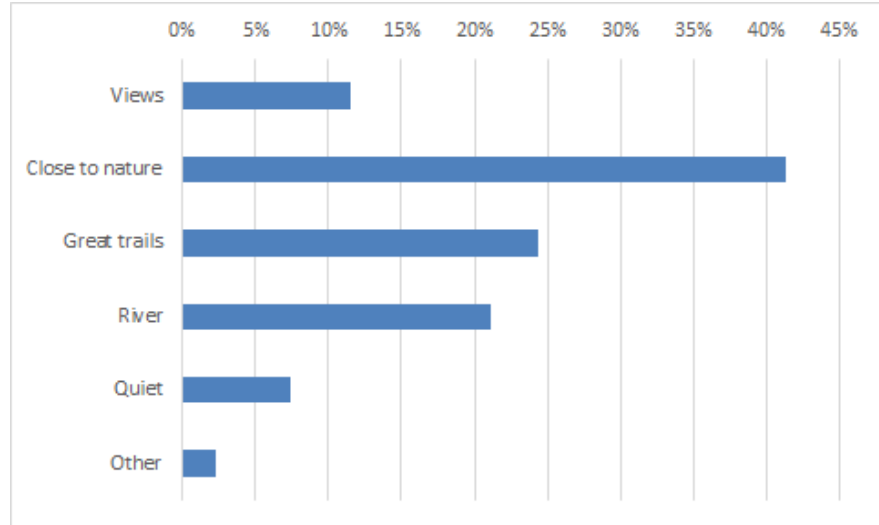
'Other' included non-motorized watercraft, or mixed modes, i.e. driving to site followed by kayaking.

Q5 What recreational activities do you participate in or near the Riverside Nature Trail site in Strathcona County?



'Other' included, but was not limited to: geocaching, bird watching, stargazing, kicksledding and kayaking/canoeing.

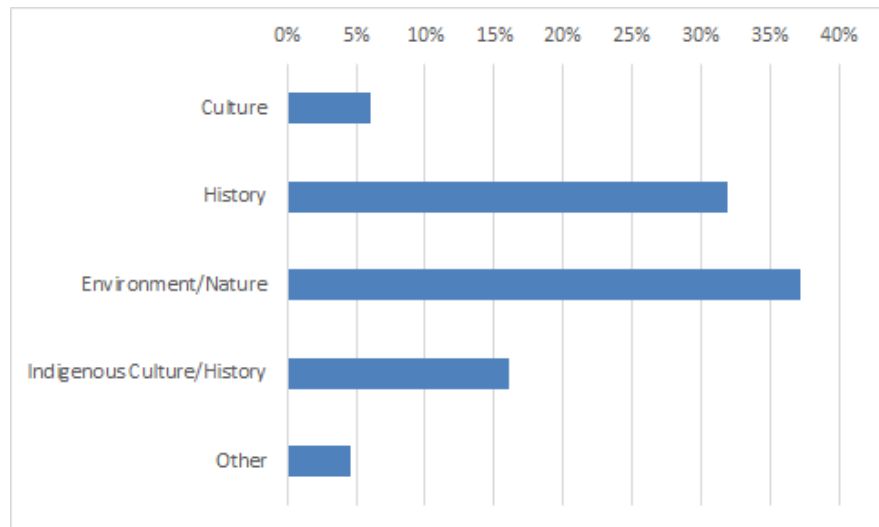
Q6 What makes the Riverside Nature Trail site 'special', unique, and/or important and keeps you coming back? What is the 'essence' or 'heart' of the place for you?



'Other' included: the scent and the proximity to agricultural lands.

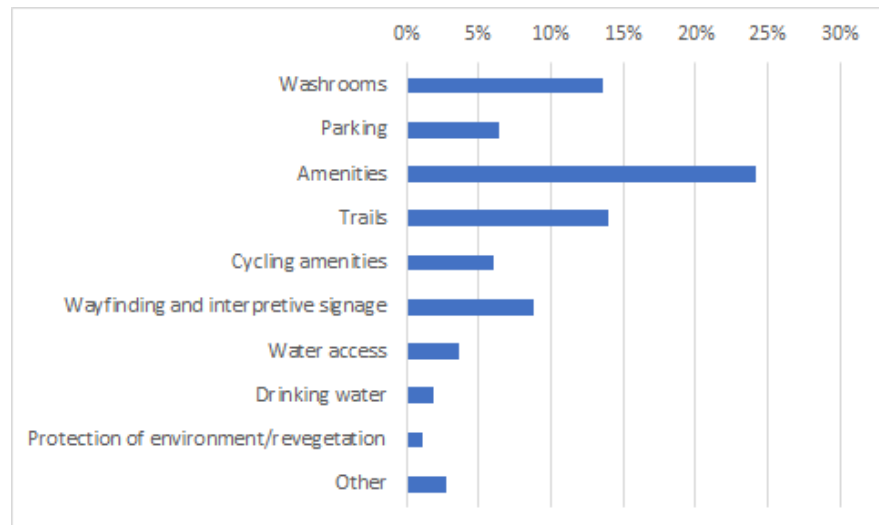
Q7 Would you like to see something celebrated in the Riverside Nature Trail site, i.e. culture, history, environment?

58% of respondents indicated that celebration was important. The following are the themes for celebration:



'Other' included, but was not limited to: family activities, gravel mining and glacial flats.

Q8 What would you like to see improved or added to the Riverside Nature Trail site?



Amenities included but were not limited to: benches, shelters, firepits, BBQ's, picnic tables, waste receptacles, lookouts, fish cleaning station, and pet waste facilities.

'Other' included but was not limited to: lighting, off leash dog area, and fish cleaning station.

Q10 Are there any constraints or challenges in or near the Riverside Nature Trail site in Strathcona County?

The remote location and accessibility, to and within the site, for all types and levels of mobility and modes was considered the main constraint.

The potential increase in traffic and the resulting need for more parking was second.

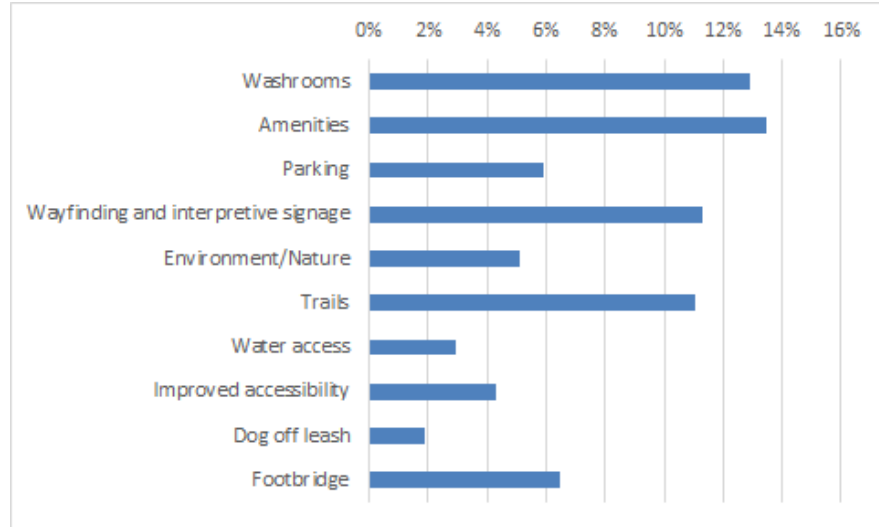
Future construction, and increased user, impacts to the environment was followed by the need for improved trail connections inside and outside of the project area.

Q11 Are you aware of any special environmental features, such as rare plants or wildlife, in or near the Riverside Nature Trail site in Strathcona County?

17% of respondents were aware of either wildlife or plants that they felt should be considered.

A wide variety of wildlife species were identified, including, but not limited to: sturgeon, eagles, pelicans, beaver, coyotes, deer, moose, and snakes. Lady slipper orchids, wild asparagus, saskatoons, and other plants, including noxious weeds, were also identified.

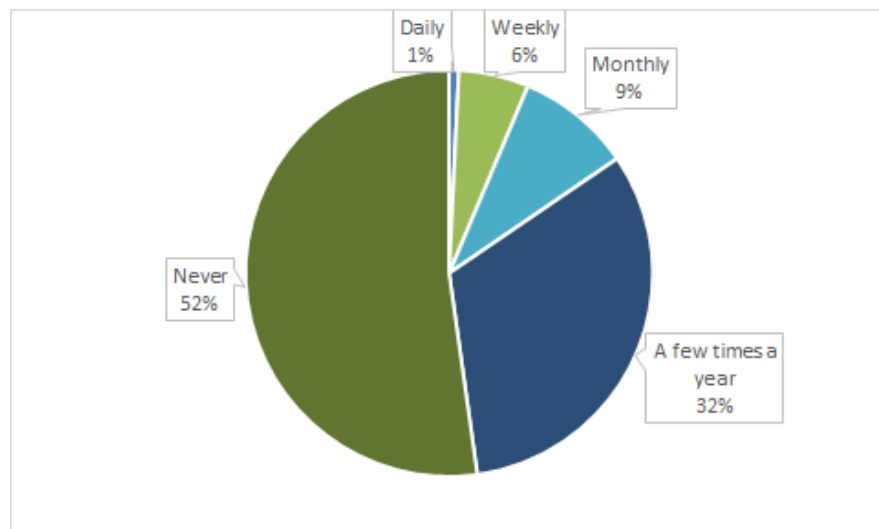
Q12 What desirable or useful feature or amenity could improve this site and interest you enough to visit the Riverside Nature Trail site and the proposed footbridge in Strathcona County?



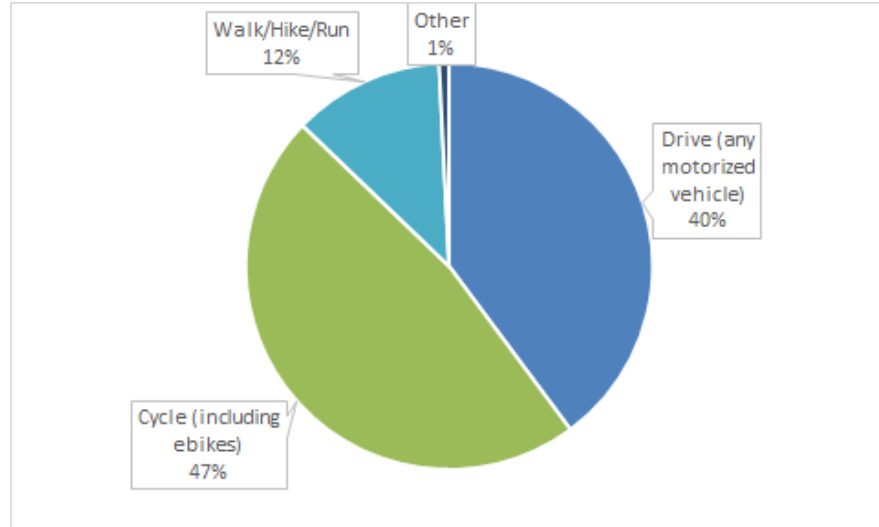
Amenities included but were not limited to: benches, shelters, firepits, BBQ's, picnic tables, waste receptacles, lookouts, gathering spaces and emergency phones.

CITY OF EDMONTON EAST END TRAIL SITE

Q13 Over the past 3 years, how often have you visited the East End Trail Site in the City of Edmonton?

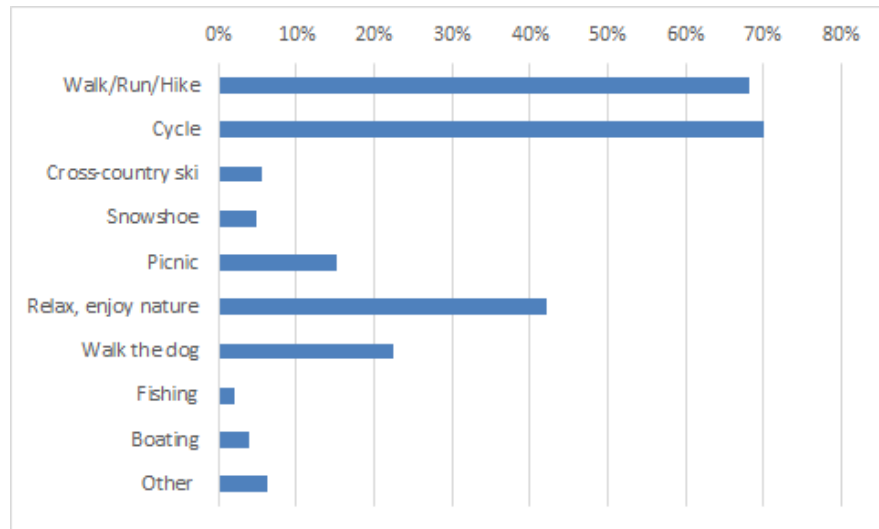


Q14 What is your main transportation mode to get to the East End Trail Site?



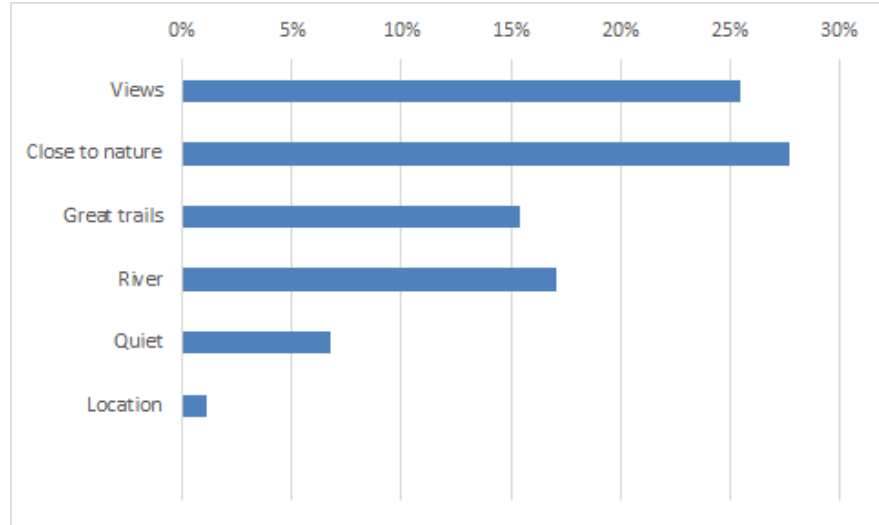
'Other' included "both walk and cycle".

Q15 What recreational activities do you participate in or near the East End Trail Site in the City of Edmonton?



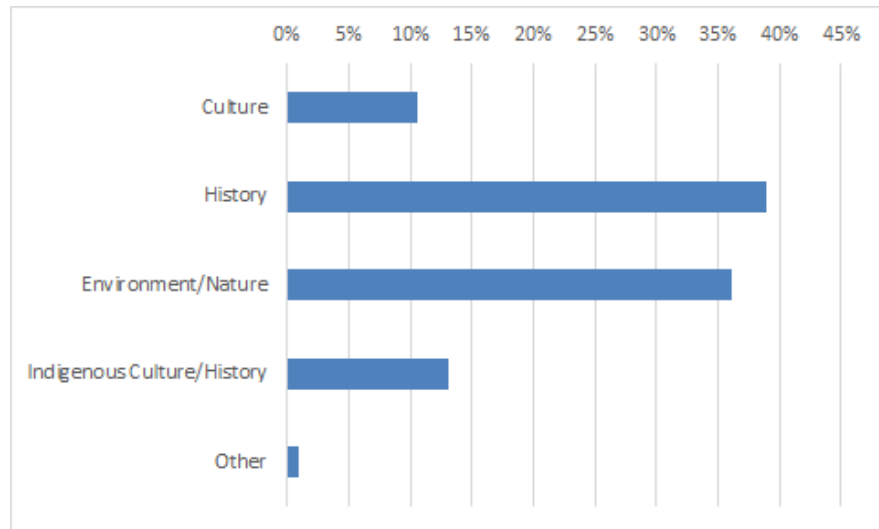
'Other' included, but was not limited to: geocaching, inline skating, golfing at nearby golf courses, swimming and photography.

Q16 What makes the East End Trail Site 'special', unique, and/or important and keeps you coming back? What is the 'essence' or 'heart' of the place for you?



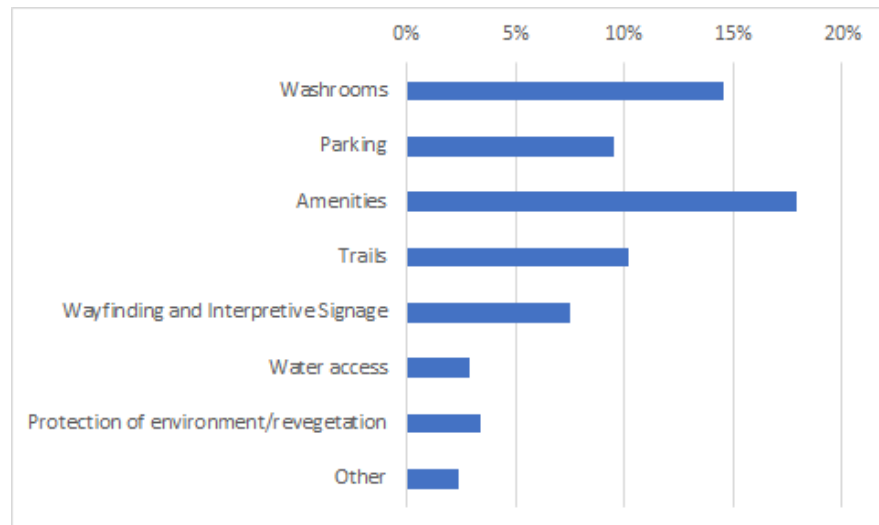
Q17 Would you like to see something celebrated in the East End Trail Site, i.e. culture, history, environment?

53% of respondents indicated that celebration was important. The following are the themes for celebration:



'Other' includes the location and agriculture.

Q18 What would you like to see improved or added to the East End Trail Site ?



'Other' included but was not limited to: improved maintenance, public art, dog off leash area, lighting, cafe, and food truck areas.

Amenities included but were not limited to: benches, shelters, lookouts, waste receptacles, picnic tables, firepits, BBQs, pet waste amenities, emergency phone, play area and tenting area.

Q19 Are there any constraints or challenges in or near the East End Trail Site in the City of Edmonton?

The potential need for more parking was considered a challenge followed by site accessibility due to the slopes.

Minimizing damage to the natural areas was important.

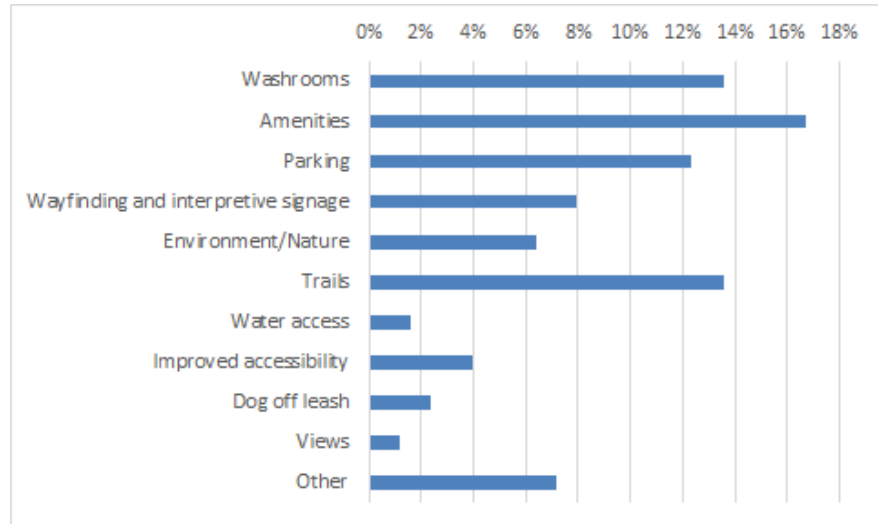
The odour from the Epcor site was cited as an issue throughout the survey.

Q20 Are you aware of any special environmental features, such as rare plants or wildlife, in or near the East End Trail Site in the City of Edmonton?

17% of respondents were aware of either wildlife or plants that they felt should be considered.

A wide variety of wildlife species were identified including, but not limited to: sturgeon, eagles, pelicans, cougar, coyote, deer, and moose. Wetlands, Morel mushrooms, Prairie crocus, and other plants were also identified.

Q21 What desirable or useful feature or amenity could improve this site and interest you enough to visit the East End Trail Site and the proposed footbridge in the City of Edmonton?



'Other' included, but was not limited to: improved maintenance, drinking water, and emergency phone.

Amenities included but were not limited to: benches, shelters, lookouts, waste receptacles, picnic tables, firepits, BBQs, pet waste amenities, and bandstand.

Other topics of note:

Other topics that were raised throughout the survey, but were often not raised in significant numbers in any one question, included but were not limited to:

- provision of drinking water,
- conflicting requests to have (or not have) areas for dogs,
- provision of site lighting,
- provision of public art,
- provision of emergency phones and security/policing,
- need for increased maintenance,
- finding a solution for the homeless staying at the sites
- conflicting opinions on whether the footbridge should be constructed or not, and
- concern over the project costs and how this project will be paid for.

G. What Happens Next?

All comments will be considered in the concept and preliminary design of the Edmonton-Strathcona County Footbridge and adjacent sites, along with other criteria, such as technical requirements, standards, plans, policies, and regulatory requirements.

Concepts of the footbridge and the two riverside sites will be presented in summer 2021 for public feedback. A 'What We Did' response to 'What We Heard' comments from this survey will also be provided.