



**Calgary**



**GLB2021-0975  
Attach #3**

# Green Line Qualitative Research

## Final Report on In-Depth Interview Findings

**For more information, please contact:**

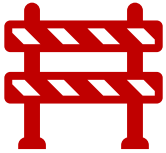
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# Research Summary



**Traffic congestion and loss of parking were the biggest pain points for businesses experiencing construction.**



Businesses were most likely to be frustrated by lane closures, reductions in parking and other measures that make their businesses harder to access.

**Better signage and forums for sharing feedback were viewed as the most helpful things The City can offer.**



**10 of 15** Calgary-based businesses interviewed said an online discussion forum would be “very helpful” during construction.



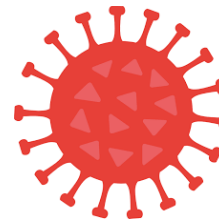
**9 of 15** said making signage larger and more prominent near construction sites would be “very helpful.”

**More than anything, business owners wanted clear, sustained and honest communication about how construction will affect their business.**



Businesses wanted multiple touchpoints – particularly direct contact with engagement staff – and a clear deadline for when construction will end.

**Support for businesses may be especially important in the wake of COVID-19.**



Businesses noted that it may be devastating for those along the Green Line to have to deal with construction right as they emerge from the pandemic.

*“There's no access, and then you've got COVID on top of it... That's just adding fuel to the fire.”*


*- Calgary business owner*





# Methodology

# Introduction/Methodology

- 
- The City of Calgary is about to embark on the construction of the Green Line Light Rail Transit (LRT), the largest infrastructure project in Calgary's history. This line will run through Calgary's commercial core as well as several areas with a relatively high number of businesses.
  - The City wished to understand how it can better engage businesses located along the Green Line path and address any of their potential concerns, while also helping them deal with the negative impacts of construction. To this end, The City wished to better understand:
    - The experiences of business located within Calgary that have dealt with both transit and non-transit-related construction in recent years; and
    - The experiences of businesses located in other Canadian cities, including Toronto, Ottawa, Edmonton, Kitchener-Waterloo and Mississauga, where light-rail transit lines have been constructed recently.
  - The City commissioned Probe Research to conduct a series of 30 in-depth interviews (IDIs), including 15 with representatives of Calgary-based businesses and 15 interviews with representatives of businesses in these other Canadian cities.
  - The table later in this section provides an overview of where these businesses were located, as well as their other characteristics.

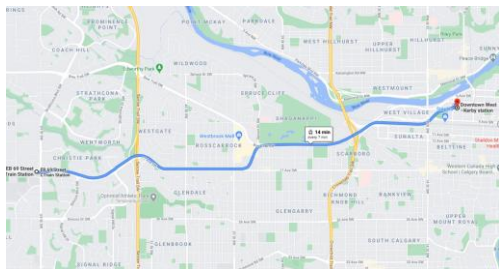
# Introduction/Methodology

- To contact businesses, Probe Research developed a database using public listings taken from Google Maps in areas where these construction projects have occurred.
- A customized screening survey was administered via telephone prior to each interview, and all participants were provided with a \$150 incentive in exchange for their participation.
- A total of 30 interviews were completed between March 8th and March 27th, 2021 by Curtis Brown, Mary Agnes Welch and Katelin Neufeld of Probe Research. These conversations followed two customized discussion guides: one for Calgary businesses and one for businesses located in other cities.
- All interviews were audio-recorded with participant consent and transcriptions will be available once the final report has been submitted.



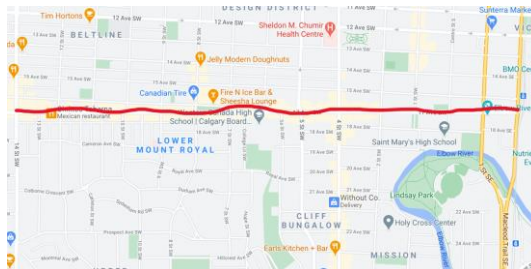


# Profile of Respondents: Calgary



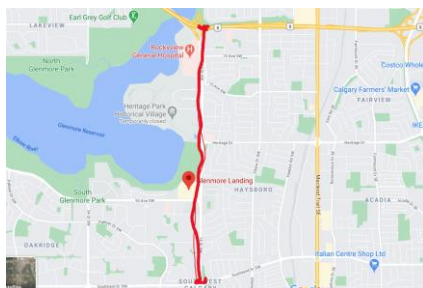
## CTrain West LRT

Built 2009-2012; opened 2012  
Number of interviews: 6



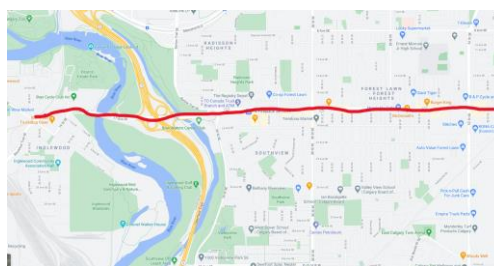
## 17th Avenue S.W. (non-transit)

Under construction 2017-2019  
Number of interviews: 4



## Glenmore Landing/ Southwest BRT

Built 2017-2019; open 2020  
Number of interviews: 3



## 17th Avenue Transitway (BRT)

Built 2017-18, opened 2018  
Number of interviews: 2

## Company Size

10

<25 employees

2

25-49 employees

3

50+ employees

## Sector Categories

8

Retail, hospitality,  
accommodation, food  
services

3

Professional/financial  
services

2

Construction,  
manufacturing, wholesale  
trade and resources

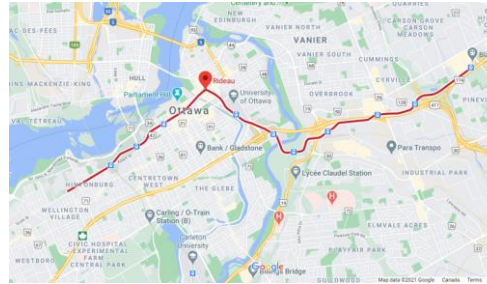
2

Other (various)

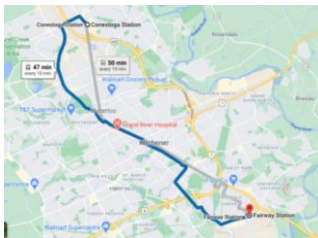
# Profile of Respondents: Other Cities



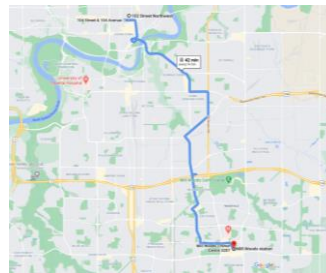
**Toronto: Eglinton Crosstown LRT**  
Under construction; opening in 2022  
Number of interviews: 4



**Ottawa: Confederation Line**  
Built 2015-2018; opened in 2019  
Number of interviews: 4



**Kitchener-Waterloo: Ion Light Rail**  
Built 2014-2019;  
opened in 2019  
Number of interviews: 3



**Edmonton: Valley Line Southeast LRT**  
Under construction; open  
in 2021  
Number of interviews: 3



**Mississauga: Hurontario LRT**  
Under construction;  
open in 2024  
Number of interviews: 1

## Company Size

10

<25 employees

2

25-49 employees

3

50+ employees

## Sector Categories

3

Retail, hospitality,  
accommodation, food  
services

3

Professional/financial  
services

7

Construction,  
manufacturing, wholesale  
trade and resources

2

Other (various)





## Key Findings and Conclusions/ Recommendations

## Assessment of Construction

### **The perceived impact of transit-related construction varied a great deal among businesses.**

- Frustration with construction tended to boil down to three main factors: business sector, their proximity to construction and the ability to access alternate routes around the construction.
- Those in the retail and hospitality/service industry tended to note that construction had the most devastating impact on their business, while those in areas where there are limited access points (such as Glenmore Landing in Calgary) were more likely to say construction negatively affected their business.

### **Traffic congestion and lack of parking tended to be the main pain points for businesses.**

- For most businesses, their chief frustration with construction was the inability of customers to access their business due to lane closures and turning restrictions.
- Those in more urbanized locations tended to point to both congestion and a lack of parking together as frustrations which kept customers away, while for those in suburban areas, frustration was more related to access points being blocked off.
- Other pain points that emerged were vibration/noise (which caused items to break within the business), dust/debris, and issues with flooding due to drainage changes.

### **Many businesses experienced a decrease in revenue during construction, with several not seeing a noticeable rebound due to the COVID-19 pandemic.**

- The financial impact of construction varied significantly, with businesses dependent on walk-in traffic (e.g. retail, hospitality) more likely to report significant losses. While some businesses bounced back relatively quickly, some did not because the COVID-19 pandemic closely followed the end of construction.

# Key Findings (cont'd)

## Assessment of Construction (cont'd)

### **Businesses had mixed views on the long-term benefits of transit construction.**

- Those in denser, more transit-oriented areas of Calgary and other cities were more likely to feel the short-term frustration of construction was outweighed by the long-term benefit of having a transit line near their business, with the associated increases in pedestrian traffic, property values, etc.
- Those in more suburban areas, on the other hand, questioned whether there will be much of a long-term benefit to them or to the area, as they observed relatively few people using these new transit services.

## Communications Evaluation/Assessment

### **Businesses that interacted with someone directly tended to have a better assessment of the municipality's overall communications approach to construction.**

- Calgary businesses who dealt with a more recent construction project (such as 17th Ave. S.W., 17th Ave. S.E. or Glenmore Landing) were more likely to report they had direct contact with someone from The City, and more likely to provide a positive assessment of The City's engagement with businesses prior to and during construction.
- Those who were affected by construction on the CTrain's West LRT line were less likely to recall dealing with someone directly – and less likely to be happy with The City's approach to communication.
- This was also the trend in other cities, as businesses in Toronto were more likely to feel their civic government and the agency responsible for constructing the Eglinton LRT (Metrolinx) was not accessible enough during construction.

# Key Findings (cont'd)

## Communications Evaluation/Assessment (cont'd)

**The biggest communications-related frustration among businesses was a lack of clarity about how long construction will last.**

- Businesses valued clear, honest updates about how long construction will last and grew frustrated when they were told about a series of extensive delays in finishing.
- Some businesses reported a gap in communication as their landlords may not have shared information sent by the municipality.
- Those who lease their buildings were more likely to say they did not always find out about construction in a timely manner because the municipality communicated with their landlord, who did not always pass along the information (or only shared some of it). While most felt they had enough time to prepare, many felt this is a problem that should be addressed.

**Calgary-based businesses who raised concerns tended to be happy with how The City addressed them.**

- Those who raised an issue with The City were generally likely to feel their concerns were heard and considered.
- Those in other cities were more likely to express frustration with their local government's response to concerns, as some said planning officials were more focused on dealing with the next area under construction than addressing concerns about construction in the moment.



# Key Findings (cont'd)

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# Key Findings (cont'd)

## Views on Assistance for Businesses

**Many businesses did not perceive their municipality as offering a great deal of help – although most did to some degree.**

- In both Calgary and elsewhere, many businesses did not perceive the local government as doing a great deal to help them during construction. While temporary signage was the item they were most likely to recall, many said the signs posted were not that helpful.
- Many businesses who experienced something more devastating – such as items breaking due to vibration, or other construction-related damage – were generally pleased with the efforts of city government and/or the contractor to “make things right.”

**Businesses in other cities were more likely to expect some kind of financial assistance from their government – and were disappointed not to receive it.**

- Those who were based in cities where transit-related construction dragged on longer than expected were more likely to think their municipal government should have provided some degree of tax relief to account for their hardship. Those in Calgary, on the other hand, were less likely to advocate for outright tax relief, but to want The City to offer help through both financial means (e.g. waiving licensing fees) and non-financial methods (e.g. better signage, events).

**Creating online discussion forums, providing better signage could help businesses affected by Green Line construction.**

- Calgary-based businesses who experienced construction felt these two ideas would be the most beneficial, as the discussion forum would give businesses an ongoing way to share ideas and feedback while also receiving updates. Many felt signage should be improved by making it more prominent.
- There were mixed views on hosting special events, with some indicating this idea was tried on 17<sup>th</sup> Ave. S.W. and was not successful.

# Key Findings (cont'd)

## Advice for the Green Line

**Direct communication about construction – including a clear estimate of how long it will take – was viewed as the most important thing The City can do for businesses affected by the Green Line.**

- Businesses in Calgary and elsewhere urged The City to be as clear and transparent as possible about where and when construction will occur and provide a prominent channel for businesses to express any concerns or frustrations, as well as ask questions.
- Those who have been through the experience before expressed how important it is to have dedicated staff in place who are responsive and can provide useful information on a timely basis, particularly about key project milestones.

**Many businesses also felt that it will be important for The City to do as much as possible to solve other construction-related aggravations facing businesses.**

- Many of these suggestions were modest and included things like removing no-parking signs near businesses temporarily, fixing damaged curbs and pavement and ensuring sidewalks remain clear during construction.

**Businesses stressed that the impact of COVID-19 makes it especially important to ensure there are supports in place for businesses affected by the Green Line construction.**

- Although they did not immediately make the connection – and it may be less of an issue if the first leg of construction has been delayed until 2022 – many businesses felt it is important not to hit Calgary businesses with another devastating blow just as they are recovering from the pandemic.
- Many of those interviewed suggested alleviating the impact by making construction proceed incrementally or providing even more supports to businesses – including some form of financial relief.

# Conclusions/Recommendations

## Be as clear as possible about construction timelines and their impacts.

- It became very apparent during the interviews that one of the greatest sources of frustration for businesses that have experienced transit-related construction was the amount of time required to finish. Those in Toronto – where the Eglinton LRT has experienced major delays – were especially frustrated with their city government and Metrolinx for the extended period required to build this line.
- Although it may not be entirely possible to do this given the nature of construction, The City should ensure that it is very clear about how long it will take to build each phase of the Green Line and have an extensive plan in place to engage businesses, answer their questions and alleviate any concerns.



## Small gestures can make a major difference.

- Businesses did not have a clear sense that their municipal governments truly provided help during construction. But what many of them noticed – and deeply appreciated – were situations where the municipality or the contractor did things that alleviated some of their frustration. For example, this included temporarily removing no-parking signs near some businesses while regular parking spots were not accessible, or re-paving a parking lot that had been damaged by heavy vehicles during construction. These relatively modest efforts appear to have been appreciated, as they kept businesses already annoyed with the main aspects of construction from spiraling into further frustration and anger.



# Conclusions/Recommendations (cont'd)

## **Ensure there are multiple and sustained touchpoints with affected businesses.**

- It became apparent from these interviews that businesses that had direct contact with municipal engagement staff tended to be more satisfied with their local government's efforts to keep them informed. The City appears to do this to a greater degree now for major construction projects (e.g. Glenmore Landing, 17<sup>th</sup> Ave. S.W.) than in the past, and it was clear that even if businesses were angry about the effects of construction, they were more likely to give The City credit for listening to their concerns when they had someone they could call or email who would be responsive and empathetic.
- Direct engagement through dedicated staff is likely ideal, but should also be supplemented by other touchpoints, including printed notices prior to construction, ongoing email updates and a dedicated discussion forum (discussed in more detail below). One of the key arguments for having dedicated staff reach out directly to businesses (rather than relying on sending notices to property owners) is that this ensures actual business owners are reached, as landlords may not provide information to their tenants in a timely or complete manner.

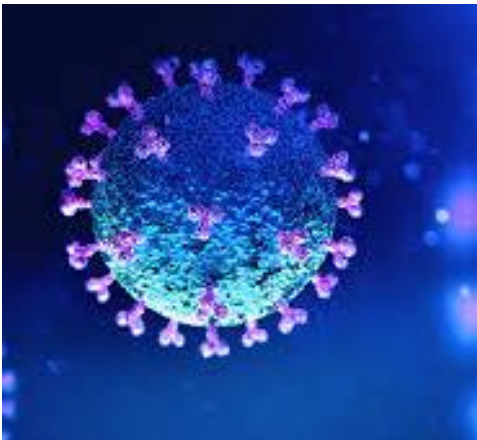
## **Ensure communications are simple, direct and in plain language.**

- This is a fundamental component of communication, but some businesses reported that notices they received did not make it clear how extensive the construction would be or how exactly it would affect them. Any notices sent to businesses need to be written in accessible language and explain – briefly and at a very high level – what will happen, how the business will be affected and who they can contact if they have concerns.

## Conclusions/Recommendations (cont'd)

### **Better signage and discussion forums were viewed as the most helpful potential types of assistance.**

- When Calgary businesses were asked to consider ideas that could support businesses affected by the Green Line construction, they were most likely to point to having better signage to notify people that business are open. Many also felt that online discussion forums would be a useful place for businesses to learn more, vent and have their questions answered.
- The City may wish to prioritize these two items when preparing to support Green Line businesses. The idea of having a centralized business continuity hub – that is, a place where businesses could pick up and drop off courier items, leave waste and recycling, or that could serve as an alternative retail space – did not test well. The City may wish to set this idea aside when considering supports for businesses.



### **Carefully consider the impact and aftermath of COVID-19 on affected businesses.**

- Although this may be less of an issue now that construction will not fully begin until 2022, business owners recognized that Green Line-related construction could be very detrimental, particularly to retailers and hospitality-related companies whose operations have been restricted to a great degree during the past year. The City's approach to communicating with and supporting these businesses should acknowledge this reality, as The City should also be prepared for additional concerns and complaints once some of the work (including relocating utility lines downtown, which is slated to happen in 2021) begins.



## Assessment of Construction Disruption

This section looks at how business owners perceived the experience of construction, including the main pain points and the perceived short- and long-term impact of construction.

# Overall Assessment of Construction

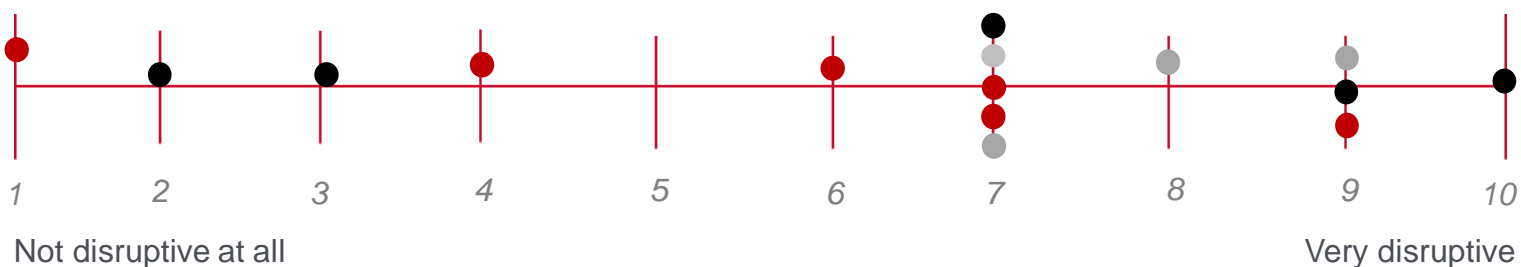
- When participants were asked to indicate how much of an effect construction had on the normal operations of their business, their views tended to vary based on three key factors: the type of industry they are in, their proximity to the construction and their ability to access other routes around the construction.
- Not surprisingly, those who were based in areas that experienced more prolonged periods of construction were more likely to say construction was more disruptive to their business. As well, those in areas where there were fewer potential access points (such as the Glenmore Landing area in Calgary) were also more likely to say it negatively affected their business.
- Retailers and those in the hospitality industry were most likely to say they experienced a significant amount of disruption due to construction, as they pointed to a noticeable drop in walk-in and drive-up traffic due to the disruption. In their view, customers began to avoid their area entirely because they knew it would be challenging to access parking, while some retailers and hospitality service business representatives pointed out that sidewalks were often blocked off by construction materials, which made it less appealing for customers to visit.
- Those in professional or white-collar occupations that are not reliant on walk-in traffic to a significant degree, meanwhile, were likely to say while construction was frustrating for them and their clients, they were not affected to the same degree. Many of these businesses dealt with these frustrations by going out to see clients rather than asking them to come in.
- Participants were asked to assess the impact of construction using a 1-10 scale where a 1 meant construction did not disrupt their business at all and a 10 meant it completely disrupted it. The results of this question can be found on the following two pages.



# Assessment of Construction Impact Calgary-based Businesses

## Perceived degree of disruption on the business

● West LRT ● 17<sup>th</sup> Ave. S.W. ● Glenmore Landing ● 17<sup>th</sup> Ave S.E.



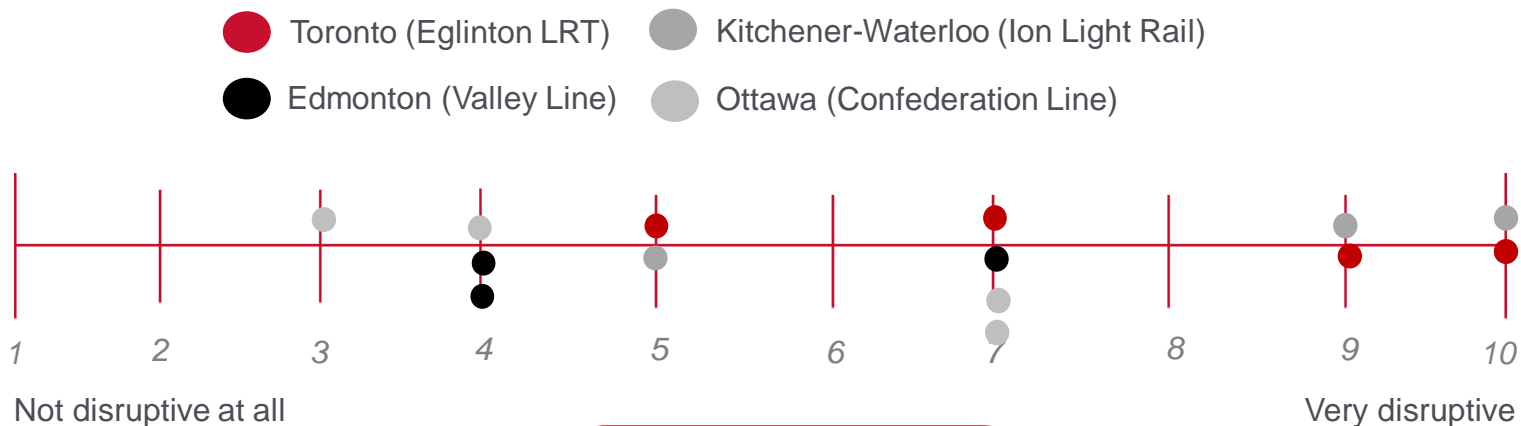
*"It's affected my operation because it's hard to put signs when things are normal in the world to market my (business). It was difficult because people couldn't see the signs."*  
- Business along 17<sup>th</sup> Ave. S.E.

*"Most of my customers, when they realized that everything was blocked, they decided not even to park. ... Most of them actually gave up completely. They didn't even show up."*  
- Business along 17<sup>th</sup> Ave. S.W.

*"Probably nine out of ten. It was pretty severe. Sales dropped about 35 to 38 per cent that first year."*  
- Business at Glenmore Landing

# Assessment of Construction Impact Businesses in Other Cities

## Perceived degree of disruption on the business



*"We can do a lot of our business through phone and email and courier services, so we don't rely on foot traffic necessarily ... I know other businesses that are on the same strip as us where a lot of the construction was going on. I think a lot of them were a little more impacted, that's for sure."*

- Business in Ottawa

*"The road that comes into my location literally was not accessible for over a year, so a majority of my customers actually had to take a service road ... that's filled with potholes and grunge to get into the back of our parking lot."*

- Business in Kitchener-Waterloo

*"It would be a 15, like well over 10 ... We don't have lots of traffic anymore because the roads and sidewalk are all torn up. There's no parking anywhere around."*

- Business in Toronto

# Construction Pain Points



- In both Calgary and elsewhere, businesses tended to point to two major pain points – **traffic congestion** getting to and from their businesses, coupled with the **loss of parking** due to construction.
  - Businesses located along grid roads in relatively urbanized areas were more likely to point to both the loss of parking alongside issues such as lane closures (and resultant congestion) and blocked access along the sidewalk for pedestrians.
  - Those based in more suburban locations with fewer access points (for example, the Glenmore Landing area in Calgary) were more likely to cite traffic congestion on its own as their chief frustration. The main impact of this cited by these business was customers avoiding coming to their locations.
  - In a few instances, business owners mentioned how contractors and other people associated with the project also took away parking on their properties.
- Some of the other specific frustrations cited by businesses included:
  - **Vibration/noise from construction.** This was often cited in instances where tunneling was required (such as along Toronto's Eglinton Avenue), but was also mentioned by a few other businesses that mentioned how machines working on the street made objects in their buildings vibrate.
    - One Calgary business owner along 17<sup>th</sup> Ave. S.W. described how vibrations led to fragile inventory breaking, while another business owner in the West LRT area described how vibration from driving piles into the ground broke some computer monitors.
  - One Toronto-based business owner attributed these vibrations to an influx of **rats** in their business due to the noise and vibration making these animals flee, and noted he had to invest in extermination measures.

## Construction Pain Points (cont'd)



- One business owner in the West LRT area said their building **flooded** due to a change in drainage after construction took place, while a business owner in Kitchener-Waterloo mentioned how pressure from a **water main break** shot water onto his business' windows, forcing staff and clients to evacuate.
- Another business owner along the West LRT lined noted that someone climbed onto the overhead train line and threw a bag of metal weights through their roof, causing **significant damage**. Fortunately, it was late at night and no one was injured, and he was able to have the damaged fixed at no cost to their business.
- **Additional dust and debris** was mentioned specifically by a business owner who experienced this in the West LRT area of Calgary, although they may have inadvertently attributed this to a more recent construction project on Crowchild Trail than the West LRT construction project. Some businesses in other cities, however, did mention that they had to spend more money and time cleaning their storefront or dusting within their buildings due to dust and dirt stirred up by construction.





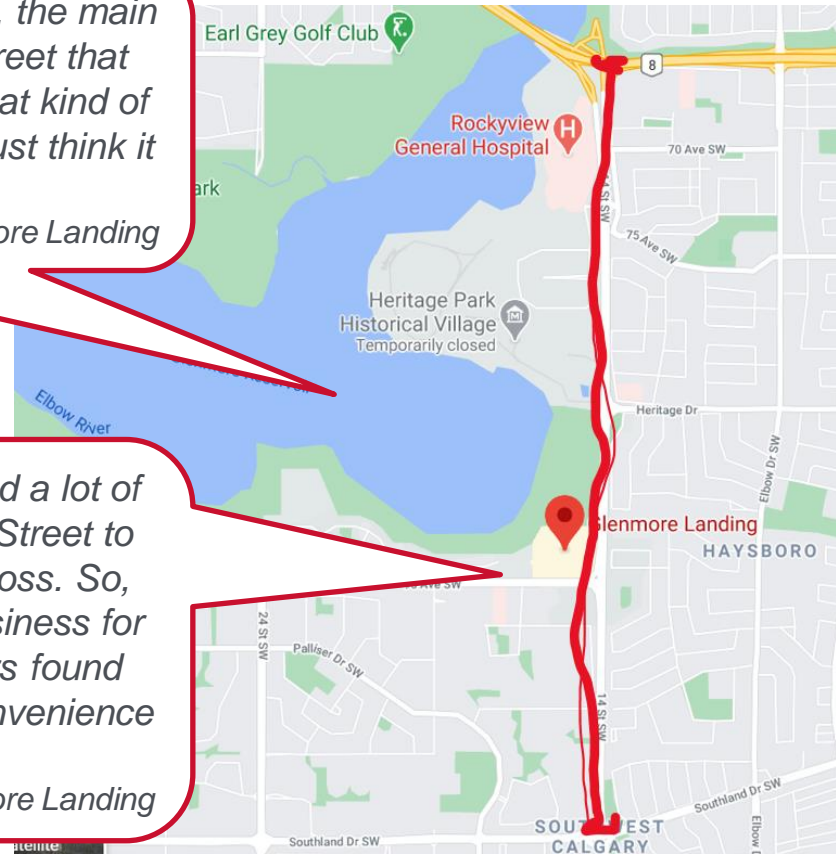
# Construction Pain Points: Calgary Businesses

*"The main entrance to the mall off 14<sup>th</sup> Street, the main street, was taken away. There is another street that intersects with 14<sup>th</sup> Street, 90<sup>th</sup> Avenue, so that kind of created a bottleneck at that entrance. And I just think it was too hectic for people."*

*- Business at Glenmore Landing*

*"We're on the west side of the 14<sup>th</sup> Street and a lot of customers came from the east side of 14th Street to our store. It was an absolute pain to get across. So, for probably two years, we lost all of that business for two and a half years where those customers found somewhere else to shop just due to the inconvenience of trying to get in here."*

*- Business at Glenmore Landing*

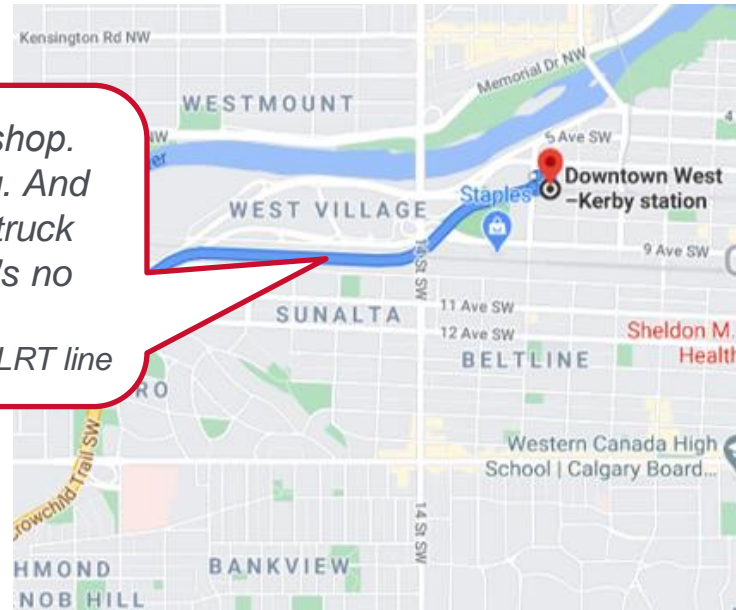


# Construction Pain Points (cont'd)

## Calgary Businesses

*"To this day, it's kind of graded towards our shop. We've been phoning and phoning and asking. And finally, we just went out and got a couple of truck loads of gravel and filled it ourselves. There's no point asking anymore."*

*- Business along Calgary West LRT line*



*"Just with the construction, it was displacing other individuals where they normally park. You could tell parking was more congested than usual during that period of time."*

*- Business along 17<sup>th</sup> Ave. S.W.*

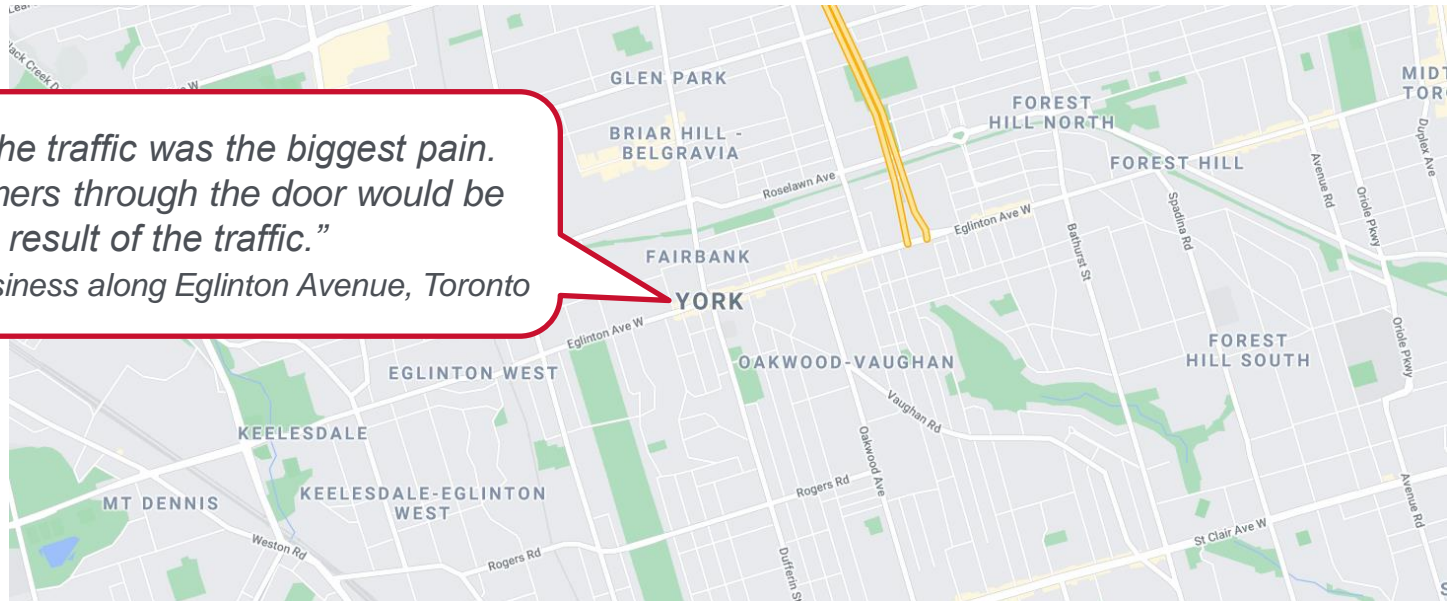


# Construction Pain Points (cont'd)

## Other cities

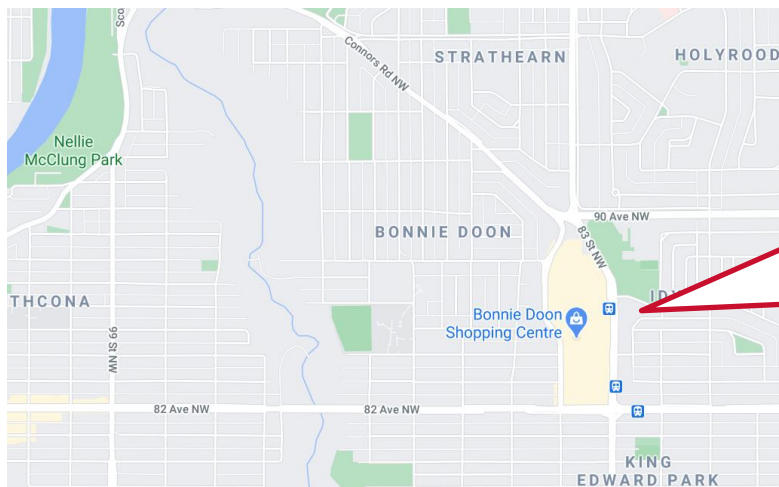
*"I would say the traffic was the biggest pain. Losing customers through the door would be the result of the traffic."*

*- Business along Eglinton Avenue, Toronto*



*"We have service vehicles that leave here all hours of the night. With road closures and extra traffic going down 86th Street, it kind of slowed us up. We had to add extra time to our service calls."*

*- Business in southeast Edmonton*



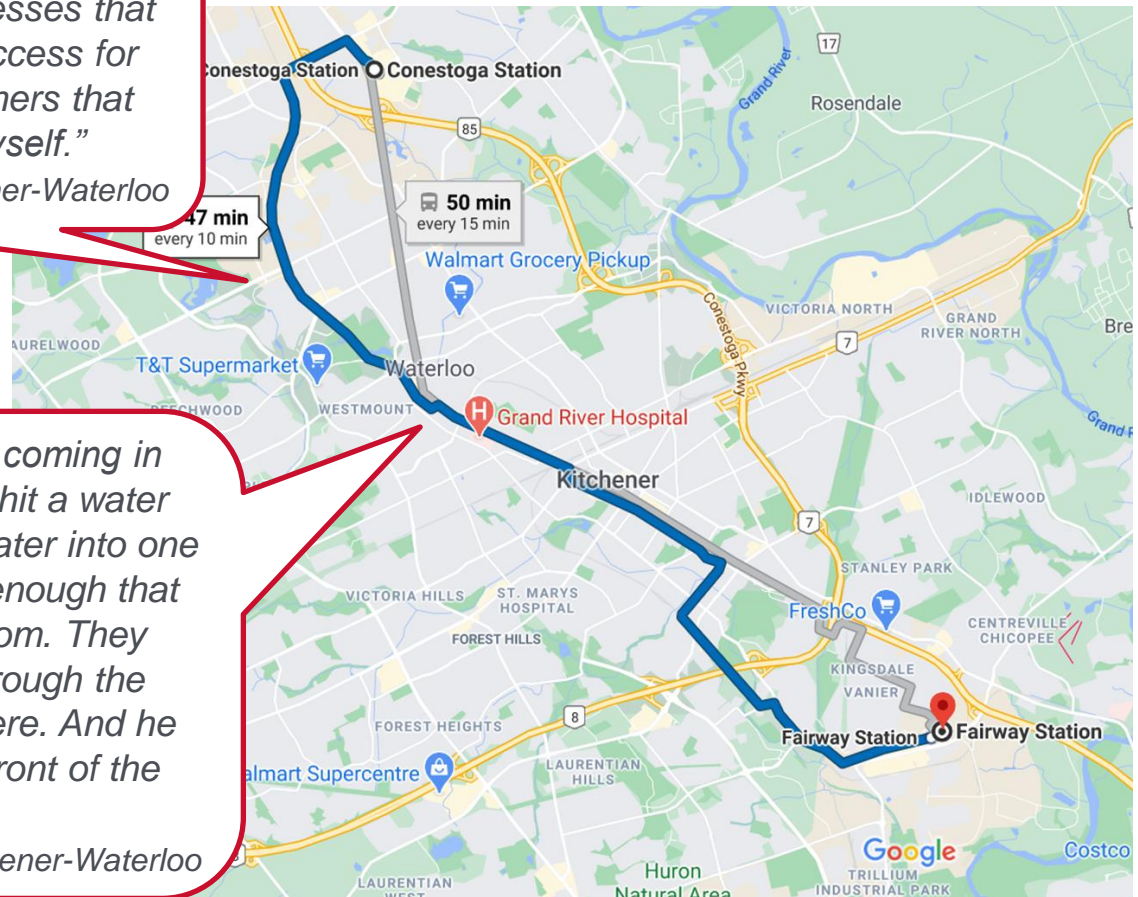


# Construction Pain Points (cont'd)

## Other cities

*"I experienced traffic headaches and delays. But compared to some of the businesses that were right along the line and lost access for long periods of time, there were others that were far more impacted than myself."*

*- Business in Kitchener-Waterloo*



*"They cut our Rogers cable line coming in about four different times. They hit a water pipe. And it shot up a stream of water into one of our windows that was strong enough that people were evacuating the room. They thought it was going to bust through the window. They had a backhoe there. And he just put the backhoe bucket in front of the water stream."*

*- Business in Kitchener-Waterloo*

# Short and Long-Term Impact

- A majority of businesses interviewed indicated their companies experienced decreases in revenue during construction.
  - About one-half of the Calgary-based businesses reported decreases in revenue, which ranged from a low of 10 percent to 50 per cent reported by two businesses. In other cities, only about half reported losses, with those along Toronto's Eglinton Avenue reporting the highest and most sustained losses over time.
- In several instances, business owners had a difficult time measuring how quickly business bounced back following construction, since for some of the more-recently completed projects, the COVID-19 pandemic struck shortly after construction ended. Businesses in the retail and hospitality sector were most likely to state that their business has never fully recovered from the impact of both construction and COVID-19.
- There were mixed views regarding the perceived benefits of these projects. Those in growing and densifying areas, such as those along Eglinton Avenue in Toronto and in downtown parts of Ottawa and Kitchener-Waterloo, pointed out their property values have increased significantly following construction and that they expect to benefit from additional traffic. A couple of those along the West LRT route in Calgary mentioned that they advertise to their customers that the line is close by and makes their business more accessible.
  - Those in less dense and more historically car-centric locations, on the other hand, were more likely to question whether there will be a longer-term benefit to having the LRT near their business. Some of those interviewed in more suburban areas (such as Glenmore Landing in Calgary, Ottawa's east end or southeast Edmonton) pointed out that they often see empty train cars on these lines and really wondered whether the headaches they experienced as part of construction will be worth it for their businesses.



## Short and Long-Term Impact: Calgary Businesses

*"It was hard - it wasn't just for those months. It was down 20 per cent, I'd say, for three years and then more when (the construction) was in front of me."*

*- Business on 17<sup>th</sup> Ave. S.W.*

*"I think we probably even bounced back before because I think some of the construction eased off from the roads. Whenever the road traffic wasn't affected, we were fine."*

*- Business along West LRT*

*"It started (coming back) actually when (the construction) moved more to the west side. It started getting better and improving. It came back quickly, it didn't take long."*

*- Business along 17<sup>th</sup> Ave. S.W.*

*"But once everything got completed, it was a good aspect for us. It's another addition that we have a train station next door to us. It makes it 10 times more accessible for individuals to come to our facility."*

*- Business near West LRT*

*"That whole part of 17th Avenue, there was a Moxie's there, there was Boston Pizza, there was quite a few other places, everyone's gone under. There's no one left. They just never recovered after that closure."*

*- Business at Glenmore Landing*

# Short and Long-Term Impact:

## Other cities

*"All I can tell you, I don't know how, but we had better business after they opened the LRT than before. It was good before, we lost a lot, but it's much better after. Much better."*

*- Business in Ottawa*

*"(It's) hard to say because of COVID, everything is so crazy these days. One month can be our best month we've ever had and then the next month you have zero income."*

*- Business in Toronto*

*"We get some (staff) that are actually from Toronto. So, they have a long way to go. And busing is not always all that great on that line. So, for them to be able to use the LRT, I think it will make a big difference."*

*- Business in Mississauga*

*"I think it was bringing more people downtown or at least making it easier. The traffic was better. People were able to come downtown and pick up their projects. I think it made things a lot more convenient."*

*- Business in Ottawa*

*"The one thing now, five years later, whatever it is since this started, I can safely say I know that our property values have gone up and the tax values, too. But at the end of the day that would be the only bonus or plus to this whole thing."*

*- Business in Kitchener-Waterloo*



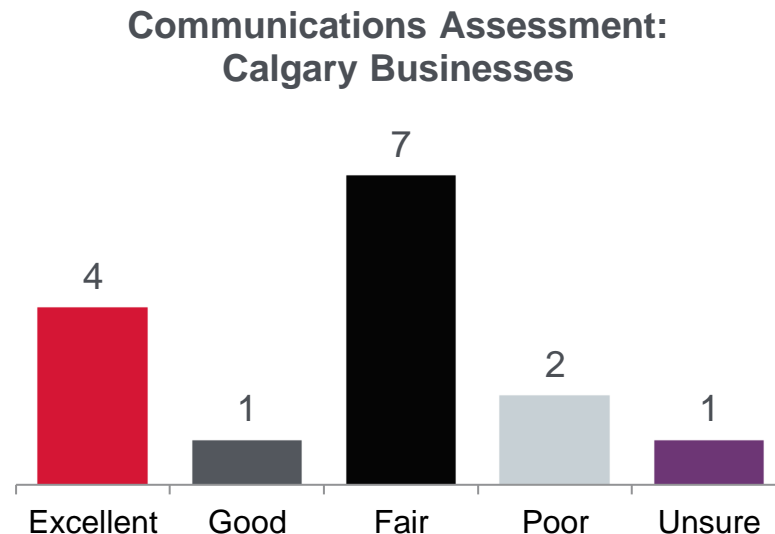
## Communications Evaluation/Assessment

This section examines how businesses in Calgary and elsewhere felt about efforts to keep them informed about construction.

# Communications Assessment

## Calgary Businesses

- Calgary-based participants had mixed views on how well The City communicated with them about construction. As a general rule, those who interacted directly with someone – either in-person or over the phone – tended to have more praise for The City’s efforts to keep them informed. Those who had less direct interaction were more likely to rate the degree of engagement as fair or poor.
  - Those who experienced a more recent construction project (such as 17<sup>th</sup> Ave. S.W.) were more likely to report having sustained communication from The City, and therefore to rate them more positively. Those who experienced transit-related construction a long time ago (such as those along the West LRT) were less likely to recall experiencing the same degree of in-person or telephone communication with someone from The City.
- Businesses at Glenmore Landing mentioned receiving email updates from The City and overall, most felt these were an effective way of keeping them informed. When asked what they would prefer when it comes to communication, most businesses expressed a preference for receiving information via multiple touchpoints, including in-person and telephone consultation, with emails used to provide updates.
- There were mixed views on receiving items in the mail, with some saying they would be helpful if they were short, illustrative and written in plain language – but others indicating they are more likely to be overlooked.

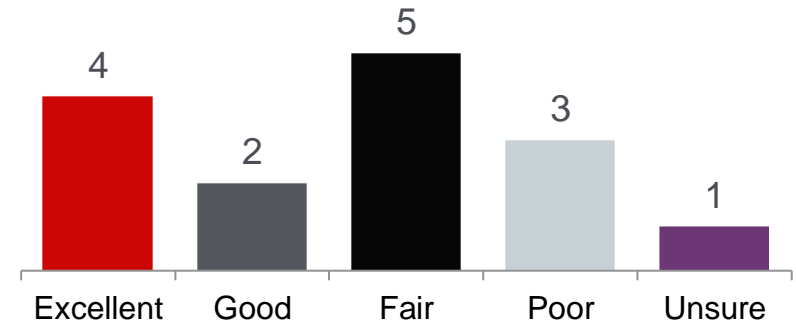


# Communications Assessment

## Other Cities

- Participants had mixed views on how well their local governments or transit agencies communicated with them about construction.
- As was the case in Calgary, those who interacted directly with someone in-person or via telephone tended to have a more positive assessment of how well they were informed, with those who had less contact not providing a high assessment of their municipality's efforts.
- One of the frequent complaints raised by some businesses elsewhere was that communication and engagement was more intensive during the pre-construction phase, but that once construction began officials became less responsive. There were two perceived reasons for this. First, some pointed out that there are more actors involved once construction is underway, including construction contractors, utilities, the municipality and/or transit agency, etc. For some, it was difficult to know who exactly to go out and speak with as issues arose. Second, some felt that engagement liaisons they had engaged with prior to construction tended to shift their focus to other areas once construction was actually underway.
- Those based in Toronto were especially critical of their government and the local transit agency (Metrolinx) and their efforts to keep people informed. While some mentioned that they received regular email updates (which was perceived to be somewhat helpful), they noted that this organization set up liaison offices in local neighbourhoods. However, these businesses pointed out they were not allowed to go into these offices if they had a more specific complaint and that staff from them were not always very responsive.

Communications Assessment:  
Other Cities





## Communications Assessment (cont'd)

- Perhaps the biggest complaint when it came to communication – which was echoed to the greatest extent by businesses along 17th Avenue S.W. in Calgary and Eglinton Avenue in Toronto – was that officials were not sufficiently clear about the scope and duration of the construction.
  - In the case of 17th Avenue S.W., some businesses indicated they did not realize just how extensive construction would be based on the initial information provided by The City of Calgary.
  - In the case of Eglinton Avenue, businesses expressed a great deal of frustration with significant and ongoing construction delays and wished that both Metrolinx and the city government been clearer about how long construction would last.
- When it comes to communication, businesses were most likely to value clear, honest updates about how long construction would last. This was among the most common desires, and one many business representatives felt municipalities and transit agencies too often failed to provide.

*"It wasn't very clear about what exactly was going to happen. It just said construction. So when I think of construction, I think of everyday construction, like you have to go around guys on the street, and it's kind of irritating, but the road is still open. So, it took a while to realize that the road was actually going to be closed."*

*- Business on 17<sup>th</sup> Ave. S.W., Calgary*

*"I would say poor because you never knew what's happening unless you kind of heard it on the radio or news. That's where you'd hear the delays, too. They weren't very direct with the business owners on Eglinton, at least from our perspective. It's not like we were getting calls, updates or anything like that."*

*- Business on Eglinton Avenue, Toronto*

## Communications Assessment (cont'd)

- Participants who lease their properties were also more likely to point out there was a gap in communication, as the municipality/transit agency provided information to the landowner only. In some cases, the landlord proactively provided their tenants with information, but in other cases the businesses felt they were not sufficiently informed because their landlord did not pass along the information.
- When it came to evaluating the frequency of communication, participants in both Calgary and other cities generally felt their local government communicated with them often enough. Those who were more dissatisfied with communications overall were more likely to say they would have preferred to receive more communication and outreach from municipal officials.
- Even though there were some challenges with the degree of communication, the majority of participants in both Calgary and elsewhere also felt they were provided with enough time to make preparations prior to construction actually taking place.

*“So because I had that good communication (with the landlord) I was able to know. But personally, nothing came to our unit number that was ‘Hey, this is what’s occurring on our street and this is a new projection of what’s going to happen.’”*

*- Business along West LRT in Calgary*

*“They came a couple of months before and they told us that this road was going to be blocked like that. They told us ahead of time. Of course, we were prepared.”*

*- Business along West LRT in Calgary*

# Resolution of Complaints

- Among Calgary-based businesses, only about a third of those interviewed said they actually took the step of raising a specific concern or complaint with The City. The manner in which this was done varied to some degree, with some contacting what sounded like public engagement staff and others reporting they (or someone else in their business) contacted their councillor. All but one of these five individuals who made a complaint said they felt like they were listened to and that The City did what it could to act upon their complaint.
- Half of those interviewed in other cities, meanwhile, said they made a complaint - with others saying they would have considered doing so but felt it was not worth it to do so.
- Those business owners in Kitchener-Waterloo and Toronto expressed frustration with the responsiveness of local officials, with a couple saying they were hard to reach and did not always return phone calls. One business owner said these officials kept redirecting them to the website rather than directly answering their question, and that this was frustrating.

*"I always had someone to talk to at the beginning. 'OK, you got a backhoe sitting in the middle of our driveway. Can you move it?' 'Oh, yes. So we'll get right on it.' And they were fast; they jumped. So I give them credit for that. ... But like I said, it went from excellent to fair to poor. I think the worst thing is they moved away from our business and then they moved their phone service away from our business. (It was) 'OK, we don't talk to him anymore. Let's go to the next one.'"*

*- Business in Kitchener-Waterloo*

*"I believe that I called to complain that my customers were leaving the store because of their noise. .. They explain(ed) it. They know. And they did a good job, yeah. They explained what was happening. And I believe that they said that they would stop for a little bit, you know, something like that."*

*Business along 17<sup>th</sup> Ave. S.W. in Calgary*



## Views on Assistance for Businesses

This section explores perceptions of the degree of assistance offered to businesses during construction, as well as provides an assessment of potential supports that could be offered during Green Line Construction.



# Views on Business Assistance

- In both Calgary and in other cities, business owners did not perceive their municipality as providing them with much assistance – although once the conversation unfolded, it became apparent that these municipalities did, in fact, offer some support, even if it was limited in scope and not to the level businesses hoped for.
- Many of those interviewed said their municipal government provided signage directing potential customers to their businesses, although several said that overall, these efforts were not that helpful. Several of these participants felt the signs used were too small and not prominent or enticing enough to really attract people to their businesses.
- A few participants located in denser urban areas (such as Toronto) noted that in some cases the city removed parking restrictions from nearby side streets, which they said was helpful because this meant their customers did not have to walk as far from their vehicles to their business. Other businesses, however, said their local government kept some of these parking restrictions in place, which they – and their customers – found aggravating.

*“So as far as I know, there wasn't anything. Not that I am personally aware of, no.”*  
- Business at Glenmore Landing

*“It was hard with the heavy construction ripping out all of the sidewalks. We could have put some signs facing the street because we get a lot of cars that drive by and we get more advertising for our business and walk-ins.”*  
- Business on 17<sup>th</sup> Ave. S.E.

*“Side streets have no parking or whatever, so what the City did was they would get rid of that and allow(ed) people to park on the side streets... that definitely did help.”*

- Business in Toronto

*“They made a little entrance to our restaurant, but there was no parking. People were parking on the government parking and getting tickets.”*

- Business in Ottawa



## Views on Business Assistance (cont'd)

- Some participants pointed to specific things their city government (or the contractor) did to essentially “make things right” when they suffered some degree of obvious damage related to construction. This included replacing computer monitors broken vibrations (in the case of one Calgary-based business) to the contractors on Ottawa’s Confederation Line repaving a business’s parking lot after their heavy vehicles had been parking on it during construction.
- Similarly, a couple of individuals mentioned that getting some degree of business from those involved in construction was also helpful. For a restaurant owner, that meant having construction crews and inspectors eat in their restaurant from time to time, while for another contractor it meant getting an opportunity to supply a product to construction crews. For these individuals, the benefit of unanticipated business mitigated, to at least a small degree, an overall decrease in business due to construction.
  - In many cases, these relatively inexpensive gestures paid dividends in terms of fostering goodwill and making the business feel like their most significant frustrations were addressed.

*“We had such a good experience with the LRT part of it. It was frustrating the one day when we came in and the computer monitors were on the ground. But then when the guys gave us new ones, it looked like they’re being good about everything.”*

*- Business along West LRT*

*“All the managers, all the people who were like from out of town working on this project, they used to come here and let us know everything about what’s going on. ... They would bring more people to eat here and they (would) make appointments here, meetings here. They really helped us a lot.”*

*- Business in Ottawa*

# Expectations of Financial Relief

- In other cities, several participants wished that their municipality would have provided some degree of property tax relief to those most affected by the construction.
  - Those in Toronto, Kitchener-Waterloo and Ottawa were especially likely to focus on this, as their chief frustration had to do with the amount of time required for construction to be completed. These businesses pointed to sustained losses over a long period of time and said they and many others in their area have asked their city government for some degree of compensation, whether in the form of an outright break on their municipal property taxes or waiving certain fees, such as business licenses.
- Calgary-based businesses who experienced construction were less likely than their counterparts elsewhere to go this far, with most wanting “help” to take other forms (such as better signage, promotional activities to attract businesses, etc.) or simply steps to alleviate the specific frustrations associated with construction.
  - A small number of business owners, however, did say it would be helpful to receive some degree of financial relief, such as waiving licensing fees or other costs paid directly to The City that are required as part of doing business.

*“That’s the most disappointing thing that I saw in this region. From the regional standpoint, from our government standpoint, not a penny. Very disappointing.”*

*- Business in Kitchener-Waterloo*

*“My taxes, of course, have to have the regular increase, which I get, our operating costs as a municipality, they don’t go down. They never will. But perhaps just an equilibrium while development is going on or something of that nature.”*

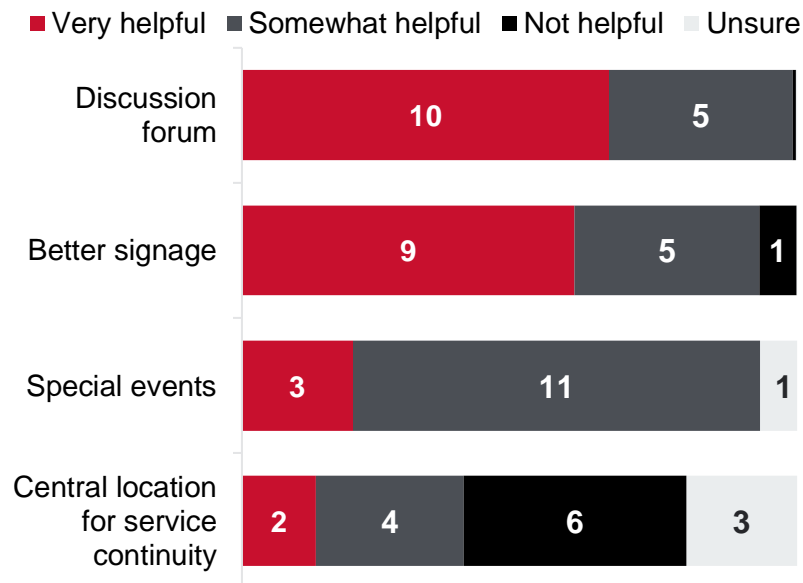
*- Business in Edmonton*

# Assessment of Potential Supports

## Calgary businesses

- Calgary-based businesses were asked to evaluate four ideas that could potentially help those who will be affected by the Green Line. Overall, most businesses thought efforts to offer improved signage near businesses and creating an online discussion forum for businesses to share ideas and feedback would be very helpful. Those that advocated for this expected it would keep businesses informed and provide them with an opportunity to share ideas and criticism, thus allowing them to feel heard.
  - There were mixed views regarding hosting special events, with some indicating these would be helpful and others noting that similar efforts along 17th Avenue S.W. were not successful because people continued to avoid the area for a prolonged period.
- Most business owners did not think setting up a centralized point for business service continuity would be helpful, as they felt it would be inconvenient to go elsewhere to drop off waste/recycling or pick up items from couriers. Some, however, did like the idea of offering additional retail space in a more accessible area for those who may be able to benefit from this.
- Some of the additional ideas that were suggested included incorporating murals and public art to beautify areas near where construction is taking place, as well as having in-person meetings with local businesses in addition to an ongoing online discussion forum.

### Assessment of Potential Supports (Calgary Businesses)



# Assessment of Potential Supports (cont'd)

## Calgary Businesses



### Online discussion forum

*"Very helpful ...just to keep everybody in the know and for the business owners to have some say or maybe bring something to light, that the planners overlooked, that type of thing."*

*- Business in Glenmore Landing*

*"That sounds very helpful... the ability for business owners directly affected and perhaps substantially affected by the project, would just have that easier access to have input and feedback with respect to what's being contemplated."*

*- Business on 17<sup>th</sup> Ave. S.W.*



### Better signage

*"Something (signage) just to say, 'Hey, these businesses are over here' - something that's fairly prominent that's going to let people know that "on the other side of this construction, this particular business is there."*

*- Business along the West LRT*

*"If you're talking about those little orange ones (signs), if I'm somewhere with construction, I don't find those all that helpful. But if maybe they were a little bit bigger... especially in some of the areas where it's sort of congested."*

*- Business along the West LRT*

# Assessment of Potential Supports (cont'd)

## Calgary Businesses



### Special events

*"We did try to do that. It wasn't as well attended as we'd hoped because, again, it's a disaster, right? Like it's like an open pit. So, people are already frustrated with the whole thing."*

*- Business along 17<sup>th</sup> Ave. S.W.*

*"I just know with our economy right now ... unless the meeting was literally in front of my building, I don't know how many people would actually show up to this area, but it may be somewhat helpful."*

*- Business along the West LRT*



### Centralized point for business service continuity

*"Being able to say, you can take your stuff and put it to this other spot - I mean, now you have to go and pick it up. I can't imagine that would be all that much helpful because you're getting everybody to do everything twice."*

*- Business along the West LRT*

*"I know a few business owners that are on 17th (Ave. S.W.) and they have their business kind of cut off from the front. Any type of resource that could help a business have a little bit easier transition during construction period is always helpful."*

*- Business along the West LRT*





## Advice/Suggestions Related to the Green Line

This final section provides participants' perspectives on what the City of Calgary should keep in mind as it proceeds with construction on the Green Line, including how to communicate about and mitigate the impact of construction on local businesses.

# Advice for the Green Line

- When thinking about how the City of Calgary should work with businesses to deal with the effects of construction on the Green Line, there was a high degree of unanimity among both Calgary businesses and those located in other cities that high-quality, honest and direct communication about the construction process is a must-have. More than anything, businesses said The City needs to be clear and transparent with businesses about when construction will occur, what the specific impact to their business will be and whom they should reach out to if they have concerns.
- One of the key pieces of advice offered by those who had been through the experience of construction in other cities is to ensure The City has a way to hear from all businesses – not just those who are most vocal about bringing forward complaints. These businesses stressed The City should make sure that it clearly communicates how the Green Line will benefit their business, the neighbourhood and the city overall and be sure to point these benefits out as much as possible to create buy-in.



*“You’ve got to stick to your guns and know that you’re going to get complaints no matter which way you do it. But if it’s for the benefit of the whole city, you’ve got to put up with it. There’s going to be a few that suffer, but the majority are going to enjoy it or take advantage of it.”*

*- Business in Toronto*

*“Just (do) more public awareness other than, ‘Hey, we’re building this, it’s coming.’”*

*- Business in Kitchener-Waterloo*

## Advice for the Green Line (cont'd)

- Businesses in other cities who had been through this experience stressed that it is especially important to provide sustained and ongoing communication, preferably from dedicated staff who are easy to reach and who proactively engage businesses prior to construction beginning. Those who were deeply critical of the job their municipalities did during construction and frequently mentioned that their frustration was made worse by either:
  - Not knowing whom to get a hold of;
  - Project/engagement staff being unresponsive – for instance, by not returning calls in a timely manner, or not being available at their on-site office; or
  - Not being able to provide enough information or specific answers, as some businesses felt frustrated they were only given pat responses when they had more detailed questions about the effects of construction.
- Some of these businesses also noted that having City staff contact businesses directly also means they are more likely to hear about things directly and eliminates the possibility their landlord will not inform them of when construction will occur. Some also advocated for City staff to check in frequently and give businesses a forum for sharing concerns or feedback.

*"I think they have to actually literally drop off notices to people's buildings instead of having it done by ... the BIA (Business Improvement Association). Some people just don't read their emails or especially language differences or whatever."*

*- Business along 17<sup>th</sup> Ave. S.W.*

*"I think having those initial conversations and understanding what the impact might be and I think that regular check-ins – this was a two-year project and I think it would behoove them to perhaps every six months have a conversation to say what is the impact?"*

*- Business at Glenmore Landing*



## Advice for the Green Line (cont'd)

- One of the key points made by businesses – especially those in other cities – is to ensure there is better project planning in place about when the most disruptive components of construction will occur.
  - These businesses – especially those in Toronto, Kitchener-Waterloo and Ottawa - pointed out they would especially want a clear sense of the milestones, as the most aggravating aspect of their construction experience was that it took much longer to finish the project than initially anticipated. These businesses hoped those along the Green Line route will be given a clear sense well in advance of when construction will finish, and that this timeframe will be met.



Construction on the Eglinton Avenue LRT in Toronto  
Source: BlogTO

*“Plan ahead and support the small businesses, because no matter what they think, it's probably going to have a far greater impact on the small retailers than the planners say it will. And also, from our experience here, there's construction timelines that are published which I don't think on any project like this are ever adhered to. There's always overruns in time and cost.”*

*- Business in Kitchener-Waterloo*

*“You've got to have accountability. Accountability means that somebody has to be accountable for their promises to finish on budget. ... I think that would definitely bring more trust from the businesses and the locals.”*

*- Business in Toronto*

## Advice for the Green Line (cont'd)

- As noted earlier, some businesses also suggested The City can build goodwill by addressing other easy-to-solve problems, such as removing no-parking signs near businesses or quickly fixing parking lots and curbs after construction has been completed. Some also mentioned that The City needs to ensure construction crews keep pedestrian access points clear of debris, especially for businesses that rely on walk-up traffic (and as an accessibility measure).
- A few businesses also recommended staggering construction or staging it in a way that it is less detrimental to businesses. This could include completing construction in stages, or only doing extensive work in a small area rather than making a larger area under construction for a longer period of time.
- Some businesses also urged The City to ensure there is a sufficient degree of support for businesses in place. While some suggested providing financial assistance to some degree, others focused on items such as better signage.

*"On the sidewalks especially, you got seniors, you got people with wheelchairs, crutches, walkers and stuff that we see struggling during construction times because the walkways aren't kept clear."*

*- Business on 17<sup>th</sup> Ave. S.W.*

*"Make sure there's strong communication where they're doing their work with those businesses, and I think they got to know there's going to be a percentage of businesses that aren't going to make it."*

*- Business in Kitchener-Waterloo*



# Impact of COVID-19



- When businesses were asked to consider what impact, if any, COVID-19 may have on those about to be impacted by Green Line construction, it was clear many had not taken this into account earlier – but once they thought about it, they were highly mindful that prolonged construction could be devastating for these businesses.
- Many of those interviewed said The City needs to take into account the fact these businesses – especially those in the retail, accommodations and food services sectors – have struggled significantly in the past 12 months and may not be able to survive if their customers stay away further due to construction-related issues like congestion, lack of parking, etc.
- When asked what could be done to help these businesses, some suggested staggering construction so that it takes place incrementally, doing so in a way that ensures access to these businesses is not affected for a longer period of time.
- Some also suggested The City needs to consider doing more to provide direct supports to businesses, including by offering some kind of financial relief – either a reduction in property taxes or by reducing other costs, such as waiving business license fees.
  - Although this was not a widespread view, some businesses mentioned that since so many companies survived due to assistance from the federal and provincial governments during lockdown, it may be justified for The City to provide some type of financial aid for those who will be most severely impacted by construction on the Green Line.

# Impact of COVID-19 (cont'd)



*"It's probably a broken record thing, but our taxes, my operating costs are probably almost 30 percent of my rent. So even if you're only paying your operating costs, it's still significant."*

*- Business on 17<sup>th</sup> Ave. S.W.*

*"I don't know what you could possibly do. I'm just trying to think of other businesses and how it would affect them. There's no access, and then you've got COVID on top of it. Nobody's going to show up. ... yeah, that's just adding fuel to the fire."*

*- Business along the West LRT*

*"I would definitely say maybe not increasing property taxes at that time - putting a hold on it to give some sort of a financial benefit that the company doesn't have to go and struggle and try to apply for. Maybe giving a reduction on the business license fees. You know, something - anything helps out a business."*

*- Business along the West LRT*

*"Certainly if there's anything in the way of tax reductions or even business licensing fee reductions that can be made so that people feel like The City is doing something to help them out as much as they can."*

*- Business in Edmonton*