Green Line Stage 1 Business Support Program

What We Heard
Fall 2020 – Spring 2021

Engagement program overview

In 2015 a Notice of Motion was put forward by Councilor Druh Farrell (NM2015) in order to proactively address any negative construction impacts that may be experienced by businesses along the Green Line LRT alignment. In the Notice of Motion, Councilor Farrell directs:

Consult with the impacted business community to develop a Business Support Program, and report to the Standing Policy Committee on Transit and Transportation, prior to commencement of construction of the Green Line.

This report outlines the formal public engagement completed, as well as what we heard through that engagement. However, it is important to note that the project team has and continues to consult with, and support businesses impacted by Green Line LRT and enabling works construction activities.

The formal public engagement program initially focused on four phases of engagement:

1. Educate and Inform
2. Set Program Objectives
3. Build and Refine the Program
4. Report Back

Engagement was planned to broadly reach businesses along the Stage 1 alignment as well as to focus on engagement with a more targeted group of business and community representatives which make up the *Business Insights Panel (BIP),* which was launched in January 2021. Engagement with both groups (broad and targeted) was planned to occur between Fall 2020 and Summer 2021 with the first phase of engagement beginning in November 2020. While the *Educate and Inform* phase was launched and program information was shared on the Green Line website and throughout the Functional Plan engagement sessions, it came at a difficult time for businesses. With Covid-19 cases rising, businesses facing provincial restrictions and the resulting stress and distractions that came as a result, this phase saw minimal participation.

Adapting to the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic

In Early 2021, the engagement plan was revised in response to what we learned through the challenges in phase 1. The team revised the strategy to re-launch broad public engagement in Spring 2021 anticipating, based on Covid-19 experiences of Spring 2020, that businesses would gradually begin to open and get back to normal. We hoped this would make for an effective and respectful time to engage businesses. However, as the third wave rapidly climbed and businesses once again faced new provincial restrictions and stresses, and with consideration to input from the BIP, the decision was made to indefinitely postpone broad public engagement until there was more detailed information to share with businesses about specific Green Line LRT construction impacts.

To ensure development of the Business Support Program (BSP) framework remained informed by insights from business and community members, the team maintained the focus of connecting with members of the BIP. This engagement has been used to inform our approach to supporting businesses and to ensure that local business perspectives have been considered.

The Business Insights Panel (BIP)

The role of the Business Insights Panel (BIP, The Panel) is to provide perspective and make suggestions to the project team regarding the development of a business support program. While the expertise of The Panel is used by the project team to help inform project decisions, The Panel is not a decision-making body; decision-making authority remains the responsibility of the Green Line project team.

Membership was structured to include business perspectives from along Stage 1 of the Green Line LRT. While we received a thorough response from Business Improvement Areas and Community Association representatives, initial efforts to recruit public business members from targeted areas were paused by the Covid-19 challenges described above. At the time of writing this report, membership consists of:

#	Member			#	Member	
1	Inglewood BIA	Filled		11	Crescent Heights BIA	Filled
2	Ramsay CA	Filled		12	Eau Claire CA	Filled
3	DouglasQuarry CA	Filled		13	Chinatown BIA	Filled
4	Millican-Ogden CA	Filled		14	Victoria Park BIA	Filled
5	Highfield area (recruited)	Not filled		15	Calgary Downtown Assoc.	Filled
6	Shepard area (recruited)	Not filled		16	Beltline BIA	Filled
7	Public (recruited)	Not filled		17	Public (recruited)	Not filled
8	Public (recruited)	Not filled		18	Public (recruited)	Not filled
9	Program Manager	Filled		19	BIA Liaison (City)	Filled
10	Program Lead	Filled		20	Engagement staff	Filled

What did we do?

To date, four components of the engagement program have taken place:

1. Initial online public engagement including recruitment for the BIP
2. Regular meetings with the Business Insights Panel
3. In-person and virtual alignment “walks” with members of the BIP
4. Research to learn from other Canadian business experiences

1. Initial public engagement

Initial engagement included launching the “Educate and Inform” phase. This involved robust promotional efforts with the intent of:

- Driving people to the website to learn about the business support program

- Recruiting public members to join the Business Insights Panel
- Collecting feedback on initial engagement questions

As described earlier, this initial effort saw minimal participation. Following this initial effort, both public recruitment for the BIP as well as efforts to engage the broader business community were halted and the engagement strategy was revised.

2. Regular meetings of the Business Insights Panel

At the time of writing this report, the BIP has met five times:

Meeting	Date	Meeting topics
Meet and Greet	January 12, 2021	Members met as a group for the first time
#1	January 26, 2021	• Introductions • Terms of Reference (TOR) • What is Business Support? • Engagement Approach • Wrap Up
#2	February 23, 2021	• Welcome • Meeting #1 Recap • Program Objectives • Interactive Review of Program Objectives • Connecting with Businesses • Wrap Up
#3	March 30, 2021	• Welcome and agenda review • Opening remarks from Chair • Review revised program objectives • Review May engagement tactics • Connecting with businesses in May • Wrap Up
#4	May 25, 2021	• Welcome and agenda review • Opening remarks from Chair and project update • Notice of Motion Report update • Review of lessons learned to date • Group discussion about initiatives & applicability • Building a business database • Wrap Up

3. Business Insights Panel Alignment Walks

In May 2021, a series of virtual “walks” were held with members of the BIP. Initially intended to take place in-person, rising Covid-19 cases and new Provincial restrictions necessitated the walks take place online. The team adapted to this need and facilitated a suite of effective and informative virtual walks with BIP members. While all members were offered walks, it was also explained that walks could be held at a future date if the timing was not good for the member.

The walks followed the Green Line alignment in specific communities/business areas along the Stage 1 alignment, with a focus on business and/or community areas that may be affected by future construction.

The purpose of the walks was to:

- Spend time with BIP members at an individual-community-level, and further establish our relationships;
- Build our local understanding as we develop our business support program framework; and
- Learn more about the attributes of businesses in specific areas and gain familiarity with any specific issues or concerns associated with Green Line construction.

Learning about the local contexts along the alignment, supports the team's ability to plan for potential business supports and construction mitigation measures ahead of construction.

Walks conducted include:

Date	Time	Area of focus
May 19 2021	1:30-3:00 p.m.	Ramsay and Inglewood
May 20 2021	1:45-3:00 p.m.	Lynnwood and Millican Ogden
May 20 2021	4:00-5:15 p.m.	Eau Claire
May 25 2021	10:30-12:00 p.m.	Crescent Heights
May 26 2021	1:30-2:45 p.m.	Victoria Park and Beltline
May 31 2021	1:15-2:30 p.m.	Downtown

4. Research to learn from other Canadian business experiences

The project team also commissioned a research program to better understand the experience of Canadian businesses, including Calgary businesses, who had been through similar construction. The focus of this research included:

- 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 interviews were completed between March 8th and March 27th, 2021. These conversations followed two customized discussion guides: one for Calgary businesses and one for businesses located in other cities, with the intent to understand how best to connect with businesses located along the Green Line alignment and address their potential concerns, while also helping them deal with the negative impacts of construction.

What did we hear?

1. Initial public engagement

As described earlier, only a handful of comments (10) were received; roughly half of which were not relevant to the questions asked. This initial phase of engagement did not provide sufficient feedback to inform the program. A consistent comment we did hear from members of The Panel was the need for businesses to have more detailed information to enable meaningful input into the program and initiatives. The project team will continue to engage impacted businesses and the business community at large to inform the initiatives throughout the construction of the Green Line LRT, and particularly when there is specific and relevant information to share.

2. Regular meetings of the Business Insights Panel

A summary of each meeting is shared below.

Meeting #1, Jan 26, 2021: welcome, program overview, and getting to know the membership

BIP members shared their initial impressions of the business support program. Many opinions were shared, but some consistent themes emerged:

- The need for Green Line to understand unique and distinct business needs
- The importance of communicating accurate construction timelines and impacts, and avoid false starts (which create skepticism and distrust)
- Recognizing the cumulative impacts of concurrent and/or subsequent construction work
- The desire to think outside of the box, and try to implement meaningful supports for high-impact businesses
- Businesses are facing many stressors now, and it may be difficult to grab their attention without real and specific construction plans

Additional details are retained in the meeting minutes held by the project team.

Meeting #2, Feb 23, 2021: reviewing program objectives

The project team presented a draft set of BSP program objectives for review by the BIP. Each program objective was reviewed and discussed, asking members to evaluate the importance and effectiveness of each.

Members expressed a desire for the team to simplify and reduce the overall number of program objectives, simplify wording and reduce City jargon.

In addition, we heard the importance of:

- Safety (and accessibility)
- Construction timeline communications
- Maintaining an up to date business database
- Cultural and language support (accessible)

Additional details are retained in the meeting minutes held by the project team.

Meeting #3, Mar 30, 2021: review revised program objectives and public engagement tactics

The project team returned with a revised set of program objectives based on the feedback received by the BIP at meeting #2. Highlights of the updated version include:

- Fewer objectives

- Simplified wording
- Additions/amendments to reflect themes heard:
    - Safety (and accessibility)
    - Construction timeline communications
    - Up to date business database
    - Cultural and language support (accessible)

BIP members were asked for additional feedback and expressed an overall approval to proceed with the updated objectives. Discussion included a general agreement that The City will not be able to ensure that no business is affected; but that it is important to do the best we can and set realistic expectations. The importance of transparent communications and setting communities up for success by preparing them for construction impacts was also discussed.

Following this discussion, the group was provided an overview of the tactical approach to broader public engagement, then scheduled for May. Some themes from feedback received include:

- The importance of effective engagement with Chinese-speaking business owners. Standard surveys do not work, and a door to door approach has proven more effective
- The challenge of trying to engage businesses without having concrete construction plans available to share
- A willingness of BIA representatives to assist communicating with businesses
- The potential challenges associated with rising Covid-19 numbers* (* this turned out to be severe enough that broader public engagement was postponed indefinitely, out of respect for the challenges businesses were facing)

Additional details are retained in the meeting minutes held by the project team.

Meeting #4, May 25, 2021:

At this meeting the project team presented a summary of the many streams of research and lessons learned being explored. These include:

- Review of similar construction projects and business supports from across North America
- Meetings with the Business Insights Panel
- Research to learn from other Canadian business experiences (commissioned by the City of Calgary, described below)
- Review of lessons learned from other City of Calgary projects

Following the review, The Panel engaged in discussion based on the following questions:

i. After hearing about these lessons learned, what stands out? Is there anything you wish to comment on?
ii. What seems to have good applicability in your area? Is there something should we be exploring more? Conversely, are there any initiatives that don't seem as applicable?
iii. We are curious about the online forum that arose in the business interviews. Do you think something like this could be useful? Have you experienced or tried something similar?

Panel members shared that the lessons learned review appeared to be very relevant. The need for frequent and timely communication of accurate information was highlighted as critically important. It was explained that this could be done through on the ground staff, phone updates, as well as a frequently updated web resource such as real-time parking availability maps. Some members also expressed the importance of understanding adjacent or cumulative impacts brought on by other City of Calgary/partner projects.

One gap highlighted as missing from the lessons learned was the need for multi-lingual and culturally appropriate communications, particularly for places like Chinatown and Centre Street N. It was recommended to have at least one staff who speaks Mandarin or Cantonese.

Finally, members emphasized the importance of building a robust stakeholder database. Recognizing the different needs, abilities and preferences of the many stakeholders was also highlighted as important.

Additional details are retained in the meeting minutes held by the project team.

3. BIP Alignment Walks

Each community "walk" presented unique circumstance and detail for the project team to consider. Some highlights emerged as consistent themes across most walks and are shown below.

Top Themes

- Parking impacts are extremely frustrating for community members, especially in areas without driveways or designated parking
- Ongoing noise is particularly frustrating, and there are concerns for businesses and community members residing most closely to anticipated construction areas
- Pedestrian access is important to maintain, both to businesses as well as through communities. Long detours are especially disruptive to pedestrians
- Businesses and residents alike expect timely and up to date notification of impacts and changing plans. Communications must also consider those living and working on the periphery of the alignment/ construction zone
- There is a strong desire for The City to understanding the cumulative effects of all construction impacting an area. In addition, construction plans should consider recent activities, historic decisions and ongoing community context

Highlights from each walk are shown below. Full meeting minutes have been retained by the project team and will be referenced through project planning.

Ramsay and Inglewood Virtual Walk – May 19, 2021

- Ramsay is growing its businesses but remains somewhat industrial which adds to the character of the area; Inglewood is an area characterized by a lot of change and ongoing development pressure, resulting in sensitivity to construction
- Parking is a "trigger word" for many residents and businesses; construction vehicle parking should remain in laydown areas
- The recently added mobility lane on 11 Street SE was a big win after years of effort; it's important to be mindful of this going into construction and effort should be made to no "undo" what's been achieved

- There are some unique shops around Portland Street and at the corner of 26 Avenue and Blackfoot Trail that have limited access points
- Businesses depend on people accessing the area via all modes to remain successful.
- There is an opportunity to utilize local communication channels and even partner with local businesses to support communication and awareness activities. Communicating beyond the actual construction area is also important (i.e. periphery)
- Other concerns include water and electricity shut offs; dust affecting patios;
- Many more localized/specific details are included in the meeting minutes.

Lynnwood and Millican Ogden Virtual Walk – May 20, 2021

- Ogden is an area characterized by a rich history and small-town feel, however, is now facing increasing change and development pressure. While some people are embracing change, many others are frustrated by it.
- There are many residential homes that are very close to the alignment and that will be highly affected by construction; there are not a lot of businesses, but there are some who operate very close to the alignment
- Ogden Road has become a major commuter road and construction impacts are likely to cause major disruptions and frustrations. The community goal, however, is to see that road turn into more of a business-oriented main street in the future
- There are some potential laydown areas that could work but they need to consider things like access to sports fields (Pop Davies Park) and winter tobogganing (near 78 Avenue).
- 78 Avenue project needs to remain highly sensitive to the people living there – many whom live in Calgary Housing – and sensitive to the SE Community Resource Centre that operates on 76 Avenue. Because of delays in construction the project will need to be re-communicated in advance
- Many more localized/specific details are included in the meeting minutes.

Eau Claire Virtual Walk – May 20, 2021

- Eau Claire is a community characterized by walkability, residences, visitors, and appreciation for the “riverfront lifestyle” and surrounding environment
- Green Line will be the next round in many years of construction. This is likely to be very frustrating for residents and businesses and construction needs ot be approached with this understanding
- Residents walk frequently, especially along 2 Street SE as well as by way of the Plus 15 systems. Construction plans should consider this and maintain the walking experience i.e. maintaining access to Plus 15s and creating walking shelters adjacent to construction (e.g. shipping container walkways).
- Most businesses are currently in the Eau Claire Market. However, there are also some major office towers as well as businesses in the Plus 15s that depend on foot traffic. Other important community resources include Kids & Company Daycare, The Sheraton Hotel, and the Blood Donor Clinic in Eau Claire Market
- Considering the alignment travels the line between Eau Claire and Chinatown, there is a desire for both communities to be looked at as a whole. Areas adjacent to the alignment also need to be considered, as they will be affected by things like truck traffic.
- Residents are expecting a real commitment to having their construction questions answered. Advance notice is expected as is notice of emerging impacts and changes.

- Many more localized/specific details are included in the meeting minutes.

Crescent Heights Virtual Walk – May 25, 2021

- Crescent Heights is a community highly characterized by walkability, diverse ethnic backgrounds and mixed age groups. The nearby high school adds a lot of teenage foot traffic. It is currently a highly used vehicle corridor as well.
- The last 10 years have seen many improvements and the new BIA is helping the growing business environment. Things like events, planters and new waste management containers have been helpful. It's becoming a destination area where many people come to stop and quickly grab food.
- There is a new community food hamper/refrigerator that is seeing a lot of use. Access needs to be maintained
- Considering the seniors who live in the area, as well as the Chinese seniors that often travel on foot between Chinatown and Wing Kei Seniors Care Residence, pedestrian access needs to be maintained, and the project should be very mindful of how long-detours and steep slopes may affect these individuals
- Parking is an issue along Centre Street and businesses depend on parking availability. The busiest area is between 8 Avenue and 9 Avenue (for parking and pedestrians), but there is a desire for a parking strategy along the entire street
- Many businesses are social media savvy and can help get up to date information out to support customers accessing their business. The new mural (Magic Walk) further south on Centre Street could also be used as a communication channel if done right.
- Many more localized/specific details are included in the meeting minutes.

Victoria Park and Beltline Virtual Walk – May 26, 2021

- Beltline BIA is new and is still building contacts and relationships. It is made up of roughly 65% professional businesses and 35% storefront/retail/hospitality. There are also 26,000 residents living in the community
- Victoria Park is a very diverse area and the second oldest community in Calgary. Businesses are very diverse and include restaurant, retail, architecture and engineering, beauty health and fitness, tech, oil and gas, insurance and legal, real estate and development, banking and finance, arts and entertainment
- Victoria Park highlighted the underground aquifer that travels down the alley between 10 and 11 Avenues as it may cause impacts to construction as well as businesses if not approached properly
- A major concern of the Beltline are the one-way streets down 11 and 12 avenues. This takes away from the desired pedestrian-oriented environment. Green Line construction could help improve this if intentional; or could make it worse if not planned appropriately
- Both BIAs agree that a robust stakeholder database will help to effectively communicate with businesses, but that hyper-up-to-date data and information is essential
- There are many licensed seats in the area and increasing patio spaces. It would be a major detriment for construction to set back all the progress that has been made in this regard
- A major concern is maintaining the pedestrian flow North-South along 1 Street SW. Many improvements have been made in this area and it is highly used
- Effective construction planning may help to turn 10 Avenue into a Stephen Avenue-type pedestrian/patio type environment. Foot traffic is very important here

- It will be important to maintain access to High Park and the attached parkade. Access to businesses on all streets must be maintained; alleyways could be considered when temporarily street closures are required
- Many more localized/specific details are included in the meeting minutes.

Downtown Virtual Walk – May 31, 2021

- Over 2500 businesses are represented by the BIA. Calgary Downtown Association takes an ecosystems approach, acknowledging the complex social environment and vulnerable population in the area
- Businesses expect to receive up to date construction notices and logistical information. Many business owners who are less tech savvy will call the BIA to understand what is going on. The BIA can help if The City prepares them with accurate information. The BIA also runs an "Ambassadors" program which puts staff on the street to connect with businesses, residents and visitors to the area
- Patio seasons are critically important, and even winter patios may become more of a thing through the Winter Strategy
- Stephen Avenue is a major pedestrian corridor and hotspot for businesses. Stephen Avenue needs to be carefully considered in construction planning
- There are some critical loading zones and access points along 2 Street SW. Some act as a single entry to numerous businesses who depend on their access. This needs to be carefully planned for
- Stephen Avenue Place has just been refinished and will become an important and lively hub for business. After much investment and the impacts of Covid-19, these businesses will be eager to grow profits and remain unimpacted
- Many more localized/specific details are included in the meeting minutes.

4. Research to learn from other Canadian business experiences

Complete and detailed research findings provided the following top themes:

- **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.
- **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.
- **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."
- **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.