

A nighttime photograph of the Calgary skyline. The central focus is the historic clock tower of the Calgary City Hall, illuminated with warm lights. To its left is a modern glass skyscraper. In the foreground, there are blurred light trails from traffic in shades of blue and red. The sky is a deep blue with some clouds.

2025 Main Streets Business Support Grant Pilot Research

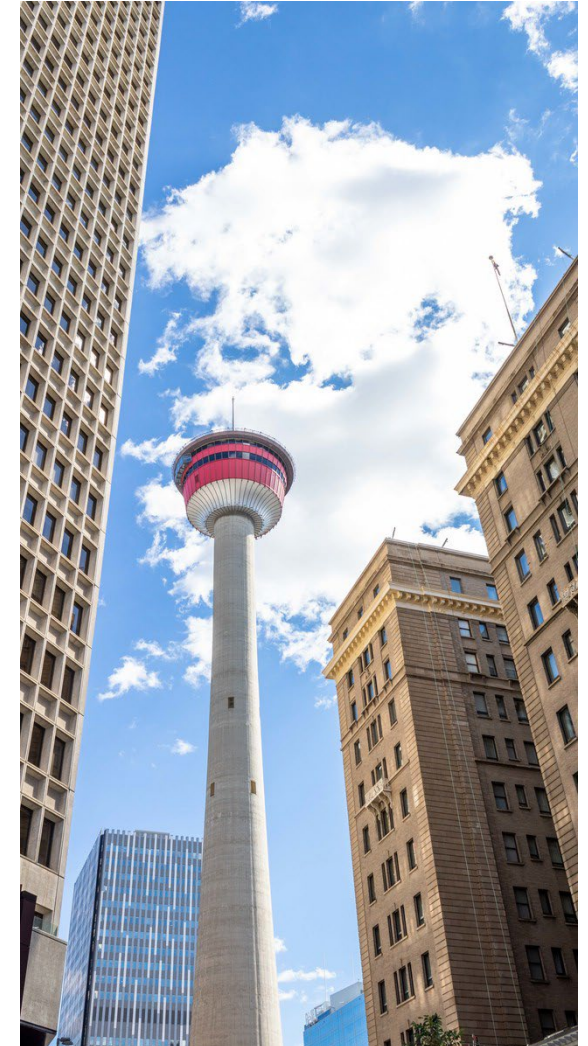
Final Report

March 2025

Prepared by: Probe Research
603-191 Lombard Ave
Winnipeg MB R3B 0X1
Tel: (204) 894-3298
Email: curtis@probe-research.com

Table of contents

Research summary	3
Key findings	4
Conclusions and considerations	6
Background and methodology	8
Overall experience with construction	10
Perspectives on the Business Support Grant Pilot	16
Perspectives of non-recipients	24
Feedback and suggestions for improving the Business Support Grant Pilot	26
Additional feedback on improving the construction process	30



Research summary

Most businesses described the construction they experienced in 2025 as being very disruptive to their business.



Businesses in Marda Loop were most likely to consider construction to be especially disruptive.



The greatest perceived challenges were the loss of on-street parking and access to sidewalks in front of businesses.

The grant was not seen as especially helpful, but many businesses were grateful to receive it.



Most put the money towards general operations and business expenses rather than towards specific efforts or strategies to deal with the disruptions of construction.



Nearly all businesses would recommend that others take advantage of this program if it was offered in the future.



Suggestions for improvement included:

- Offering more to those who experienced more challenges due to construction
- Providing payments in installments

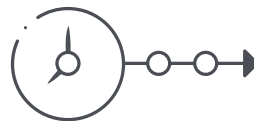
The process of applying for the grant was perceived to be very straightforward and easy.



Most applicants thought more would be required of them to qualify to receive the grant.



Nearly all agreed the application process and eligibility criteria were very clear.



Businesses are most likely to want better communication about the construction process, especially clear timelines about what will happen when.

Key findings

Overall, business representatives described their experience with Main Streets construction as very disruptive, with those in Marda Loop more likely to describe it as being incredibly difficult to operate.

- When business owners and managers used a 1 to 10 scale to describe how construction may have disrupted their business, nearly all provided a rating of 7 or higher – with many, especially those in Marda Loop, providing a 10 out of 10 (very disruptive). While some businesses in Bridgeland reported experiencing relatively less disruption during this 2024 construction season, some of these businesses were aware this coming year may be more disruptive.
- The main challenges businesses reported included limited on-street parking, road closures (and traffic detours) and sidewalk access being taken away for a period of time. Some also indicated that construction vibration, dust and temporary loss of water service at times significantly affected their ability to operate, and in some cases, they decided to shut down their operations for a period of time. These disruptions significantly affected foot traffic, which many of these businesses noted they rely upon to stay operational on a day-to-day basis.

Business representatives overwhelmingly appreciated the opportunity to apply for the grant, emphasizing that "something is better than nothing" and that "every little bit helps" in offsetting the financial strain that occurred during construction disruptions.

- Initial reactions were positive, and most indicated it was a positive gesture from The City. However, business owners did admit that in many cases, the \$5,000 is not a good indication of what they lost in terms of revenue during the peak of the construction, or what they could lose in future construction periods.

All businesses agreed they were well communicated with in terms of finding out about the Main Streets Business Support Grant pilot.

- The majority said they heard from multiple channels about the grant pilot. These included newsletters from their Business Improvement Area (BIA), email and mail from the BIA, City representatives coming door to door, as well as word of mouth from other business representatives.

Key findings (continued)

All business representatives interviewed described the grant application process as being very simple and straightforward, with minimal information required of them.

- Indeed, several business owners and managers were somewhat surprised by how easy it was to apply for the grant, with many expecting the process to be more difficult. Several also indicated they received the money relatively quickly, which they appreciated.

The majority of businesses reinvested the grant directly into their operations, using it to cover immediate expenses such as bills, payroll, rent, and other essential business costs. Only a handful dedicated these funds to marketing initiatives.

- Most business owners indicated that if they had the opportunity to do it all over again, they would still choose to put the money towards operating expenses. Many noted that the funds they received barely covered their losses and that this was the most appropriate use of this money.
- Nearly all business representatives expressed a preference for the funds being given to individual businesses directly rather than being pooled and spent on collective initiatives that may benefit multiple businesses in an area – for example, creating temporary parking or hosting a street festival.
- Some businesses also advocated for providing more money to certain types of businesses that are more reliant on foot traffic, or providing more to those who experienced proportionally greater amounts of disruption. Some thought it may be helpful to provide payments to businesses in installments coinciding with the worst of construction rather than as one lump sum grant.

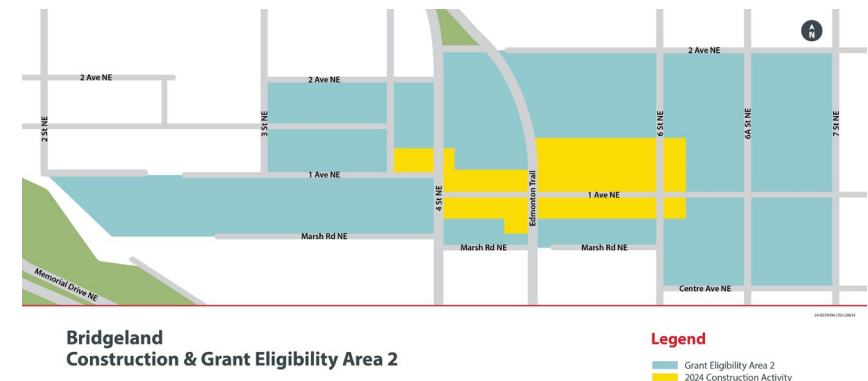
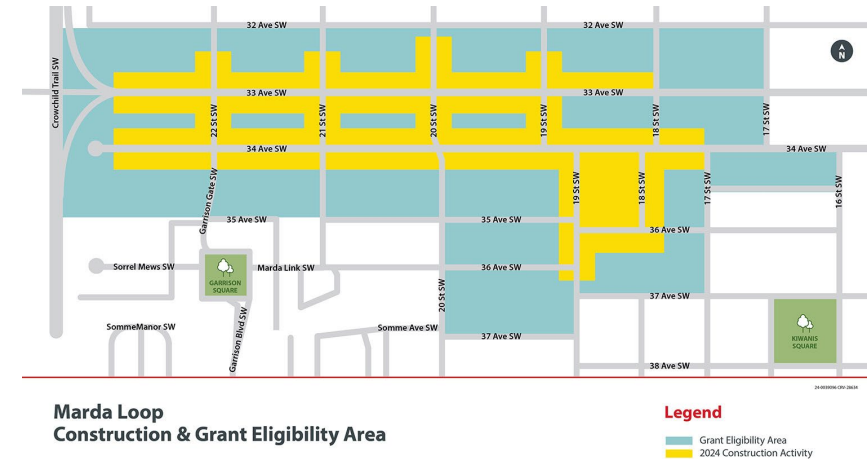
Nearly all those who applied for but did not receive the grant were given a clear reason why their application was unsuccessful.

- Those who were not successful in submitting a grant application pointed out there was a clear reason why, such as accidentally submitting multiple requests or submitting applications for two separate businesses with the same address. Only one representative had difficulty getting their questions answered about why their application was unsuccessful.

Conclusions and considerations

The straightforward structure of the Main Streets Business Supports Grant Pilot was one of the most appreciated elements of the program. However, this simplicity may make it difficult to make the program more helpful to businesses.

- No matter how they felt about the program, businesses expressed gratitude and even surprise about how easy it was to apply for the Main Streets Business Support Grant. Many went in expecting a cumbersome process that would take a long time to provide them with funds, and they were pleasantly surprised by how little time it took to fill out the application and receive their money.
- If The City continues to offer this type of grant to construction-affected businesses, it should do its best to keep the application process simple and straightforward. This includes providing clear explanations about which businesses are eligible and which ones are not.
- However, if The City wants to tailor the program to encourage businesses to use the funds for specific purposes (e.g. marketing), or if it wishes to set grant criteria based on how affected the business was by construction, it will need to sacrifice simplicity for complexity. There may be benefits to moving in this direction. However, The City will need to be prepared for complaints about the process becoming more cumbersome, or businesses taking issue with the eligibility criteria. Ultimately, The City will have to decide on the balance it wishes to strike between universality and simplicity on the one hand, and offering more targeted eligibility criteria on the other.



Conclusions and considerations (continued)

Better and more accurate communication was by far the main need businesses expressed in terms of what can be improved about the construction process.

- One of the consistent themes that came out of these discussions was that business owners and managers wanted to have clear, up-to-date information about the construction activities. Some businesses (especially those in Marda Loop) complained that the timelines posted to the City website were usually out of date and did not reflect what was actually occurring with the construction activities. Another thing that really came through these discussions was that business representatives who had more interaction with construction liaisons and other City communications staff (such as at community meetings and in-person visits to businesses) tended to be somewhat more sympathetic towards – and understanding of – The City as it worked through the challenges of these major construction projects.
- Indeed, one specific comment made by a business owner who had experienced construction related to the Green Line LRT Project – and who had a bit more experience when it came to construction-related disruption – was that the degree of City communication on that project was significantly better than it was in Marda Loop. This business owner's recommendation was for The City to apply the degree of communication and project coordination that was in place for the Green Line LRT Project to these other, smaller Main Streets construction projects.
- To that end, The City should ensure that future construction projects have a very high level of communication and engagement before, during and after the construction process. Being as proactive as possible – including sharing updates such as a delay in completing a specific stage – should help placate businesses to some degree, as they may feel less frustrated if delays happen. Setting clear expectations ahead of time and managing them effectively should help ensure business owners feel better about the construction process.
- As well, continuing to invest in and using construction liaisons should help matters a great deal. Having these City staff build relationships and gain trust from businesses seems to give them some feeling of agency about the construction process, as they can turn to these liaisons for updates and information. Even if The City's liaisons can simply listen to businesses' concerns and follow up on them, it may help assuage any anger or frustration they may have about the process.

Background and methodology

Background

The City of Calgary is advancing business-friendly approaches to City-led infrastructure projects. As part of this, in 2024, at the direction of City Council, The City implemented a one-time Main Streets Business Support Grant Pilot in Marda Loop and Bridgeland with the objectives of 1) helping businesses prepare for construction and 2) implementing strategies to encourage business patronage during construction.

The Main Streets Business Support Grant was implemented as a pilot to evaluate its effectiveness in achieving these objectives. It should be noted that the grant is not compensation.

To measure the effectiveness of this pilot program, The City commissioned qualitative research to better understand how businesses in the area used the grant and to get their overall perspective on the grant application and Main Streets construction process.

Methodology

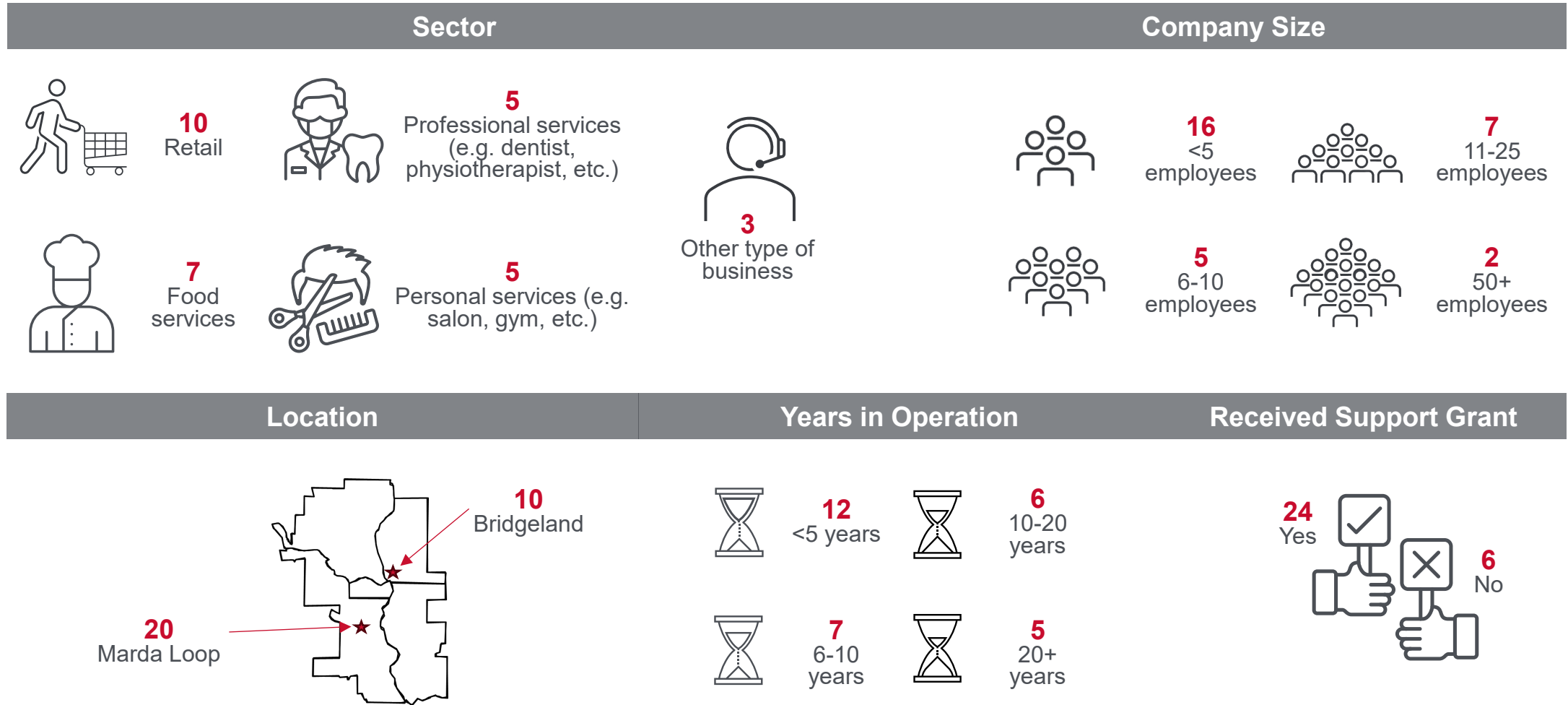
Probe Research was commissioned by The City to conduct a total of 30 in-depth interviews (IDIs) with owners and managers of businesses located in Marda Loop and Bridgeland that experienced this Main Streets construction. This included those who qualified for and received a grant, as well as those who did not receive a grant.

Participants were recruited from a list of applicants provided by The City. 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.

These interviews were completed between January 22 and February 5, 2025, by Curtis Brown and Ashley Simac of Probe Research using a customized discussion guide. All interviews were audio-recorded with participant consent. Transcriptions will be available once the final report has been submitted.

Background and methodology

The following grid provides an overview of the characteristics of the business representatives who participated in this study:





Overall experience with construction

Views on construction disruption

Virtually every business representative described the experience of construction as being very disruptive to their operations.

- Those located in Marda Loop were much more likely to describe the experience as especially difficult due to both the nature and duration of construction in this area. Those in Bridgeland described it as being disruptive, but they did not feel it to the same degree as those in Marda Loop. As one would expect, those who rely more on walk-up customers and those who viewed themselves as being more of a destination from other parts of The City were more likely to describe the impact of construction as especially difficult.
- For most, the main challenge was parking, with many noting customers were no longer able to park close to their business. Some noted construction workers parked in available spaces all day, with large vehicles also blocking access to these spaces.
- Others stated construction-related congestion or road closures made it difficult for customers to reach their businesses, with those in Marda Loop pointing out how changes in traffic flow on 33rd Avenue S.W. and 34th Avenue S.W. during the construction period led to customers avoiding the area altogether.
- Indeed, several business owners pointed out that with customers choosing to go elsewhere, their establishments experienced a drop in business. Several businesses, especially in Marda Loop, also noted foot traffic was affected as the sidewalks in front of their businesses were removed while The City installed wider sidewalks and bike lanes as part of the project.
- The images on p. 13 illustrate how different types of businesses rated how disruptive construction was to their business operations on a 1-10 scale where a 1 meant they experienced no disruption and a 10 meant they experienced a significant amount of disruption.

“The biggest thing for us ... is that the construction had to be done, but it disrupted access to the area. More importantly, it made finding parking within the neighborhood difficult. There were quite a few situations where entire roads were completely shut down for weeks. Eventually, it got to the point where we all knew going in that this would decrease customer count, change habits and affect how people perceive and access Marda Loop.”

– Food service company, Marda Loop

“People stop and park right in front of my (establishment), pick up their (product) and leave. So, the biggest challenge I faced was ‘no parking’ signs right in front. And the other challenge was the street signs indicating no parking were put up 3-4 days ahead of time, and in fact they could have put them up the night before and saved me from three days of loss due to no parking.

– Food service company, Marda Loop

Views on construction disruption (continued)

- While losing on-street parking spaces, congestion and no sidewalk access were the main disruptions highlighted, personal services businesses (such as tattoo artists, estheticians and naturopaths) were more likely to bring up other issues, including:
 - Construction noise, which was especially disruptive for a business that provides hearing testing that had to shut down temporarily.
 - Vibration, which made it difficult for tattoo artists and estheticians to do their work.
 - Dust and off-gassing from drilling into concrete, which affected some customers who are very sensitive to particulates in the air and led to them not patronizing certain businesses for a period of time.
- Another significant disruption for some businesses was when water service was temporarily shut off. Although some of these shutoffs occurred at night when fewer businesses were open, this situation forced a busy restaurant to close early one night. Some of these business owners noted they were not given enough warning ahead of time before access to water was curtailed.

“One thing that really p***** me off is they shut off the water and they gave us I think a week notice. So, we got told Thursday night and then the next Thursday we had no water, and we had to close down and we had a full day of (clients). So that was like \$15,000 in production loss for one day, let alone all the team's salaries that day.”

- Professional services company, Marda Loop



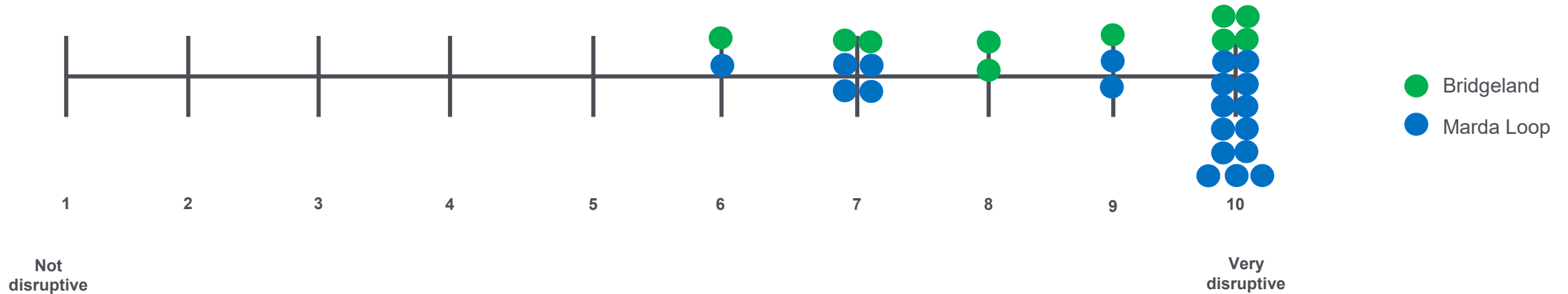
“The noise had the biggest impact on our business productivity.”

– Professional services company, Bridgeland

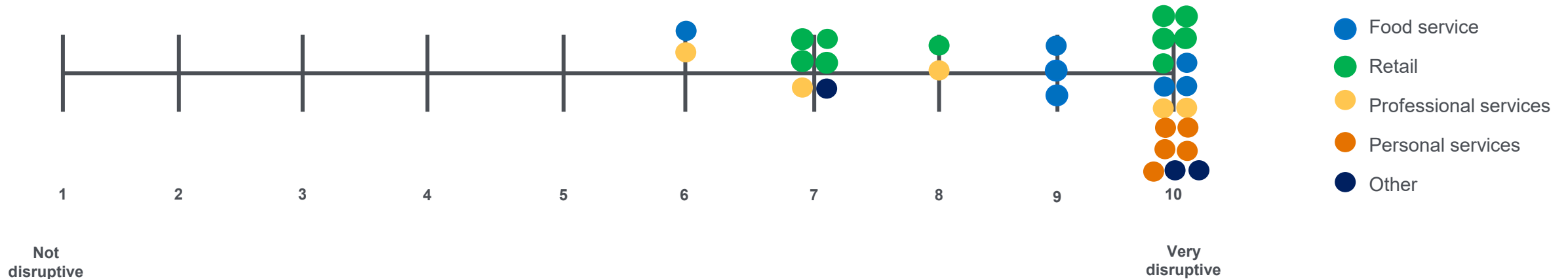
Assessment on construction disruption

- The images below illustrate how business representatives described the impact of construction using a 1 to 10 scale where a 1 meant it had no impact and a 10 meant it had a significant disruption.

Perceived level of disruption, by area



Perceived level of disruption, by business type



Post-construction season perspectives

Most of those interviewed indicated that things returned to normal – to some degree – once construction wrapped up in late 2024.

- Although some noted their business managed to recover and have their business return to normal, those along 34th Street S.W. in Marda Loop and Edmonton Trail N.E. in Bridgeland indicated frustration and worry about the additional construction scheduled for this coming year.
- As well, several pointed out that as road-related construction is wrapping up, there will still be a great deal of new private residential and commercial construction happening in these areas that will impact their business.
- Many business representatives – especially those in hospitality and food services – noted they entered the construction period in recovery mode to some degree, as they were trying to rebound from enforced closures and loss of business during the COVID-19 pandemic and repay debt incurred during this time. These businesses indicated the construction knocked their businesses back again, and the long and somewhat unexpected timeframes for completing the work made it especially frustrating and financially difficult.
- A few businesses that opened in early 2024 also indicated the construction was difficult for them as they are just getting established. They noted if they had known in advance that the Main Streets construction would have been this prolonged or disruptive, they would have chosen to open their business in another location.

“So many people are unaware that construction has kind of been put on pause right now (and will continue in 2025).”

– Retail services company, Bridgeland

“I think the perception is still that Marda Loop isn’t accessible right now. The BIA and The City hasn’t done the job or the work to get people back in the short term. Like saying ‘Hey, construction is on a reprieve right now — come on back, visit us, support small, support local.’ On the other hand, I totally see why they don’t, because they’re going to have to do it all over again in the spring, which will upset more people and confuse our customers even more.

– Food services company, Marda Loop

“The street was essentially closed down on multiple occasions, impacting our entrance. There was no walkable traffic, and parking was affected. We lost between 40% to 50% of our business during that period. From being located near Marda Loop, I know people were avoiding the area completely. In a couple of weeks, we’ll likely be able to quantify the impact even better, as we’re already seeing a bounce back now that the street is open – but the impact was quite extreme.”

– Retail services company, Marda Loop



Perspectives on the Business Support Grant Pilot

Perspectives on the Business Support Grant Pilot

Most businesses agreed The City communicated well with them about the Main Streets Business Support Grant Pilot.

- Businesses reported hearing about the Main Streets Business Support Grant Pilot through a variety of methods, with many learning about it directly from City representatives via email or at in-person meetings. Some said they heard about it from their neighbours or other word of mouth channels. Generally, most offered positive comments regarding how well The City and the two BIAs did letting businesses know about the program.
- Nearly all of those who applied for the grant had a positive opinion of the grant at first, as they (from their perspective) thought it was good for The City to acknowledge the disruption they were experiencing and to provide some degree of support. Only a few businesses indicated they disliked the idea, as they felt it would be better for The City to focus instead on finishing construction more quickly.
- Although many businesses expressed gratitude that they would receive at least some money to acknowledge their hardship, several stated the grant amount would not make up for the lost revenue they experienced due to this construction.

I know for a fact that it was spread by our BIA newsletter. The City did a good job advertising it and that stuff really spreads fast, and people will tell other business.

– Food service company, Marda Loop

I can't remember where I heard it first, but it came from multiple directions. I mean I got an e-mail on it. I heard about it through the BIA. I got an e-mail from the BIA and I got mail. It came in at least four different directions.

– Professional services company, Bridgeland

Perspectives on the application process

Across the board, business owners agreed it was incredibly easy to apply for the grant.

- None of the 30 business representatives interviewed offered any specific feedback on how the application process or form could be improved, as they noted the eligibility criteria and instructions were quite clear.
- Most expected a more onerous process and were surprised they had to input a minimal amount of information for the application process.
- Similarly, all noted they received their funds in a couple of weeks – in many cases, much more quickly than they expected to get this money.
- Nearly all noted they do not think the guidelines to qualify should have been more stringent, as they appreciated the simplicity of what was in place. Only a handful of participants indicated there should have been more criteria in place, with an evaluation of need by The City taking place based on the level of disruption during construction.

Yeah, the application process (was) very simple, wasn't cumbersome, wasn't asking for a lot of data, wasn't asking for financial resources, wasn't asking for history that your sales have decreased. They didn't ask for a lot of that.

– Food service company, Marda Loop

The actual application process was really easy. It was pretty straightforward — you just enter your information, indicate where you are and submit. It was incredibly easy, actually.

- Retail business, Bridgeland

I probably just went online and filled in the form and got a cheque.

- Food service company, Marda Loop

I can't believe I'm saying this, but the grant process was almost too easy. I think the process needed to be a little more difficult, and there should have been an evaluation—whether by a person or a small team—who could visit each business, schedule a time to sit down, and say, 'OK, here's what we're doing, here's how you'll be impacted, here are your options, and here's how you fill out the application.

– Retail business, Bridgeland

Views on the effectiveness of the grant

In general, businesses indicated the grant was not that helpful to them and did not do enough to cover their losses.

- While many indicated they did not want to seem ungrateful, their attitude seemed to be that even a little bit of help from The City is better than none at all.
- Business representatives appreciated that this was the first time The City provided a grant to support and/or mitigate the disruptions caused by construction on businesses, and they noted they could have received nothing at all for their trouble.
- However, several business representatives – especially those in Marda Loop – indicated the small amount of money came nowhere near to making up for the financial losses, disruption and related aggravation they endured during the past two years. Some businesses indicated their revenue loss exceeded more than 40% during the worst periods, and they are still struggling to make that up.

It's really helpful, especially at a time when your business is slow because of this. Putting some money in makes a big difference.

– Retail business, Bridgeland

I mean this with no disrespect, but some businesses were impacted way more than others. And \$5,000 — it's not quite a slap in the face, but it's a little bit of one. It's just not nearly enough.

– Retail business, Bridgeland

\$5,000 barely covers my one month's rent, for instance, on my business. But at the same time, every dollar counts, right? So, I was happy that at least something was done.

– Professional services company, Bridgeland

It's a mix of appreciation, but at the same time, it was just such a small amount — especially given the length of the construction — that it didn't really make a difference. I think it soured a lot of the community because it was such a small piece of the overall impact. Anyone who actually saw the area knew how drastic it was. Even though it was highly communicated, it didn't really change anything. Some people were even frustrated or felt like it was kind of a joke.

– Retail business, Marda Loop

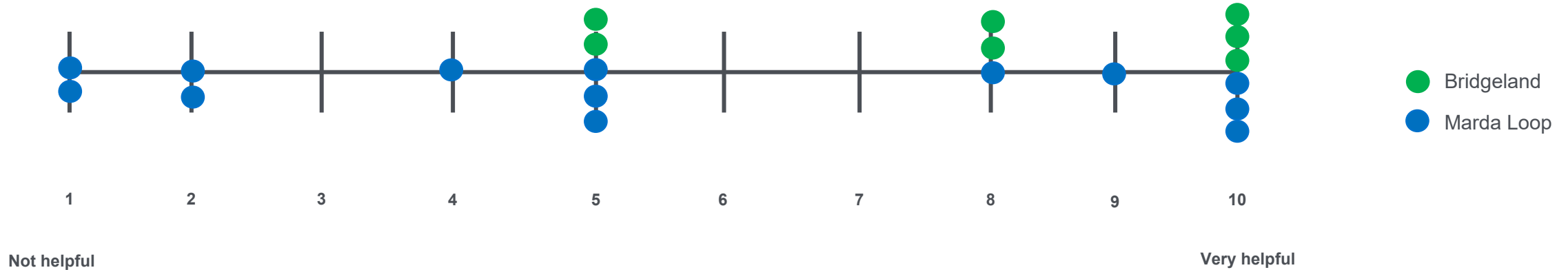
I think that the grants should be based on your business size, like your volume, basically, because for some businesses, \$5,000 doesn't help a whole lot.

– Retail business, Marda Loop

Assessment on helpfulness of grant to business

- The images below illustrate how business representatives described how helpful the Main Street Business Support Grant Pilot was for their business using a 1 to 10 scale where a 1 meant it was not helpful at all and a 10 meant it was very helpful.

Perceived level of helpfulness of the grant, by area*



Perceived level of helpfulness of the grant, by business type*



* Business excluded who answered 'don't know' or did not receive the grant

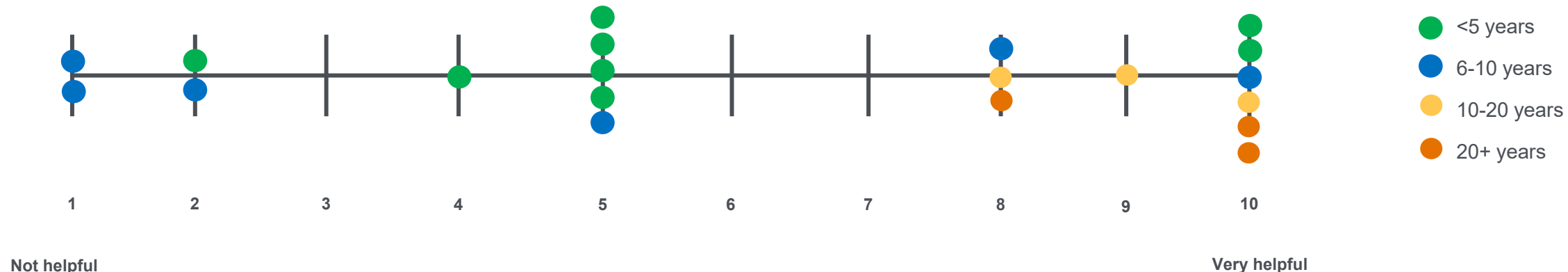
Assessment on helpfulness of grant (continued)

- The images below illustrate how business representatives described how helpful the Main Street Business Support Grant Pilot was for their business using a 1 to 10 scale where a 1 meant it was not helpful at all and a 10 meant it was very helpful.

Perceived level of helpfulness of the grant, by size of business*



Perceived level of helpfulness of the grant, by number of years in business*



* Business excluded who answered 'don't know' or did not receive the grant

Perspectives on the Business Support Grant Pilot

The majority of businesses reported the money they received went right to covering general operating expenses, including wages, their lease payments, utilities, etc.

- When asked why they spent the money this way, several – especially smaller companies, and those that heavily relied on foot traffic inside their business – indicated they felt they had no choice to do so as they were experiencing a significant decrease in revenue. They noted they had to use the money to pay their bills and cover their key costs, including paying their employees.
- For smaller businesses that lost customers, they indicated they simply needed to cover their monthly expenses. Larger businesses, on the other hand, noted that the \$5,000 they received was barely noticeable in the grand scheme of their operations anyway.
- A small number of businesses highlighted they set the money aside for marketing, with those who did allocating the funds to promote social media posts that they used to reach potential customers.
- Nearly all said they would not use the money differently if they were to re-apply for the grant again, and said they would always opt to cover operating expenses first. Even if they had applied for and received the grant sooner, most indicated they would have just put the money towards the day-to-day costs of running their business.

We made some exterior signage. I probably spent close to \$1,000 on temporary exterior signage to help direct customers on where to park and the basic 'We are open during construction' messaging. Even though The City puts that up generically, having it come from individual businesses — when people see your branding — was additionally helpful. We also had to make modifications to our website and our appointment reminders — our internal data system — so that when we sent out appointment reminders, they included that extra information.

– Professional services company, Bridgeland

I put the money right back into the business. We have some improvements we want to make, so I probably won't use the grant directly for that, but it was just to count for losses of the business.

- Retail business, Marda Loop

Views on grant timing

The timing in which the grant was offered was suitable to all business representatives who applied and received the grant.

- The majority of the businesses mentioned they found out and applied for the grant either in June, or later in July or August.
- In fact, some mentioned they were experiencing financial losses during this time, and the grant was a bit of a welcome boost during a down time.
- A handful of businesses did mention that if they had received the money earlier, or had become aware of the grant earlier, they could have planned to use the grant in a different way (i.e. methods to maintain or improve foot traffic, such as better signage, or advertising indicating they were 'business as usual' even before the construction starts). Again, however, most agreed they would put the money towards operations rather than into something specific.

I think the timing was good — I think it was critical. The negativity was really starting to show because of how long the project was dragging on.

– Food service company, Marda Loop

I think that this grant is an excellent idea because I'm not opposed to growth, but at the same time, there's a certain level of responsibility that The City must assist businesses through these times.

– Retail business, Marda Loop

Likelihood of recommending the grant to others

Nearly all those interviewed indicated they would recommend other businesses apply for this type of grant if such a benefit is offered in the future.

- Again, the perspective of most businesses was something is better than nothing, and since it was relatively easy to apply for this grant, businesses being offered the opportunity should take advantage of any additional funds The City is offering.
- However, a few business owners suggested the grant money could be used for something better than being divided up and distributed to each business. Those who focused on this suggested using the money to speed up construction and that having this type of grant offered in the first place is more about The City managing negative feedback from businesses affected by construction.

Absolutely not, don't (apply for the grant). (The City should not) give more grant money. Figure out a way to work with businesses. Learn to care about small businesses and see them as a vital ally in this.

– Food service company, Marda Loop

Of course I would recommend (the grant). In a way, it's replacing money you might have earned but aren't due to the construction. That's how I saw it — this is taking money away from my business, and this is kind of replacing it. For one month, at least, it was a help.

– Retail business, Bridgeland

I say, take the \$1 million (paid out to businesses) and use it to pay overtime for the construction workers — work Sundays, pay the workers extra, and get the job done faster. Get going and get out of here.

– Food service company, Marda Loop



Perspectives of non-recipients

Experiences of non-recipients

The businesses that were denied the grant understood The City's reasoning, although some felt misled. The main reasons they were not eligible included duplicate applications, pending relocations, licensing issues or a misunderstanding about eligibility criteria.

- Among all those who applied and did not receive the grant, nearly all received some feedback on why they were not eligible.
- One applicant accidentally submitted a duplicate application, while another applied on behalf of separate companies that share the same address. Another indicated they did not receive a grant because the building they operate in was about to be demolished, and they were about to move anyway.
- One business did not have the proper business licensing to qualify for the grant, and a couple of businesses did not realize their type of business was not eligible until after they submitted their application.
- Most understood the reasoning given from The City. However, these businesses were still affected by the construction in some shape or form, and they believed their business should have qualified.
- Although most received appropriate feedback on why they did not receive the grant, some who did not receive it felt misled that they should have qualified from earlier conversations with The City.

I was just kind of taken aback that we didn't get the grant after it seemed like it was a pretty straightforward process.

– Professional service company, Bridgeland

When I followed up, you get automated responses, get transferred between departments, and end up on hold — and I'm too busy for that. So, I think I called, was on hold for a while, then just said, 'Screw it,' and forgot about it.

– Professional service company, Marda Loop

So, the fact that the business license that I have, specifically states what kind of a business it is, I don't think then that I should have been led to believe (that) I could possibly be eligible. I think being a little bit more clear in the description as to who is or who is not eligible or just don't even bother sending (the application form) out is needed.

– Retail business, Marda Loop



Feedback and suggestions for improving the Business Support Grant Pilot

Feedback and suggestions for improving the Business Support Grant Pilot

Participants made – and considered – several suggestions on how the grant program could be improved in the future.

- **Several participants suggested it would make sense to provide more money to those who deal with a greater degree of disruption.** For example, this may mean a business that loses access to parking and its sidewalk right in front of its building should be eligible for more money than a business that is a block away from such intense construction work.
- **Similarly, some agreed businesses that are more reliant on both foot traffic and have a greater need for nearby parking should receive more than those who might be less affected.** For example, some thought a restaurant that loses access to its patio (especially over the summer), might be entitled to a larger grant than a professional services business that does not have as many customers coming and going, or has the ability to conduct business remotely.
- Some questioned how these criteria will be set and evaluated in practice and wondered whether this would lead to situations that are less fair for some businesses. However, most generally agreed that businesses that experience the greatest degree of disruption – and for the longest amount of time – should receive more money to make up for their hardship.
- With all of this in mind, **many of those interviewed indicated they liked the universality of the current grant.** They liked the fact it was easy to apply for, had very open and straightforward eligibility criteria and did not come with specific terms or conditions.

I don't know how widespread the impact was, but I know we were in the direct construction zone. I think more consideration should have been given to how affected certain businesses were — some may have been hit even harder than us. The support should have gone to the businesses that were most impacted. We had construction right in front of our location for over a year, and our stretch of road was pretty bad.

– Retail business, Bridgeland

It might be nice to almost have like a tiered system, like people who are like directly impacted and happening right outside their door distributing the money in terms of like how severe the impact is per business. I know having the \$5,000 is nice in theory, but really that's only one month's worth paying a portion of your rent and then paying some of your payroll.

– Retail business, Bridgeland

Feedback and suggestions for improving the Business Support Grant Pilot (continued)



A small number of businesses indicated it would be helpful to provide payments more than once, especially for those in Marda Loop that experienced intermittent construction for a longer period of time.

- While some indicated that it would not really be helpful if the \$5,000 was split up into a series of smaller payments, others hoped this might mean businesses that are more affected by construction in certain areas receive more money and have it paid out in installments. They indicated this might help them manage their cashflow and cover losses more effectively.
- In order for this to work, participants felt some businesses that are significantly affected would have to receive more than the base amount of \$5,000. These business representatives noted if the \$5,000 was broken up into two or three payments, it would barely make a difference to their operations.

I think the grant should be proactively communicated, with clearer time frames for the impact. Instead of just a one-time grant, there should be a system where businesses are re-eligible based on the duration of the disruption.

- Retail business, Marda Loop

Views on funding collective improvements

A few businesses suggested that instead of providing dozens of businesses each with a small payment, The City should use the money instead towards a larger project that has a greater collective impact.

- For example, some businesses recommended allocating hundreds of thousands of dollars to create a temporary parking area, or using the money towards signage or a special event that would encourage people and increase foot traffic to come to the area. The logic behind this was that small payments to each business will not have much of an impact, whereas something on a larger scale could be very helpful for a large number of businesses.
- While advocates of this idea thought it would offer more of a boost to businesses that have experienced a decrease in revenue, many others panned this suggestion. They felt individual business owners each have their own needs and would be better placed to decide on their own how to use this kind of support for themselves.
- As well, some indicated they might not benefit personally from whatever intervention by The City is chosen. They expressed skepticism that The City or the local business improvement association would spend this money effectively.

I know firsthand that if the money isn't managed properly, it often isn't spent well. I definitely think giving it to the actual business owners is a good idea because we are the people that need it.

- Retail business, Marda Loop

I mean any money is appreciated but could that \$5,000 be pooled to lessen the blow of the impact? So instead of losing 40% to 50% of our business, we could have maybe lost even 35% and this would have been way more than this grant.

- Retail business, Marda Loop

Knowing what our marketing efforts are for our BIA, we already have a marketing budget and some strategies in place. I think the money for the grant is more effective if given directly to the individual businesses to communicate with their own customers. Give it to the small business owners, and they can figure it out.

- Professional services company, Marda Loop



Additional feedback on improving the construction process

Additional feedback on improving the construction process

Businesses were most likely to want The City to provide more upfront communication about potential disruption leading up to and during construction.

- This desired communication included giving more accurate and up-to-date information about when road closures and major disruptions will occur. Also, they expressed a desire for more lead time so that they can communicate this information to customers and employees and adjust schedules and operating hours accordingly. For example, restaurants that lost water service noted they needed more than 1-2 days notice, as shifts are set well in advance.
- It should be noted that those who had a City of Calgary construction liaison visit their business – as well as those who attended community meetings – tended to offer more positive feedback about The City's communications approach than those who had not interacted directly with a City representative in this way. These businesses acknowledged the efforts of these individuals and appreciated they had a very difficult task dealing with businesses that were upset about the prolonged effects of construction in the area.

If The City was more proactive in their approach to alleviating concerns of business owners, I think that would have been helpful versus being - it felt very reactive.

- Retail business, Marda Loop



Additional feedback on improving the construction process

Many businesses indicated the bigger problem was The City's timelines that were shared on The City website and via email kept changing and were often out of date, to the point of being perceived as fairly unreliable.

- A couple of businesses who also experienced construction disruption related to the Green Line LRT project contrasted their experiences, as they perceived the Green Line LRT construction to be better coordinated and communicated than the work done in Marda Loop, in particular.
- These businesses indicated The City should dedicate more staff and resources towards ensuring Main Streets construction happens on schedule (and in a more coordinated way), as well as towards improving communication with businesses. This may mean additional staff and resources dedicated for outreach to businesses as well as coordinating the construction process.

The construction wasn't efficiently done. It was dug up multiple times. So maybe it's just more detailed communication that's needed, I guess.
— Retail business, Marda Loop

This amount is nothing compared to the losses we've had, right? I understand The City isn't responsible for our losses, but they could have mitigated them by being proactive or more honest about the timelines.

- Food services company, Marda Loop



I have evidence of other departments within the city that have done a really good job of developing and modernizing the infrastructure — without nearly the same impact on businesses. The Green Line LRT project is an example of that. My argument would be to go look at how the Green Line has dealt with Victoria Park and the Beltline because their level of communication was on a whole other level.

— Food services company, Marda Loop