



Summary of research and phase one and two of engagement

Business-Friendly Construction Policy

June 2025

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Purpose

The City recognizes how important businesses are for the local economy. As we continue to invest in infrastructure and amenities for Calgarians, we are working to enhance the way businesses and customers experience City-led construction.

As directed by City Council, The City of Calgary is developing a Business-Friendly Construction Policy and preparing to make a recommendation to the Infrastructure and Planning Committee in early 2026. This Policy aims to create a more consistent approach to mitigating potential construction-related challenges for businesses and enhancing the experience of both businesses and customers during City-led construction projects.

To help inform the development of this Policy, The City is undertaking a combination of pre-engagement research and public engagement. Participants from the business community contributed to various pre-

engagement research opportunities, including focus groups, workshops and a survey. In addition, public engagement activities were offered to the broader “customer” population and Calgarians as a whole. In total 860 participants contributed input through the research and engagement completed to date. The feedback gathered during phases one and two of public engagement is helping shape the policy objectives alongside additional pre-engagement research involving businesses across Calgary and the construction industry.

This report summarizes the feedback collected during Phase 1: Explore, which occurred from February 24 to April 3, 2025; Phase 2: Expand, which occurred from April - May 2025; and focus groups that were conducted in February 2025. It provides high-level summaries of each, and a list of overall key themes emerging throughout the research and engagement.

Summary of themes: Engagement and research to-date

Throughout the research and engagement conducted for this policy project to date, some overarching themes have emerged. These are summarized below.

1. THINK ABOUT BUSINESSES FROM THE START

- Consider project duration and explore ways to complete construction faster.
- Provide consistent experiences and set expectations for level of service and support across different projects.

2. PLAN EARLY FOR BUSINESS, CUSTOMER CONVENIENCE

- Plan for mobility, area impacts and business operations and coordinate with nearby projects to reduce disruption.
- Increase resources and consider support for BIAs and businesses outside of business improvement areas.

3. BUILD AND MAINTAIN STRONG RELATIONSHIPS

- Talk to businesses early to understand interests and plan.
- Maintain contact to keep the conversation going; share information, listen and respond to concerns (e.g. Business Improvement Areas and direct business outreach).

4. SHARE CLEAR AND TIMELY INFORMATION

- Communicate early and share information that enables businesses to plan ahead.
- Provide a reliable source of information and use clear, consistent, transparent and personalized communication.

5. COLLABORATE TO SUPPORT LOCAL BUSINESSES

- Support for major events, area promotions, marketing incentives.
- Consider partnerships and collaborations with Business Improvement Areas and others.

6. MAKE IT SAFE AND COMFORTABLE FOR VISITORS

- Develop a mix of signage for wayfinding, project information etc.
- Make the area safe, well-lit and accessible.

7. DELIVER PROJECTS WITH A FOCUS ON IMPROVING BUSINESS AND CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

- Provide end-to-end support and continuity throughout a project.
- Be flexible, adaptable to balance business and project needs.
- Deliver on commitments made.
- Provide ongoing monitoring of area to maintain quality, safety, comfort and convenience.
- Finish the job and make it clear that construction is complete.

8. KEEP GETTING BETTER

- Be open to new ways of doing things; ask for input.
- Continue to apply good solutions implemented in one project to others.

Detailed summaries of research and engagement

Business-Friendly Construction Policy Survey

To collect feedback during Phase 1: Explore a survey was open from March 6 to April 3, 2025. It was designed to gather input from businesses and their customers about their experience with City-led construction. The survey was distributed directly to The City's Business Perspectives Panel members and made available to all Calgarians through the Engage webpage. In total, 91 Business Panel members and 133 Calgarians completed the survey. Of those who completed the survey on the engagement webpage, 73 were business owners and 60 were customers.

Key Findings:

53% of businesses who completed the survey currently have or have had City-led construction occurring at or near their business within the past three years, while 41% of businesses have not had City-led construction occurring at or near their business.

A minority (37%) of businesses who had City-led construction projects occurring at or near their business were satisfied with the support they received from The City.

- Business respondents who were dissatisfied with the support received from The City indicated that The City should work towards finishing construction projects faster (30%) and reducing traffic disruptions (21%) in areas undergoing construction as ways to support businesses during City-led construction.

Businesses indicated that providing wayfinding through signage and detours, as well as offering temporary parking solutions were considered the most helpful mitigation strategies.

- Common additional suggestions provided by businesses were to reduce construction delays (16%) and provide effective communication (16%) to businesses.

- 49% of survey respondents indicated that The City offering a one-time grant pilot of \$5,000 would be effective in helping the business adapt their business operations or implement strategies to encourage patronage during construction. While half of businesses indicated that a one-time grant of \$5,000 would be effective, 60% of business respondents indicated that they would use the \$5,000 grant for business operation costs and debt.

38% of business respondents had interactions with City staff during construction.

- Business respondents who had interactions with City staff were satisfied with their interactions with City staff before (53%) and during (52%) construction. A further 52% were satisfied with the responsiveness of City staff when construction issues arose.

45% of business respondents were satisfied with the overall communication provided by The City about construction projects. Additionally, 45% of businesses indicated that they received information in time to prepare their business for construction.

- 37% of business respondents were satisfied with the information provided by The City on potential challenges to expect from construction.
- 57% of businesses found the information provided by The City to be ineffective in preparing them for construction.

87% of business respondents' preferred information channel for construction project updates is through email.

- 51% of business respondents would prefer to receive updates about

construction projects directly from City staff.

- In contrast, customers would prefer to receive updates via The City's website (70%) or through social media (63%).

For 77% of customers, construction occurring in the area was likely to influence their decision to visit a business.

- Common reasons given by customers for visiting areas with construction include to attend appointment-based services (72%) or that the business provided a unique product or service (54%).
- Common reasons that customers provided for not visiting areas that have construction included typical construction disturbances (88%) and traffic congestion (76%).

Business-Friendly Construction Policy Focus Groups

Pre-engagement research was conducted to help inform the policy objectives and guide the initial public engagement. A total of six focus groups with owners, operators and property managers of businesses that have been affected by City-led construction or may be affected by City-led construction projects in the future were conducted in February 2025. This included both public-facing and non-public facing businesses.

For business owners, the most effective way for The City to support them is to find a way to shorten the length of construction projects.

Key findings:

Most business owners feel that construction projects have affected their operations.

- The main effects of construction raised by businesses were the loss of parking as well as impacts to traffic and commuting patterns.
- Lack of access due to sidewalk closures and blocked entrances, as well as noise, garbage and construction debris were also concerns for businesses.

Business owners view the challenges of construction from a holistic perspective – and expect The City to do the same.

- They recognized that their business has the potential to be affected by multiple and repeated construction projects across Calgary.
- They made little distinction between public works completed by The City and private or third-party utility projects, such as condominiums or telecommunications, as the effects on their business are often similar.

- They felt that construction may have long-term impacts on their business, continuing beyond the duration of a project.

Business owners want timely updates and communications about construction, with additional business supports throughout the life of a project.

- **Pre-project:** Consultation on projects, not just communications about projects. Improved planning from The City that takes a holistic view of projects, and a City contact they can reach out to for information.
- **During a project:** Regular and timely updates and outreach on project schedules and work that directly disrupts their business, like sidewalk closures and parking limitations.
- **Post-project:** Support for getting customers back to the area – through events, parking and transit subsidies, and timely clean-up of construction debris. Debrief meetings to review lessons learned for future projects.

Business-Friendly Construction Policy – Phase 1 What We Heard Report

Phase 1 public engagement consisted of two levels. The first level engaged the broader public through three in-person pop-up events, reaching a range of interested individuals (158). The second level was a deeper dive to gather detailed feedback from business organizations and representatives. This included workshops with business interest holders, including Business Improvement Areas (BIA) Executive Directors and Business Advisory Committee members.

Themes

The feedback collected during this phase of engagement confirmed the need for greater consistency, and potentially an overarching framework that will help guide how The City supports and prioritizes tools and resources to mitigate the potential challenges experienced during City-led construction. Common themes heard included:

- Flexibility and adaptability to balance business and project needs.
- Increased resources and support for BIAs and businesses outside BIA areas.
- Desire for a transparent and uniform policy, along with the necessary support to ensure consistent experiences and outcomes across different projects.
- Approaches and tools developed with hospitality and public service at heart for enhanced customer satisfaction and service delivery.
- Early and continued, collaborative planning and engagement through BIAs and others.
- Communicate early, using clear, consistent, transparent and personalized communication and share information that enables businesses to plan ahead and take action.
- End-to-end support to help with smoother construction transition of processes.
- Enhanced collaboration or partnership with local businesses.

Areas for additional consideration

One consideration we heard was balancing the long-term policy goal versus the immediate needs of businesses as the current construction season approaches. We heard from business representatives (e.g. BIAs) the importance of City funding and resources to support their promotional and outreach efforts. They highlighted the need to address immediate challenges at the same time as the project team focused on long-term policy solutions, and specifically, the importance for the Project Team to communicate how the Business-Friendly Construction Policy project aligns with ongoing programs and pilots that address immediate needs.

Another theme we were asked to consider was around individual versus collective support. Several participants sought tailored assistance to address their specific needs and challenges, while many current business friendly approaches aim to support the business area and focus on benefits to the broader community. However, not every project area is represented by a BIA and this disparity may raise concerns over resource allocation and perceived fairness.

Business-Friendly Construction Policy – Phase 2 What We Heard Report

The goal of Phase 2 was to validate and refine the priorities identified during Phase 1 by engaging directly with both customers and businesses. This included exploring issues such as accessibility, signage, parking, and overall convenience for those visiting businesses experiencing City-led construction.

We also gathered feedback on strategies that had been effective—or were seen as potentially effective—for encouraging customer visits during construction. These conversations helped clarify the respective roles of The City and its partners in supporting business areas throughout construction.

Approach

Phase 2 expanded on earlier efforts by reconnecting with business organizations and including customers more directly. Engagement opportunities included a customer-focused survey, an in-person workshop, Business Advisory Committee presentation, intercept surveys, pop-up events and an online drop-in session, collectively reaching 651 individuals.

Common themes heard

Customer survey

Prioritize accessibility and parking

- Customers emphasized the importance of convenient parking and clear pedestrian access. Temporary lots and flexible on-street parking should be prioritized during construction.

Enhance communication through signage

- Clear, early signage about construction timelines, detours, and business access is critical to reduce confusion and build public trust.

Support businesses with visibility

- While promotions were appreciated, customers stressed that visibility and access were more important. Emphasis should be placed on signage and wayfinding.

Ensure pedestrian safety and cleanliness

- Safe, accessible walkways and well-maintained construction areas significantly improve the customer experience and likelihood to visit businesses.

Consider travel patterns in planning

- We heard that many customers visit business areas by car. Strategies should reflect these patterns and consider local demographics and regional travel behaviours.

Business workshop and drop-in session

Validation of Phase 1 themes

- Participants agreed the themes from Phase 1 were still accurate but requested clearer explanations of how specific strategies would be implemented.

Enhanced collaboration with BIAs

- There is a strong desire for clearer distinctions of responsibilities between City departments and Business Improvement Areas (BIAs) when it comes to construction. BIA participants recommended flexible, tailored support that reflects varying capacity. Financial tools or supports were also suggested to help BIAs play an active role.

Hospitality and public service mindset

- Participants encouraged a greater focus on visitor experience, recommending that construction zones consider not only technically planning, but also aesthetic and functional planning for visitors and customers. Local

context - such as peak hours and seasonal activity - should be considered in planning and coordination.

New themes emerging

- Some participants suggested treating high-impact construction more like an emergency - using proactive triage systems, early - warning indicators and tools to manage help impacts.
- Some BIAs expressed an interest in greater control over signage, wayfinding, and pedestrian flow, others indicated there was not capacity. There was support for developing standardized toolkits and support to help BIAs lead local marketing and communication efforts during construction.

Priorities

- The customer survey provided insight into the areas that we can focus on that would make the most difference to their experience. Focusing on the basics in areas with city-led construction like parking, signage, and creating safe and welcoming environment would encourage customers to continue visiting these areas

Areas for consideration

The following are themes we heard that reflect tensions and require further consideration.

Collaboration remains a core value, but BIAs have varying capacities

- Participants emphasized that collaboration models must consider the varying capacities of different BIAs. For example, not all BIAs have the capacity or want to act as liaisons.

Improving internal coordination at The City is equally important

- A systems-thinking approach—where departments share responsibility and coordinate early in the planning process—was seen to strengthen internal collaboration and improve project outcomes from a business and community perspective. For example, construction of the infrastructure project may be complete, but operations and maintenance are not yet resolved and therefore the project does not meet post-construction expectations from businesses or the community.

Clarifying authority for BIAs

- As noted above, there is strong interest among some BIAs to have more involvement in certain aspects of construction-related activities like construction phasing and planning discussions. However, participants identified that City policies and liability concerns may limit how much involvement BIAs can have.

Next Steps

This report concludes phases one and two of engagement and reports back on the additional research conducted. The project team will be using this feedback to develop policy objectives.

A draft of these policy objectives will be shared back for the next phase of engagement (Phase 3: Refine) to test whether we have captured all the feedback in the themes and draft objectives and determine if there are any missing pieces from the research and engagement themes we have gathered to date.

Phase three engagement will focus on reconnecting with the business community and working with City Administration and construction industry partners to refine the policy objectives and plan for implementation. This phase will begin in mid-June 2025.