

City of Edmonton **Yellowhead Trail Freeway Conversion Program**

What We Heard Report: 156 Street to St. Albert Trail

March 2021

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1. Project Overview

In 2011–2012, the City of Edmonton completed and endorsed a strategic plan for Yellowhead Trail to become a freeway. Safety is a key reason—more than 1,000 collisions occur on Yellowhead Trail each year, largely attributed to the stop-and-go nature of the existing route.

Removing the at-grade intersections—and the associated signals—will enable the smooth flow of traffic, with reduced potential for collisions. There are environmental benefits too, such as reduced emissions from stop-and-go traffic.

Yellowhead Trail Freeway Conversion from 156 Street to St. Albert Trail

Yellowhead Trail will be a freeway from end to end by 2027, with no at-grade intersections or traffic lights. Existing intersections at 149 Street and 142 Street will be closed, and there will be no direct access to Yellowhead Trail from these streets. Direct access to Yellowhead Trail will be removed, including at 143 Street, existing service roads and existing business accesses. Road users will access Yellowhead Trail at the nearest interchange—either at 156 Street or St. Albert Trail—or use the new one-way service roads, on the north and south sides of Yellowhead Trail, to access businesses and properties. Once the freeway conversion is completed, travelling through this area will be much different than it is today. For more information go to edmonton.ca/YellowheadTrail.

The concept plan for this segment of Yellowhead Trail was developed after an extensive public engagement process from 2012 to 2014. Stakeholder and public feedback contributed significantly to the concept plan that was presented to City Council in October 2015.

In the concept planning stage (2015), we developed a plan for what will be built and what it will look like. During the design stage (2019–20), we fine-tuned the design based on technical analysis and feedback from both stakeholders and the public.

Because of the length of time between the concept and design stage, we also focused on providing information, including a series of detailed videos, to refresh the public's knowledge of the project's scope and goals.



2. What Changed in the Project as a Result of What We Heard?

As a result of engagement, changes being made to the project include:



- + **Access to specific properties:** After meeting with stakeholders, some of the accesses that were scheduled for closure were retained, and others were widened or relocated.



- + **Speed limit review:** Some stakeholders expressed concern about speed limits along service roads. As a result of stakeholder input, proposed speed limits along service roads are being reviewed by the project team and the City's Office of Traffic Safety.



- + **Ongoing communications:** Stakeholders reported a greater understanding of the changes to Yellowhead Trail from 156 Street to St. Albert Trail because of detailed videos shared during the design phase on the project website. They appreciated the City's suggestion of providing them with customized maps that would direct clients and customers to their locations during and after construction. The project team will continue to focus on and will seek to enhance communications efforts before and during construction to ensure stakeholders' continued understanding of the project.

3. How We Engaged

"How We Engaged" was influenced by the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent restrictions. The City placed all in-person engagement on hold to follow physical distancing requirements. Efforts to reach stakeholders, the surrounding business community and the public included increased communications as well as virtual engagement. Virtual engagement was targeted to businesses and property owners in the project area. The public had an opportunity to provide feedback through the [Engaged Edmonton platform](#).

The project team used several communications methods:

- + Newsletters delivered by Canada Post to 1,909 businesses and residents.
- + Bulletin informing approximately 90 businesses in the area about potential utilities work (hand delivered).
- + Personalized letters hand delivered to businesses whose access may be impacted by the project, along with phone calls and emails inviting them to meet with the City and the project team.
- + Invitations to virtual information sessions, hand delivered to businesses in the area.
- + Signage promoting the videos and opportunity to share feedback through Engaged Edmonton.
- + Promotion of the engagement opportunity through the City's weekly public service announcement and social media.

Engagement took place at the ADVISE level of the Public Engagement Spectrum.



The following engagement opportunities were offered:

- + [Engaged Edmonton](#) online engagement from October 13 to 30. This opportunity was available to both stakeholders and the public. Participants could offer opinions, ask questions, and view videos. 625 people accessed the site with 18 leaving comments and questions. 121 clicked on a map, video or newsletter and 510 opened the page and viewed the landing page.
- + The project team met with 11 business and property owners whose access to properties were potentially impacted by the project. Following COVID-19 protocol measures, nine in-person meetings and virtual meetings were held with those directly impacted by the project.
- + A virtual information session was offered to businesses in the area and the public.
- + Alternatives to online engagement included hard copy surveys and phone calls.

4. What We Heard

Several common themes emerged, indicating common viewpoints among stakeholders who participated through virtual and physically distanced meetings and the public who participated through the Engaged Edmonton site. The project team reviewed and adjusted elements of the plan where possible.

Support for the project was a common theme, with a majority of participants acknowledging that the Yellowhead Trail Freeway Conversion would ultimately benefit the Yellowhead corridor.

“ I think this will be great! It will be an economic plus and good for moving products. It's too dangerous and too choppy now. ”

“ It adds to the ease, reducing the stress of customers getting into our properties. Customers say the left hand turns in and out are hard. This will really help. ”

“ How much is this costing? It is totally unnecessary to spend this much money with today's economy and in the middle of a worldwide pandemic. ”

A few people thought the project was unnecessary, particularly during tough economic times.

The closure of intersections drew comments

from some businesses as well as participants on Engaged Edmonton. Though they supported the goals of the project and the freeway conversion, there was some concern over the closure of the 149 Street intersection. Participants felt that closing the 149 Street intersection would lead to congestion on the 156 Street overpass.

“ What about 156 Street? It’s plugged full already heading northbound and trying to turn left to go westbound. It’s going to get very bad and it’ll push traffic into other lanes. ”

“ Our main concern is access to and from Yellowhead. Removing access creates a situation where consumers have to travel further and double back to access the lot, and in those cases would be traveling past a competitor who would be much easier to get to. ”

Access to businesses and property was the most frequently mentioned concern expressed by stakeholders. There were two considerations when discussing access to their properties:

- 1) Large trucks and tractor trailer units delivering or picking up products.
- 2) Customers' ability to conveniently and safely access the properties to conduct business on site.

Safety was also raised as a concern among participants. Business owners and operators identified potential safety conflicts between tractor trailer units and other vehicles if access points were altered.

“ B Trains, the big ones, they are 70–80 feet, right? Tractor trailers, multi-trailer units, we get multiple deliveries a day from these units. They need to be able to make those turns and pull through. They can’t back out. ”

“ There’s a lot of people that slow down in front of here which supports the lower speed limit. In this case you are entering a work zone where there are people coming and going regularly. ”

Speed limits along the service roads and poor sightlines were of concern to two businesses along the access roads.

Pedestrian safety was also mentioned by stakeholders. The current service road, with its slower speed limit was considered unsafe by some stakeholders. They expressed concern over increased traffic at higher speeds creating conflicts with pedestrian traffic.

“ *There are always a lot of people walking around. Dozens of pedestrians a day are walking between the two hotels, McDonald's, Kal-Tire while their cars are being repaired and all crossing over to Costco and the casino.* ”

Stakeholders mentioned that some lines of sight along current service roads were hindered by large trees, signage or vehicles parked along the service roads. They said this created a safety hazard for vehicles exiting or entering businesses. Where accesses are reconfigured, stakeholders encouraged the City to pay special attention to ensure clear sight-lines.

“ *There's people who rent trucks or lease cars who leave their cars there overnight. Customer parking is going to be an issue. Sometimes there's cars parked out there for days at a time and we have no idea whose they are.* ”

Parking along service roads is a convenience for staff of nearby businesses, customers renting vehicles, trucks who drop their trailers off, and others who need long-term parking while travelling to worksites out of the City. Stakeholders thought that removing parking would create a hardship for people if it's not allowed along the new service roads. Some requested that a shoulder be constructed to allow for parking to continue.

Construction scheduling was discussed by all stakeholders. Many welcomed construction information packages that dealt with schedule and access issues. Stakeholders were relieved to learn that businesses would be accessible throughout construction.

“ *Our biggest concern is access eastbound during construction, number one, we need a way to get into our business; we need ease of access during construction.* ”

“ *This is really the key. Will there be good signage to indicate access during construction?* ”

The suggestion of wayfinding maps and information, customized for businesses to distribute to customers and suppliers, was greeted with enthusiasm. All stakeholders requested marketing materials and other information for clients and staff to help them understand the upcoming changes to the site access and the challenges during construction.

“It would be really good to see a blown-up map of this. We need to educate our customers.”

“If there’s aerial photos you could give out to customers for education that would be helpful.”

“That’s a great idea. If you could give us the files for posters, postcards for directional maps, we could print them and also put them on our website.”

5. What is Next?

Strategy

Concept

Design

Build

Operate

Construction will begin in 2021 and is expected to be complete by the end of 2023. A robust communications plan will ensure that construction scheduling and access information is clearly conveyed to stakeholders and the public.

For pre-construction information, [sign up for project updates](#), visit the project website at edmonton.ca/YellowheadTrail or email yellowhead@edmonton.ca.

Yellowhead Trail Freeway Conversion Program

The Yellowhead Trail Freeway Conversion Program, identified in the City’s 2019–2022 Capital Budget as a transformational project, will upgrade Yellowhead Trail to a freeway by the end of 2027.