

# Hamilton Main Street Two-Way Conversion

## *Engagement Summary*

September 2023





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## PROJECT BACKGROUND

WSP was retained by the City of Hamilton to carry out a Main Street Two-Way Conversion Study for the two-way conversion of Main Street, from Longwood Drive North to King Street East, a 6.7 kilometre corridor.

The study was initiated following a Council direction to convert the street to two-way operations. Recognizing that the decision *to* convert the street had already been made by Council, the project explicitly did not consider whether the street *should* be converted, but instead focused on *how to* best convert it to two-way traffic.

The Study is *Exempt* from the Municipal Engineers Association Municipal Class Environmental Assessment (MCEA; as amended, 2023). However, the City of Hamilton recognizes the significance of this project to the City and its residents; as such, the project is being carried out to generally follow the MCEA process.

The overall structure of the Study is as follows:

- Develop a problem and opportunity statement
- Develop design alternatives for the corridor
- Evaluate the design alternatives
- Select a preferred design for the conversion of the Main Street from a one-way road to a two-way road, with a focus to improve safety for all road users.

## ENGAGEMENT APPROACH

The City conducted internal and external engagement. Internal engagement began with an in-person workshop with representatives from a wide range of City departments to identify key opportunities and concerns, and to establish design priorities for the two-way conversion. A second internal engagement session was held following the development of a draft design concept, which allowed staff to share technical feedback on the design.

External engagement included an online Public Information Centre, three in-person neighbourhood meetings and meetings with stakeholder groups including businesses impacted by the project. The public was also encouraged to provide feedback through the City's "Engage Hamilton" web site. Draft design drawings were posted on the website to allow members of the public to provide comments on specific locations along the corridor. Finally, some members of the public engaged in discussion related to the project occurred on social media (e.g. Twitter).

The following sections provide a summary of:

- "**What Was Said**" – verbatim quotes and summary data from engagement activities;
- "**What We Heard**" – key themes that emerged from our engagement efforts; and
- "**What We Did**" – overview of how we did or did not use the feedback received.



## WHAT WAS SAID

Throughout the engagement process, two town halls, various BIA meetings and online engagement activities were held. In total, approximately 900-1000 people attended the sessions.

### ONLINE PIC

On May 18<sup>th</sup>, 2023 a PIC meeting was held online for the discussion of the Main Street Conversion Study. 300 members of the public attended, with 55 leaving comments and suggestions.

Throughout the meeting, attendees had the opportunity to provide live comments through the “chat” functionality. The most common theme of these comments were related to concerns with traffic volumes or congestion. Many commenters were concerned that, with bike lanes and the future LRT project, reducing the number of vehicle lanes would increase traffic congestion along Main Street and nearby streets while also reducing accessibility to the downtown core. There was also confusion over the decision to use asymmetric lane configuration along the corridor. Some sample comments include:

*With the Main Street conversion, there will be a re-direction of volume away from Main Street. How will this affect the residential streets for drivers trying to avoid traffic?”*

*Have there been any traffic studies of the impact of reducing traffic coming into Hamilton from the 403? Would vehicles be forced to stop in the driving lanes of the highway? This also seems like a safety issue.*

*3 or 4 westbound lanes on King Street West are being lost to LRT and you add 1 westbound lane on Main. How are commuters who work in the downtown office towers going to go west out of the downtown to 403, Westdale, Dundas at the end of the day?*

The second most frequent topic was to request certain types of cycling infrastructure along Main Street. Many of these commenters were supportive of the project but were concerned that the proposed ideas were not enough to ensure cyclists' safety. Bi-directional cycle tracks, like those along Cannon Street, concrete or planter barriers, and crosswalks were all suggested. Some comments include:

*Was there any consideration of a Cannon-style treatment where it's a bidirectional cycle track along a 1way street with parking on the opposite side? Wide bidirectional tracks are easier to protect, and protected tracks are much much safer for cyclists and easier to plow. Montreal has proven how nice 1way+bidirectional cycling can be.*



*RE: bike lane physical separation from cars - those concrete flower planters would be really pretty, feel safer, and would help with that greenification (if there's room!)*

*As a cyclist I am very excited at the idea of a separated bike lane in the Main Street Corridor! But it's SO important to include STRONG separation between the bike lane and traffic - not just little plastic posts that cars can more or less drive over. It just doesn't feel safe otherwise. In a previous city I lived in they used concrete planters with flowers to divide the bike lane from the traffic lane which was lovely and very functional.*

There were also many comments related to the timeline of the project, especially as it relates to the construction of the LRT. Members of the audience felt that it is important to keep the public up to date with projected timelines as they change so that residents can have positive expectations for the completion of current and future active transportation projects. One such comment states:

*"The stretches of bike lane west of Victoria and (if I remember correctly) east of Sherman are slated for "post-LRT." Are there any more specific dates or criteria you might provide for this to happen? (I think it's critical to connect existing cycle infrastructure - in this case all the way from Locke to Gage - as early as possible to encourage a modal shift from car to active transportation DURING the LRT construction)."*

Safety, connectivity of the cycling network, and beautification of public space were also topics of concern. Concerns for the supposed safety of the proposed designs were expressed. One person suggested that one-way streets are safer than two-way, while others expressed safety concerns related to the increase of two-way vehicle left turns or signal timing for pedestrian crossings.

*One-way streets are demonstrably safer than two-way streets. This has been known since the original one-way conversion was implemented back in the 1950s.*

*Will signal timing at the Delta intersection be evaluated? The current two stage process crossing on the east side feels unsafe as you sit at the point with traffic flying by at high speeds.*



Some commenters identified themselves as cyclists supporting the project, but expressed a desire to see more connectivity with the proposed Main Street bike lanes and the surrounding cycling network.

*Why are bike lanes only proposed from Victoria to Sherman? To be meaningful connection should extend as far as possible on the corridor. Understand interim, but this is an important corridor to link cycling facilities across the lower city.*

*Having plenty of experience with urban cycling, I am concerned about the inconvenience and potential safety issues of having to connect to bike lanes on other streets rather than travelling along a continuous dedicated cycling route.... Could bike lanes not be implemented all the way along Main Street, with concessions made for rail crossings? I would hope to see this as part of a complete Main Street revitalization in the future.*

There were many enthusiastic comments related to proposed beautification ideas for the public realm. Street trees, decorative crosswalks, and flexible green spaces were all supported by participants.

*Decorative crosswalks would be awesome! We need to put aesthetics closer to the top of our development priorities.*

*Seattle has some great examples of integrating green and pervious elements into the streetscape, would encourage inspiration from there.*

## **TWITTER THREAD**

A comment thread on Twitter on May 30<sup>th</sup>, 2023, expressed a desire for a heavy reduction of driveways along Main St:

*Something I'd really like to see [Maureen Wilson], [Cameron Kroetsch], [Nriender Nann] push for is reduction of driveways, and modal filters onto Main St. It's possible to remove hundreds, if not thousands of conflict points from Main St by doing this.*

This particular tweet was liked 19 times, retweeted 4 times, and viewed 2,865 times. The thread continues with a discussion about the effectiveness of fewer driveways on reducing conflict possibilities between cyclists, pedestrians, and motor vehicles. Raised sidewalks were mentioned as an alternative with a similar result, but it was noted these could possibly encumber those with mobility issues by forcing them to move up and down at every crossing.



In the same thread regarding the removal of conflict points, one user comments a suggestion to have less side streets feeding out onto Main St and King St:

*I'd love if there were fewer through streets to Main and King. Every side street doesn't need feed out to them- make them dead ends, which reduces traffic within the neighbourhoods and increases safety of main and king.*

This would have the benefit of reducing conflict points even further while increasing safety on side streets, as stated by one of the replies.

## IN-PERSON TOWN HALLS

Two Town Hall Community Meetings were held on May 25 and May 29, 2023. 12 respondents left a total of 26 comments that were collected on paper. Many respondents had concerns about the cost of the conversion project, and whether Metrolinx would be covering the expected costs. Others were also concerned about the traffic volumes on nearby streets, such as King St, and how these would be affected by the conversion, stating that the expected increased traffic volume on other streets needs considering. Finally, there were a couple positive comments regarding the idea for decorative crosswalks, raised cycle tracks, and off-peak parking. Some samples include:

*I am hoping that a continuous bike lane will be built into the plan. I know that it may not work in phase 1, but I hope that it is taken into consideration.*

*...we need to understand where traffic can flow elsewhere when Main converts. People using Main as a solution to other roadways not functioning well. Yes there's also a volume issue, but I think its worthwhile to see where traffic flows elsewhere and what could be done from there.*

*is Metrolinks paying for the conversion if no why not?*

## STAKEHOLDER COMMENTS

### LOCAL BUSINESS OWNERS

Comments were received by email from two businesses on nearby King St. with a longstanding history in the area. The businesses are concerned about the project, namely that the conversion will slow traffic into the downtown, negatively affecting the ease with which their employees and customers can reach their business. They specifically note the impact this will have on the Highway 403 access ramp and express concerns related to emergency vehicle navigation. Furthermore, they worry that this traffic issue on Main St will flow into nearby streets, negatively affecting their east and westbound traffic flows as well. They would like to see more traffic modeling done for this project showing that these issues have been considered and accounted for.



The businesses final concern is the topic of the project timeline. They would like to see a general schedule and scope of construction so they may prepare accordingly. They would also like to know how this is integrated with the construction of the LRT line, and are confused why this project is underway when these things have not yet been outlined.

A summary of their concerns, as stated by the business, is as follows:

*as businesses - we need easy access for our customers, staff and supply chain - we feel that the results of the 1st stage of traffic slowing need to be evaluated before further actions are taken - there is no need to change main street @ this time without definitive plans on the timing and scope of construction of LRT and a complete review of the traffic flow which will include the ingress and egress to the 403.*

## DOWNTOWN HAMILTON BIA SUBCOMMITTEE

Comments were received from a representative of the Downtown Hamilton BIA that were collected during a subcommittee meeting.

One of the main concerns of the committee was the amount of westbound lanes on Main and nearby King St., due to the upcoming LRT project construction. They believe this will culminate in an increase in traffic congestion in the downtown area. Adding to this would be the permission of left turns and bus stops in the westbound lane along Main St. Members of the BIA subcommittee would like to see these concerns considered in some way in the final design.

The BIA members were also excited at the idea of painted crosswalks and streetscape improvements, and are willing to work with the City in accomplishing these ideas.

## ONLINE MAP COMMENTS

The City of Hamilton presented three technical drawings of proposed redesigns for Main Street on their Engage Hamilton site. Over the course of three weeks, members of the public could leave comments on specific locations of the drawings; in total, over 500 comments were received. Each comment was categorized by sentiment, namely if it was negative, positive, or neutral, and assigned a sentiment score ranging from -1 as wholly negative to +1 as wholly positive.

## DESIGN DRAWING 1

For Design Drawing 1, 176 comments were received. Of the 176 comments, 48% were negative, 7% were positive, and 45% were neutral. The main themes that emerged are as follows:

- Reduce lane widths to 3.0 metres
- Reduce number of driveways, or where there are driveways, introduce continuous/raised sidewalks



- Reduce side street access to Main St
- No on-street parking anywhere along Main
- Replace one of the EB vehicle lanes with a bike lane
- Increase corner curb bump-outs to reduce turning speed and reduce pedestrian crossing time
- Extend centre medians at intersections to provide pedestrian refuges when crossing
- Include a bus-only or HOV lane throughout the length of Main St

Some sample comments include:

*Remove on-street parking on all parts of Main St - especially west of downtown. Traffic is already going to struggle with volumes on 3 lanes only, on street parking is going to make it awful and slow both transit and private vehicles for the benefit of a select few private vehicles. It makes no sense.*

*Suggest tall grasses, pollinator gardens and/or other beautification to increased curbs. See new Montreal streetscapes for examples.*

*Do not have Frid Street exit onto Main Street. This can only increase traffic around an already busy intersection. Have them exit onto Dundurn from Chatham.*

*Rather than just a painted buffer, utilize this area to pull out the curb, improve the cycling and pedestrian crossing of the ramp, and reduce perceive speed on the corridor. Paint alone does nothing to influence driver speeds.*

## DESIGN DRAWING 2

For Design Drawing 2, 183 comments were received. Of the 183 comments, 42% were negative, 3% were positive, and 56% were neutral. The main themes that emerged are as follows:

- Reduce number of driveways along Main
- Reduce turn lanes onto smaller side streets, with some suggested to become pedestrianized or one-way (such as Hughson St S)
- Limit access onto Main from smaller side streets
- Add corner curb bump-outs on many of the crosswalks to reduce pedestrian crossing time, and/or make the crosswalks raised
- Any cycling facilities must be separated with a concrete curb at the minimum. The traffic speeds and volumes on Main are too high for a painted buffer to be a safe option for cyclists
- Bike lanes should extend throughout the length of Main (many comment this segment is too short)

Some sample comments include:

*This parking lot [at Giorgio's No Frills] already has accesses on Main, King and Erie (which goes to both Main and King); the other Main access is literally 20 feet west. Lets eliminate this driveway.*

*The stretch between Wentworth and Tisdale is too long to not have a designated (lighted) pedestrian crossing. Its hot in the summer, and cold and windy in the winter. Pedestrians will be tempted to rush across the three lanes of road, risking collisions. I suggest a pedestrian crossing (zebra stripes and flashing lights on request) close the the HSR stop on the south side of Main. Maybe at Ontario, maybe at Erie.*

*Bus-Only lane should extend through entire city core at the very least during rush hour.*

*Sidewalk on main here [at Main and James St S] is very narrow, I would not recommend increasing the turn radius here without increasing sidewalk width.*

*It would be irresponsible to put a bike lane here without physical protection. The speeds here will be too fast, there is too much traffic, there will be too many temptations for drivers and delivery trucks to park in it, and it will be impossible to keep clear of snow in the winter since car and truck tires will squash any windrows and knock snow into the bike lane.*

### DESIGN DRAWING 3

Design Drawing 3, 220 comments were received. Of the 220 comments, 25% were negative, 7% were positive, and 68% were neutral. The main themes that emerged are as follows:

- Replace street parking with bike lanes or space for green infrastructure (many of the businesses along Main St are already serviced by ample parking lots. Many comments note that additional on-street parking would be redundant)
- Add corner curb bump-outs on many of the crosswalks to reduce pedestrian crossing time, and/or make the crosswalks raised
- Add more crosswalks for pedestrians (one comment notes that from Albert to Gage, a distance of 8 blocks, has no safe pedestrian crossing options)
- Reduce the speed limit to 40km/h
- Extend bike lanes to Gage Ave S as this would provide connectivity to an already established cycling facility on Gage, as well as provide bike access to Gage Park
- Many comments cited issues with the Main and King intersection. Many children jaywalk across Main to access Gage Park. The alignment of the eight lanes of traffic are confusing, while the landing in front of Pizza Pizza is too narrow and exposed to oncoming traffic;

many people have been injured or killed there in the past. A realignment of the roads and (pedestrian controlled) crossings would be helpful here.

Some sample comments include:

*Shoppers Drugmart has a large parking lot. There is no need for a parking lane on this block and this section should be entirely greenspace/planting with at least one shade tree.*

*Agree 100%. Propose extension of cycling facilities in lieu of on-street parking, shown to generate more revenue for businesses than street parking and improves the network connectivity.*

*Bike lanes that just end suddenly are moderately dangerous, and they discourage cycling. If a person can't follow an intuitive route on a bicycle, they are less likely to try again. Extend the bike lanes to Gage.*

*Place METAL or CONCRETE bollard here [at Main and King] to stop vehicles that exit the roadway. After multiple people were killed here ensuring nobody gets hurt here again should be a priority. Could make it a nice concrete planter too with a tree or something. There are no sitelines [sic] to maintain here.*

*From Albert to Gage there is not one single place for pedestrians to safely cross Main. That's a long stretch and people are going to cross it unsafely unless at least 2 safe crossings are added. People live here and have to play chicken to cross this street.*

## WHAT WE HEARD

The feedback received throughout the project's initial engagement sessions was incredibly valuable to help provide a foundation for the study and ensure the team is aware of the community's priorities and objectives for Main Street. The following section highlights some of the common themes that emerged through the engagement activities.

### KEY THEMES

- **Prioritize people walking, cycling, and using transit:** Streets should be designed with all users in mind and should make all community members feel safe and comfortable regardless of what type of transportation they are using. More pedestrian crossings should be added, while some existing crossings should have pedestrian-controlled signals. Bike lanes should be prioritized over on-street parking. Bus-only lanes should be added throughout the length of the corridor.
- **Prioritize street space for cycling and green infrastructure:** Many of the businesses along the roadway have large parking lots. As such, Main Street should be reducing its



on-street parking in favour of increased cycling options or beautification efforts such as planters and street trees.

- **Cycling options along Main Street should be lengthened and have increased protection:** in addition to the bike lanes proposed, cycling infrastructure should be expanded throughout the length of the corridor. In addition, more protected facilities should be included, such as concrete curbs or planters.
- **Expand Hamilton's cycling network:** there should be more connectivity to the existing bike lanes that connect directly to Main St, such as on Gage Ave.
- **Reduce side street access to Main St:** many of the smaller side streets do not need direct access to Main St. Reducing the number of access points would also reduce the number of potential conflict zones along the corridor
- **Reduce driveways along Main St:** there is a redundancy in the amount of driveways along the corridor as many of these offer multiple access points to the same parking lot. Reducing or narrowing the driveways along Main St can help reduce potential conflict points between cyclists and vehicles.
- **Traffic congestion must be addressed:** many respondents expressed concern with potential issues with increased traffic congestion both along Main St and smaller side streets due to the proposed redesigns. Members of the public and key stakeholders would like to see a more clear and structured process for addressing traffic concerns.

## WHAT WE DID

The project team has carefully reviewed all comments received and will be carrying this feedback forward as the project advances to detailed design.

The team has also completed a detailed review of side street accesses onto Main Street and has identified several candidate locations for a partial closure or one-way conversion of the side street to deter cut-through traffic on local neighbourhood streets and to minimize conflicts.