

ALBERTA'S IRON HORSE TRAIL: A MASTER PLAN TO UNLOCK OUR POTENTIAL

# "WHAT WE HEARD" ENGAGEMENT SUMMARY REPORT

February 2021





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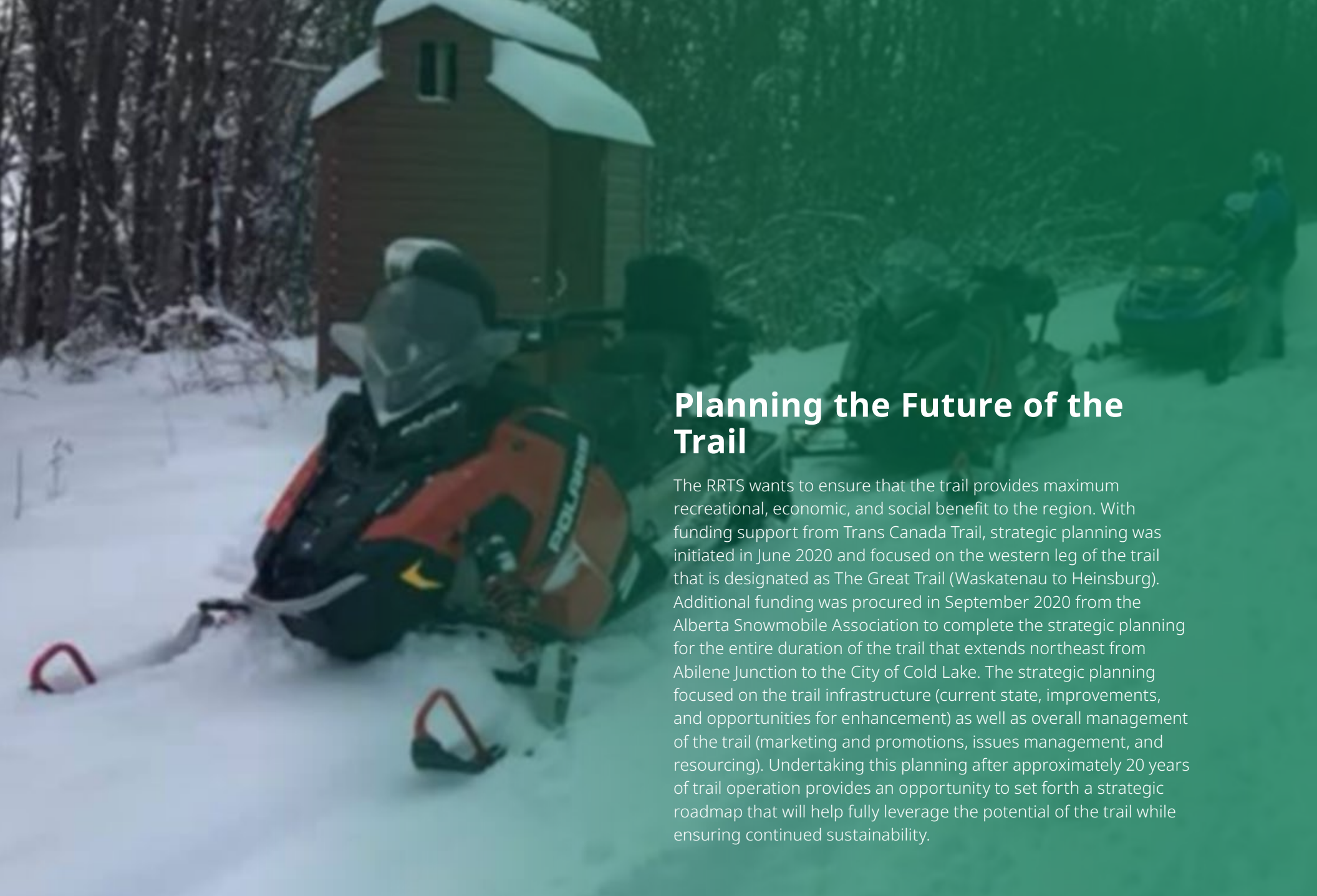
**PROJECT AND  
ENGAGEMENT OVERVIEW**



# About Alberta's Iron Horse Trail

Alberta's Iron Horse Trail consists of over 300 km of multi-use recreational trail that runs from Waskatenau to Abilene Junction where one spur continues north east to Cold Lake and a second spur continues south east to Heinsburg. Approximately 177 km of the trail is designated as part of The Great Trail (previously known as the Trans Canada Trail) and the Smoky Lake to Cold Lake segment of the trail is also part of the Great Canadian Snowmobile Trail. The trail, a former CNR railway line, was made possible due to a collaborative partnership by the 10 regional municipalities that make up NE Muni-Corr Ltd. These municipal partners acquired the railway land base in 1999 and continue to own the corridor. Development, maintenance, and operation of the trail is overseen by the Riverland Recreation Trail Society (RRTS) through a long-term lease with NE Muni-Corr Ltd.. The RRTS is a not for profit organization that was created to bring together the interests and perspectives of numerous trail enthusiasts, stakeholders, and user groups to operate and manage the trail.





## Planning the Future of the Trail

The RRTS wants to ensure that the trail provides maximum recreational, economic, and social benefit to the region. With funding support from Trans Canada Trail, strategic planning was initiated in June 2020 and focused on the western leg of the trail that is designated as The Great Trail (Waskatenau to Heinsburg). Additional funding was procured in September 2020 from the Alberta Snowmobile Association to complete the strategic planning for the entire duration of the trail that extends northeast from Abilene Junction to the City of Cold Lake. The strategic planning focused on the trail infrastructure (current state, improvements, and opportunities for enhancement) as well as overall management of the trail (marketing and promotions, issues management, and resourcing). Undertaking this planning after approximately 20 years of trail operation provides an opportunity to set forth a strategic roadmap that will help fully leverage the potential of the trail while ensuring continued sustainability.



# Engagement Purpose and Methods

Engaging with trail users, stakeholders, and the public was a critical aspect of the project. The engagement provided the project team with an opportunity to gain further insight into the trail's strengths and gaps / issues as well as explore potential future opportunities. To ensure a variety of perspectives were heard, the project team utilized a number of different engagement methods, including:

- Public online survey
- Interactive online crowdsource mapping
- Stakeholder workshops
- Stakeholder survey

As the project was conducted in two stages there were two corresponding engagement windows (July to mid-August for the Waskatenau to Heinsburg stage of the project and September to early October for the Abilene Junction to Cold Lake stage of the project). This report summarizes the findings for both engagements stages.

## Engagement Methods and Participation



**336**  
public survey  
responses



**26**  
ideas and opinions  
expressed via the  
interactive mapping  
tool (Vertisee)



Discussion sessions  
convened with  
**21** stakeholder groups



**20**  
web surveys completed  
by special interest groups  
(trail user groups and  
tourism operators)

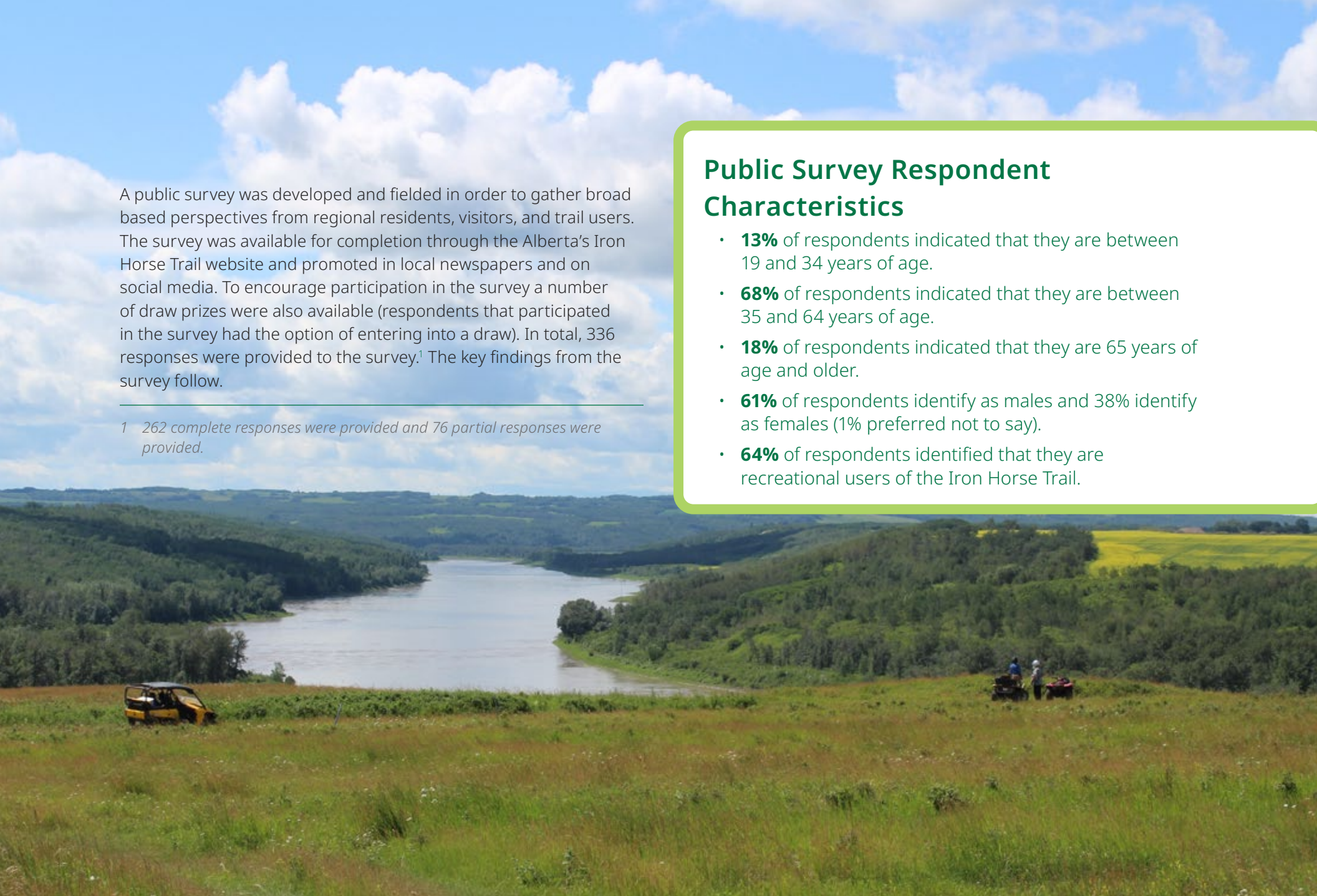


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# PUBLIC SURVEY





A public survey was developed and fielded in order to gather broad based perspectives from regional residents, visitors, and trail users. The survey was available for completion through the Alberta's Iron Horse Trail website and promoted in local newspapers and on social media. To encourage participation in the survey a number of draw prizes were also available (respondents that participated in the survey had the option of entering into a draw). In total, 336 responses were provided to the survey.<sup>1</sup> The key findings from the survey follow.

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*1 262 complete responses were provided and 76 partial responses were provided.*

## Public Survey Respondent Characteristics

- **13%** of respondents indicated that they are between 19 and 34 years of age.
- **68%** of respondents indicated that they are between 35 and 64 years of age.
- **18%** of respondents indicated that they are 65 years of age and older.
- **61%** of respondents identify as males and 38% identify as females (1% preferred not to say).
- **64%** of respondents identified that they are recreational users of the Iron Horse Trail.

## Learning About the Iron Horse Trail

Respondents were asked to identify how they learned about the Iron Horse Trail. As illustrated by the graph below, just under half of respondents indicated that they've always known about the trail and approximately one-fifth of respondents learned about the trail from friends or family.

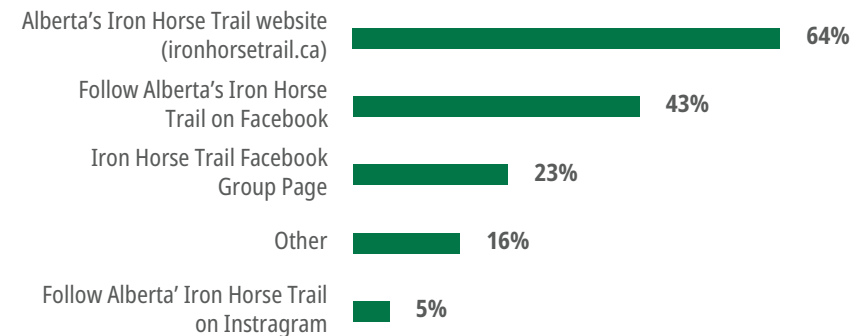
### How did you learn about the Iron Horse Trail?



Nearly two-thirds of respondents use the Iron Horse Trail website to access information on the trail. A relatively high number of respondents also use Facebook to access information on the trail.

*Note: the majority of "other" responses were local travel guides and/or municipal websites.*

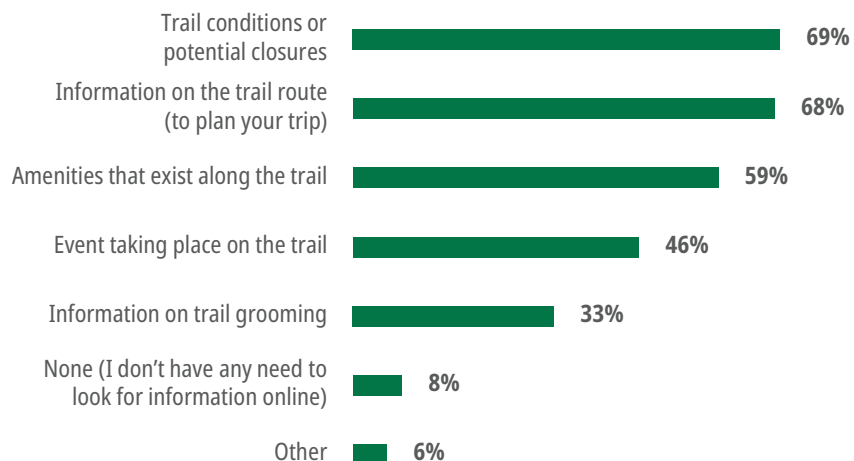
### Use of online platforms to learn about, or get information on, the Iron Horse Trail





Respondents were asked to further identify the types of information they seek about the trail via online sources. As reflected by the following graph, information about trail closures, information on the trail route, and amenities along the trail are the main topics that respondents look to online sources for.

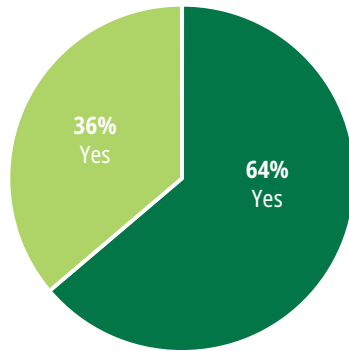
### For what purposes would you look for information online about the Iron Horse Trail?



## Trail Activities

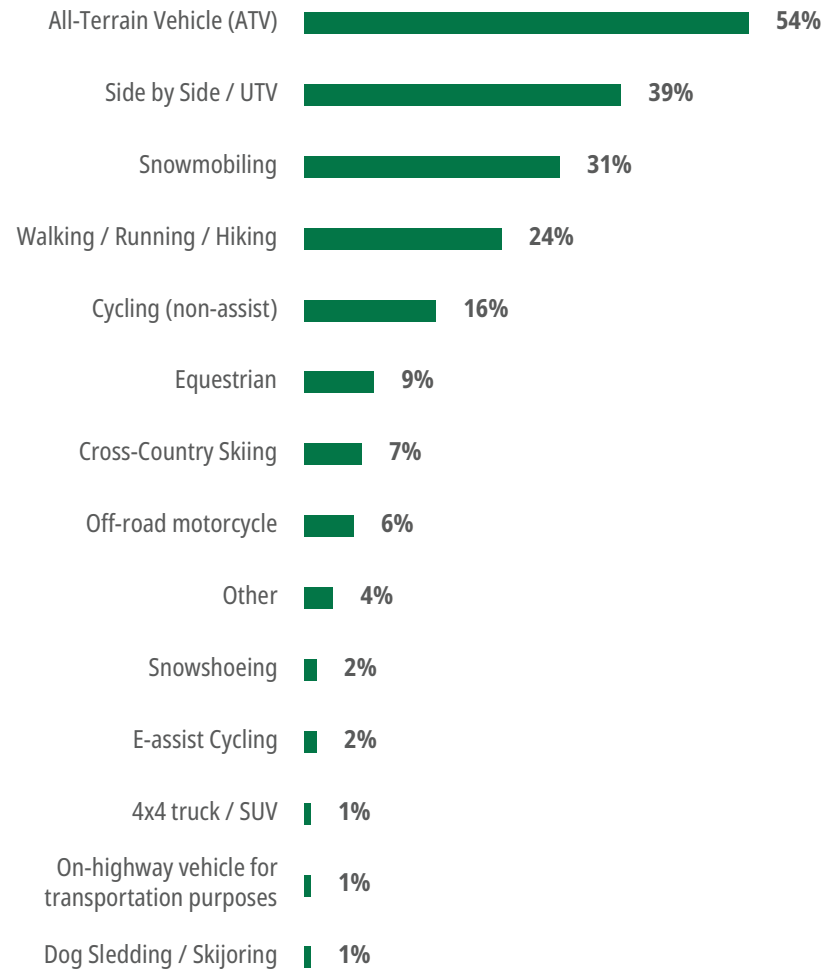
64% of survey respondents indicated that they use the Iron Horse Trail for recreation purposes (36% are not recreational trail users).

### Do you use any portion of the Iron Horse Trail for personal recreation?



Those respondents that use the trail for recreational purposes were then asked to identify the type(s) of activities that they typically use the trail for. As illustrated by the graph to the right, the majority of respondents indicated that they are motorized users of the trail. However, it is notable that approximately 25% of respondents also identified use of the trail for walking, running or hiking.

### What recreational activities do you typically engage in on the Iron Horse Trail?

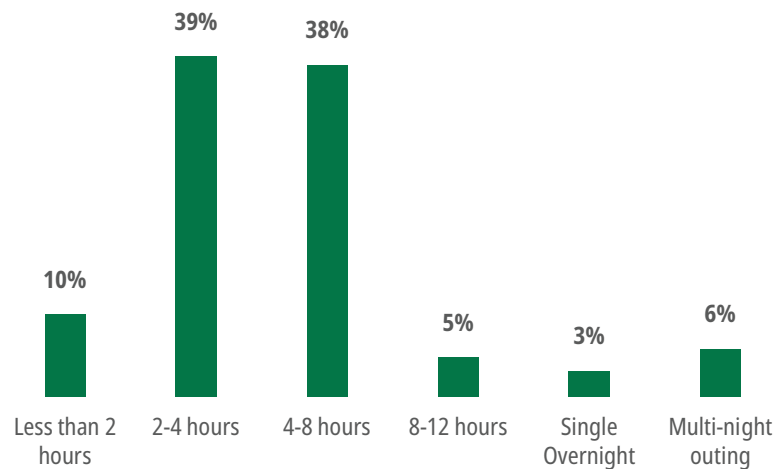






Respondents that use the trail for recreational purposes were also asked to identify how long they spend on the trail during typical outing. As illustrated by the following graph, the majority of respondents indicated that their outings typically range from a few hours to a partial day.

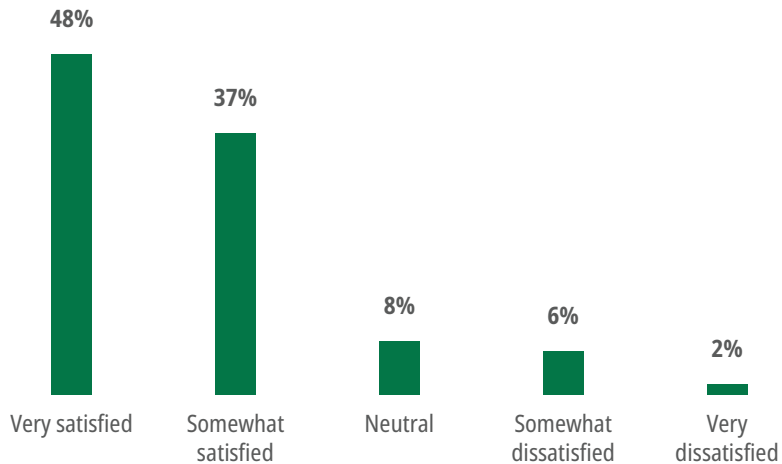
### Duration of outing on the Iron Horse Trail



## Satisfaction with the Trail

Respondents were asked a series of questions about their experience and satisfaction with the Iron Horse Trail. As reflected by the graph below, the majority of respondents indicated that they are either somewhat or very satisfied with their Iron Horse Trail experience.

### Overall, how satisfied are you with the quality of your recreational experience using the Iron Horse Trail



Opportunity was provided for respondents that didn't select "very satisfied" to comment on why they weren't fully satisfied with their trail experience. Summarized below are the prevalent themes from the 82 comments provided.

- Some stretches of the trail are too rough (most of these comments pertained to the trail tread being uncomfortable for OHV riding or unsuitable for non-motorized uses such as biking or horseback riding).
- Lack of amenities (most of these comments pertained to washrooms, drinking water sources, and loading/unloading areas).
- Cattle guards / crossing present a barrier.
- Certain stretches of the trail are boring or lack points of interest.

Respondents were also asked to rate specific aspects of the trail. As reflected in the following chart, respondents rated most aspects of the trail as "good".

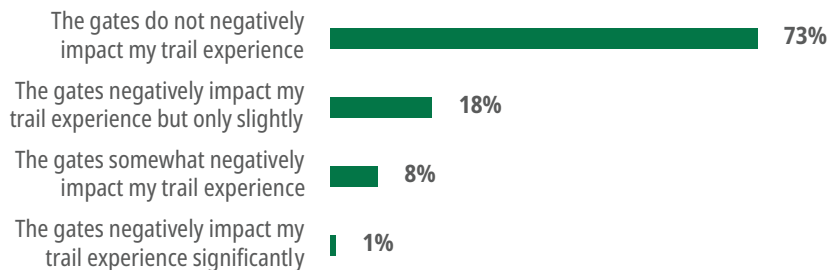
	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor	Unsure/No Opinion
<b>Condition of the staging areas</b>	33%	45%	14%	4%	5%
<b>Cleanliness of the trail amenities</b>	23%	54%	13%	2%	8%
<b>Safety and security along the trail</b>	27%	50%	11%	3%	9%
<b>Quality and effectiveness of signage along the trail</b>	24%	56%	14%	3%	4%





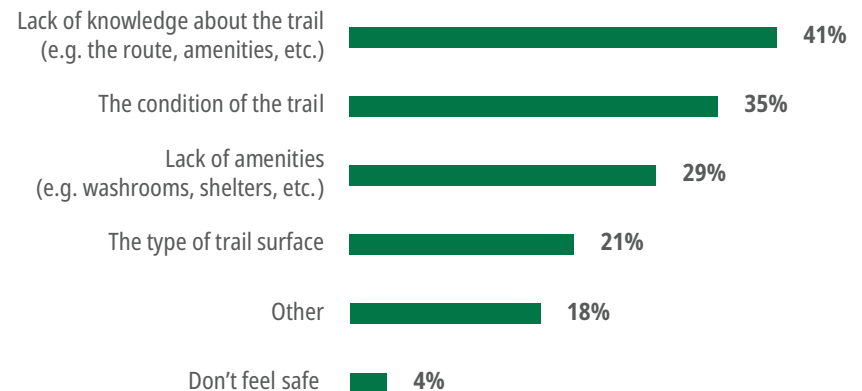
As illustrated by the following graph, the cattle gates along the trail don't negatively impact the trail experience for most respondents.

### Do the gates on the trail negatively impact your trail experience?



Respondents were provided with a list of potential barriers or limitations and asked to identify those that limit their trail use and enjoyment. Lack of knowledge about the trail, trail condition, and lack of amenities such as washrooms and shelters were identified as the top three limitations to use and enjoyment. *Note: the most prevalent "other" response was distance from home.*

### Is there anything that prevents or limits your use and enjoyment of the Ironhorse Trail?





A person wearing a hat and a vest is riding a brown horse on a trail. The horse is carrying a pack and a log. The background is a green, grassy area with some brush.

## Future Opportunities and Enhancements

The next section of the survey focused on identifying future opportunities and potential enhancements for the Iron Horse Trail. To begin this series of questions, respondents were asked to identify key characteristics that can help a trail become a destination that attracts visitation and tourism. Summarized below are key themes from the 219 comments provided.

***Thinking about the “most iconic” trails in the province, Western Canada and beyond, what characteristics do you think are most important to enabling a trail to become a travel motivating attraction?***

- Quality and availability of amenities along the trail route (e.g. towns along the trail with food services, washrooms, quality staging areas, etc.) (66 comments)
- Interest and appeal of the trail (e.g. scenery and variety of the trail) (53 comments)
- Points of interest that are accessible from the trail (e.g. places of historical significance, interpretive amenities, etc.) (48 comments)
- Accommodations (33 comments)
- Quality of the trail tread (26 comments)
- Promotions, marketing, and access to mapping (23 comments)
- Safety and security (e.g. secure places to keep equipment overnight) (10 comments)
- Adjacent OHV play areas (4 comments)



Respondents were provided with a list of trail management issues and asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed those issues are important and should be addressed through the strategic planning. The following chart is ordered by those management issues that the highest proportion of respondents “strongly agreed” should be addressed through the strategic planning. As reflected in the chart, over half of respondents felt strongly that the condition of trail tread and condition / cleanliness of rest rooms are key management issues that should be addressed. Of note, over half of respondents agreed to some degree (strongly or somewhat) that conflicts between motorized and non-motorized users’ needs to be addressed.

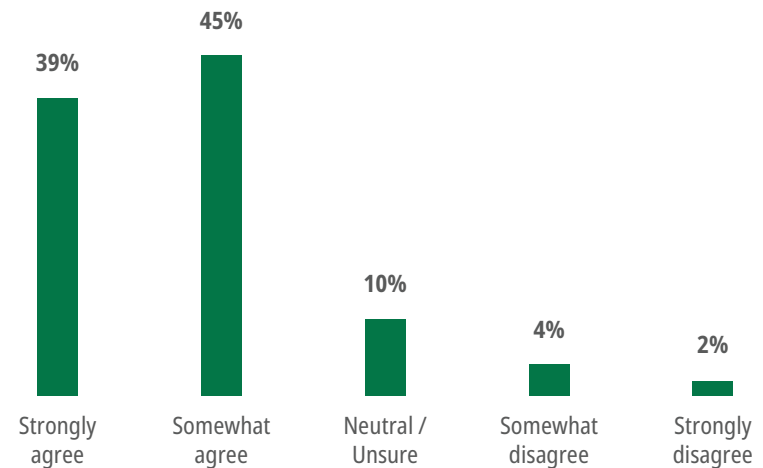
	Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree	Neutral / Unsure	Somewhat Disagree	Strongly Disagree
<b>Condition of trail surfacing</b>	54%	35%	9%	2%	1%
<b>Condition / cleanliness of rest rooms</b>	53%	32%	13%	1%	1%
<b>Condition and location of signage</b>	47%	36%	15%	1%	0%
<b>Vandalism</b>	45%	28%	24%	3%	1%
<b>Theft</b>	37%	27%	32%	3%	1%
<b>Visitor safety</b>	35%	30%	30%	4%	1%
<b>Conflicts between motorized and non-motorized users</b>	34%	21%	36%	7%	3%
<b>Size of staging / parking areas</b>	31%	38%	27%	3%	1%
<b>Condition of comfort amenities (e.g. benches, picnic tables, emergency shelters)</b>	31%	48%	18%	3%	0%
<b>Absence of comfort amenities (e.g. benches, picnic tables, emergency shelters)</b>	30%	42%	23%	5%	1%
<b>Trail intersections with roads</b>	29%	30%	33%	7%	1%
<b>Number and location of staging / parking areas</b>	28%	39%	30%	3%	0%
<b>Number of overnight accommodations</b>	27%	29%	36%	6%	2%
<b>Quality of overnight accommodations</b>	24%	27%	41%	6%	3%
<b>Conflicts between different non-motorized users</b>	19%	20%	50%	8%	3%
<b>Unprepared visitors</b>	17%	28%	46%	6%	2%
<b>Overcrowding</b>	16%	23%	44%	13%	5%
<b>The number of gates on the trail</b>	15%	25%	46%	12%	2%
<b>Issues with livestock (cattle on the trail, manure, etc.)</b>	9%	20%	42%	21%	9%



## Future Investment Priorities and Opportunities

Respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with the perspective that a higher level of investment should be made into making the Iron Horse Trail a significant destination that can attract non-local visitation to the region. As illustrated by the graph below, the majority of respondents held some level of agreement with this perspective.

**To what extent do you agree that greater investments and effort should be put into making the Iron Horse Trail a significant “destination” that attracts non-local visitors?**





Next, respondents were provided with a list of potential improvements (types of investment) that could be pursued and asked to indicate how important the implementation of each would be to improving the Iron Horse Trail experience. As reflected in the following chart, the three potential improvements with the highest proportion of “very important” responses all related to improving the connectivity of the trail.

	Very Important	Somewhat Important	Neutral / Unsure	Somewhat Unimportant	Unimportant
<b>Connect the trail to nearby visitor attractions</b>	49%	38%	10%	2%	1%
<b>Connect the trail into the communities along the trail</b>	48%	40%	9%	2%	1%
<b>Connect the trail to nearby trails</b>	48%	38%	12%	1%	2%
<b>Improve the trail tread surfacing</b>	40%	37%	18%	3%	2%
<b>Provide better up to date information on the status and condition of the trail</b>	38%	44%	15%	3%	2%
<b>Improve signage &amp; wayfinding to and along the trail</b>	36%	39%	21%	3%	1%
<b>Improve maintenance of the trail tread</b>	35%	40%	21%	3%	2%
<b>Improve restrooms</b>	34%	43%	21%	2%	1%
<b>Improve campgrounds</b>	30%	43%	22%	3%	2%
<b>Enhance visitor education and etiquette programs on the trail</b>	28%	44%	23%	3%	2%
<b>Improve trip planning tools</b>	28%	42%	25%	3%	2%
<b>Improve staging areas</b>	27%	40%	28%	2%	2%
<b>Regulate the uses of the trail and enforcement</b>	25%	39%	24%	7%	5%
<b>Improve marketing efforts</b>	25%	42%	27%	3%	3%

## Potential Investment Focus Areas (chart continued from the previous page)

	Very Important	Somewhat Important	Neutral / Unsure	Somewhat Unimportant	Unimportant
<b>Improve the convenience amenities (e.g. benches, picnic tables)</b>	24%	51%	20%	3%	2%
<b>Organize more special events</b>	23%	37%	30%	5%	5%
<b>Enhance visitor safety programs</b>	23%	39%	32%	4%	2%
<b>Provide overnight huts / comfort camping along the trail</b>	22%	33%	32%	9%	5%
<b>Provide off-highway vehicle play areas</b>	22%	30%	28%	11%	10%
<b>Provide better interpretive opportunities</b>	20%	49%	26%	5%	2%

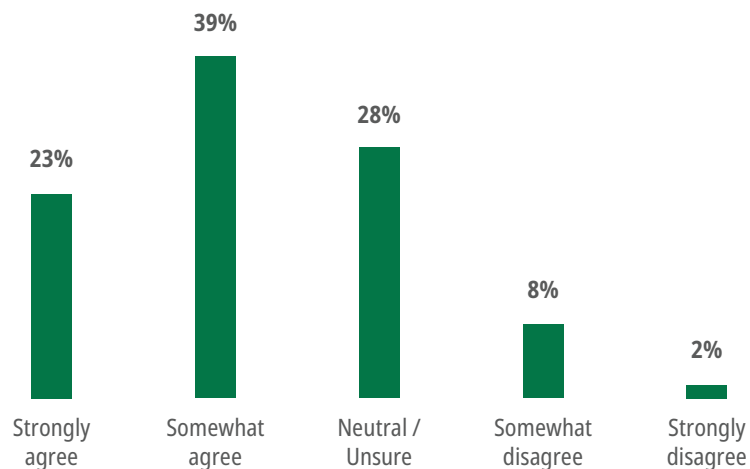
Space was provided for respondents to expand on their responses and those improvements that they believe are most important. The 57 comments provided were wide ranging and generally related to specific issues or situations. Summarized below are a handful of themes that were gleaned from the comments.

- Varying perspectives on permitting motorcycle / dirt bike use on the trail (some comments expressed the need for better enforcement of this currently non-permitted use, while other comments expressed that motorcycle / dirt bike use should be permitted).
- Improvement required to staging areas (especially washrooms and warm-up huts)



Respondents were asked to what extent they agree that the Iron Horse Trail should be designed and maintained to minimize barriers to trail use for people with physical and visual limitations. Over half of respondents agreed to some level (strongly or somewhat) with the notion, however over a quarter of respondents (28%) were unsure or had no opinion.

### To what extent do you agree that the Iron Horse Trail should be designed and maintained to minimize barriers to trail use for people with physical and visual limitations?



To further explore potential priorities and investment for the trail, respondents were provided with four overarching focus areas and initiatives and asked to rank each (1 to 4).



Maximizing the community benefits of the trail for local residents (e.g. making the trail more accessible and functional for residents living in communities along the trail, thus enhancing the social and wellness benefits provided by the trail).

**Number of Survey Respondents that Ranked this Focus Area / Initiative as a #1 and #2 Priority**



Increasing the overall utilization of the trail.

**Number of Survey Respondents that Ranked this Focus Area / Initiative as a #1 and #2 Priority**



Enhancing the trail to better accommodate long distance users / rider.

**Number of Survey Respondents that Ranked this Focus Area / Initiative as a #1 and #2 Priority**



Using the trail as a major regional asset to drive tourism and bring more non-local visitors to the area (e.g. through improve amenities and quality).

**Number of Survey Respondents that Ranked this Focus Area / Initiative as a #1 and #2 Priority**



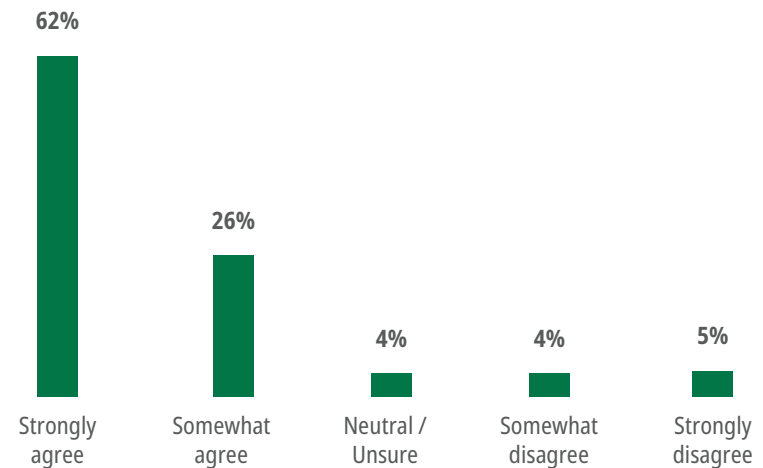


## Perspectives on Permitted Uses

Respondents were asked a series of questions on the types of uses that should be permitted on the Iron Horse Trail. **Current activities that are permitted include: walking / running / hiking, cycling, mountain biking, equestrian, horse and wagon, cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, dog sledding, all-terrain vehicles, side by sides, and snowmobiling.**

As illustrated by the following graph, most respondents believe that the current range of activities permitted on the trail are appropriate and should continue to occur.

**To what extent do you agree that the current range of activities occurring on the trail are appropriate and should continue to occur?**



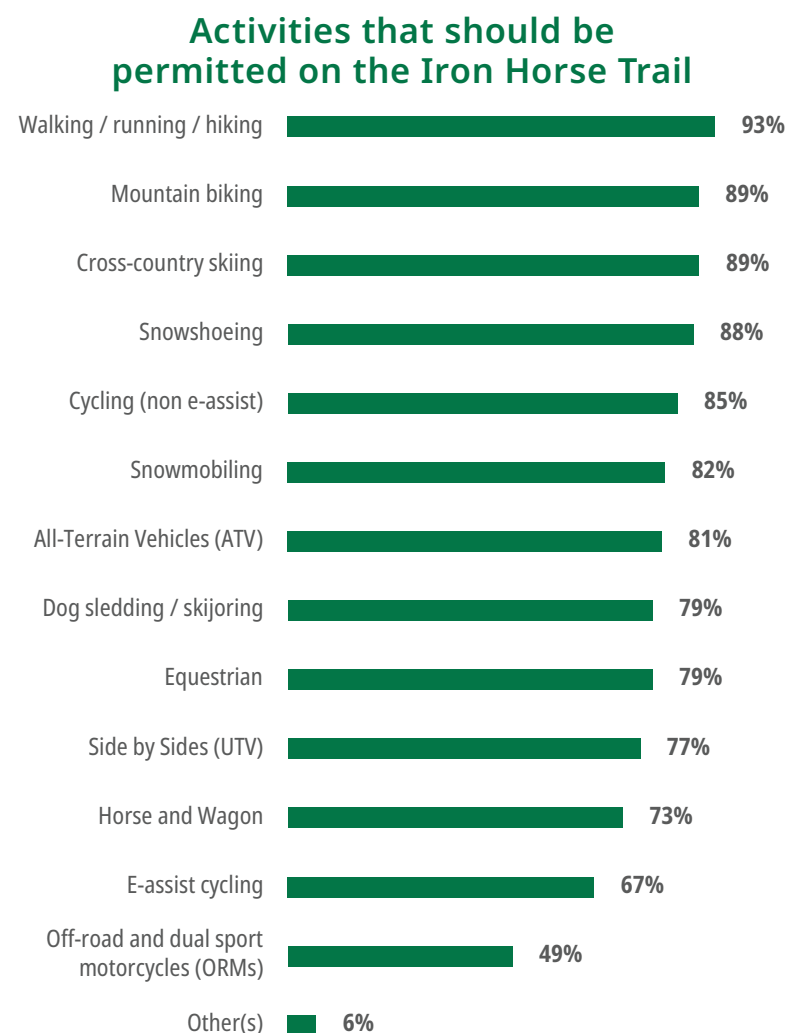


To further inform strategic planning, respondents were provided with a broad list of activity types (including both activities that are currently permitted as well as some that are not) and asked to indicate if they believe the type of activity should be permitted on the trail. As illustrated by the adjacent graph, most responses believed that most activity types should be permitted with the exception of off-road and dual sport motorcycles (just under half of respondents support permitting this type of use).

*\*Of the 12 “other” responses provided, 3 responses related to permitting off-road and dual sport motorcycles, 1 response related to allowing all uses, 1 response suggested tour operated people haulers should be permitted, 1 response related to using the trail for cattle grazing, 1 responses suggested fat biking should be encouraged, and 2 responses related to trail management issues.*

Space was also provided in the survey for respondents to provide further comment on any changes they’d like to see to uses that are permitted on the trail. The most prevalent comment theme (25 out of the 75 comments provided) related to whether off-road and dual sport motorcycles should be permitted. Consistent with previous open ended comments, respondents held varying viewpoints on this topic. While some respondents expressed concerned over safety issues and the impact on the trail tread, others believe that permitting this type of use could increase the overall value and benefits of the trail to the region and also questioned why this type of motorized use is not allowed while others are currently permitted.

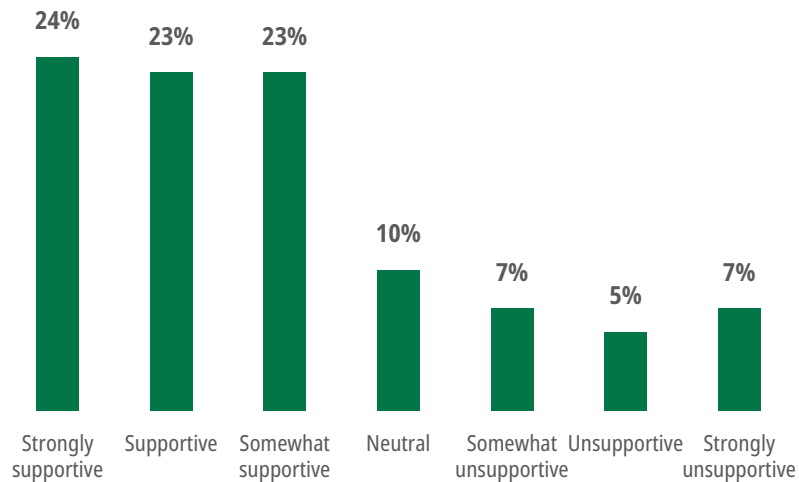
Respondents were also asked if there are any portions of the Iron Horse Trail that should be treated uniquely in terms of the activities that are permitted. The majority of the 62 comments provided related to other specific trail management or staging area amenity issues.



## Trail User Fees

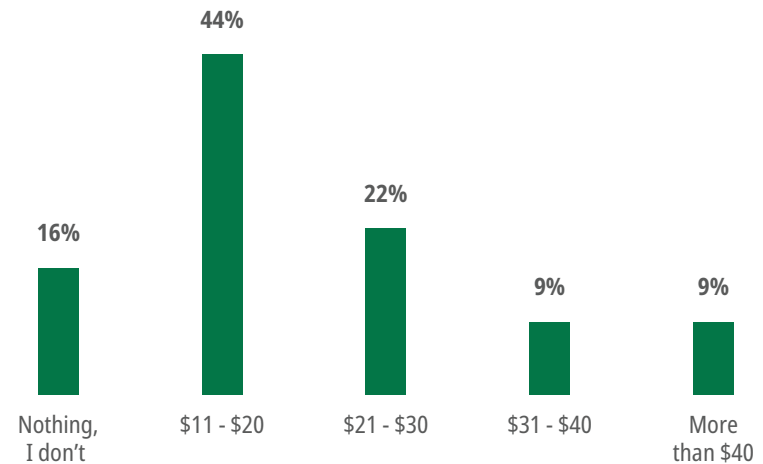
Recognizing that new sources of funding may be required to undertake future trail enhancements, respondents were asked the extent to which they would support paying an annual trail pass fee to access the Iron Horse Trail. As illustrated by the graph below, over two-thirds of respondents indicated some level of support for an annual trail pass fee.

**To what extent do you support paying an annual trail pass fee to access the Iron Horse Trail and associated amenities if this fee was to go directly back into improving the maintenance and management of the trail and amenities?**



When asked to indicate the amount of a trail pass fee that they would consider paying, the highest proportion of respondents (44%) selected an annual per person fee in the \$11-20 range.

**What is the maximum amount that you would consider paying annually per person?**







# 3

## INTERACTIVE MAPPING TOOL

A web based crowdsourcing platform (Vertisee) was utilized to provide an additional opportunity for individuals to give spatially based feedback and input on the Iron Horse Trail. Users of the platform were able to view an interactive map interface and place points on specific areas of the trail along with comments pertinent to those identified spaces. The points and corresponding comments offered can be generally grouped into two themes; opportunities for improved or new trail infrastructure and trail issues. Summarized as follows is a synopsis of the feedback provided. On the following page is a map that illustrates the specific locations identified by individuals that provided feedback through the platform.<sup>1</sup>

### Opportunities for Improved or New Trail Infrastructure

- 16 total points
- Enhanced interpretive or directional signage (8 locations)
- Addition of a viewing point (1 location)
- Improvement required to staging area (3 locations)
- Opportunity to add camping and cooking amenities (1 location)
- Horse riding amenities needed (hitching rails and water) (2 location)

*\*A general comment on the creating trail knowledge was also provided – not related to a specific location*

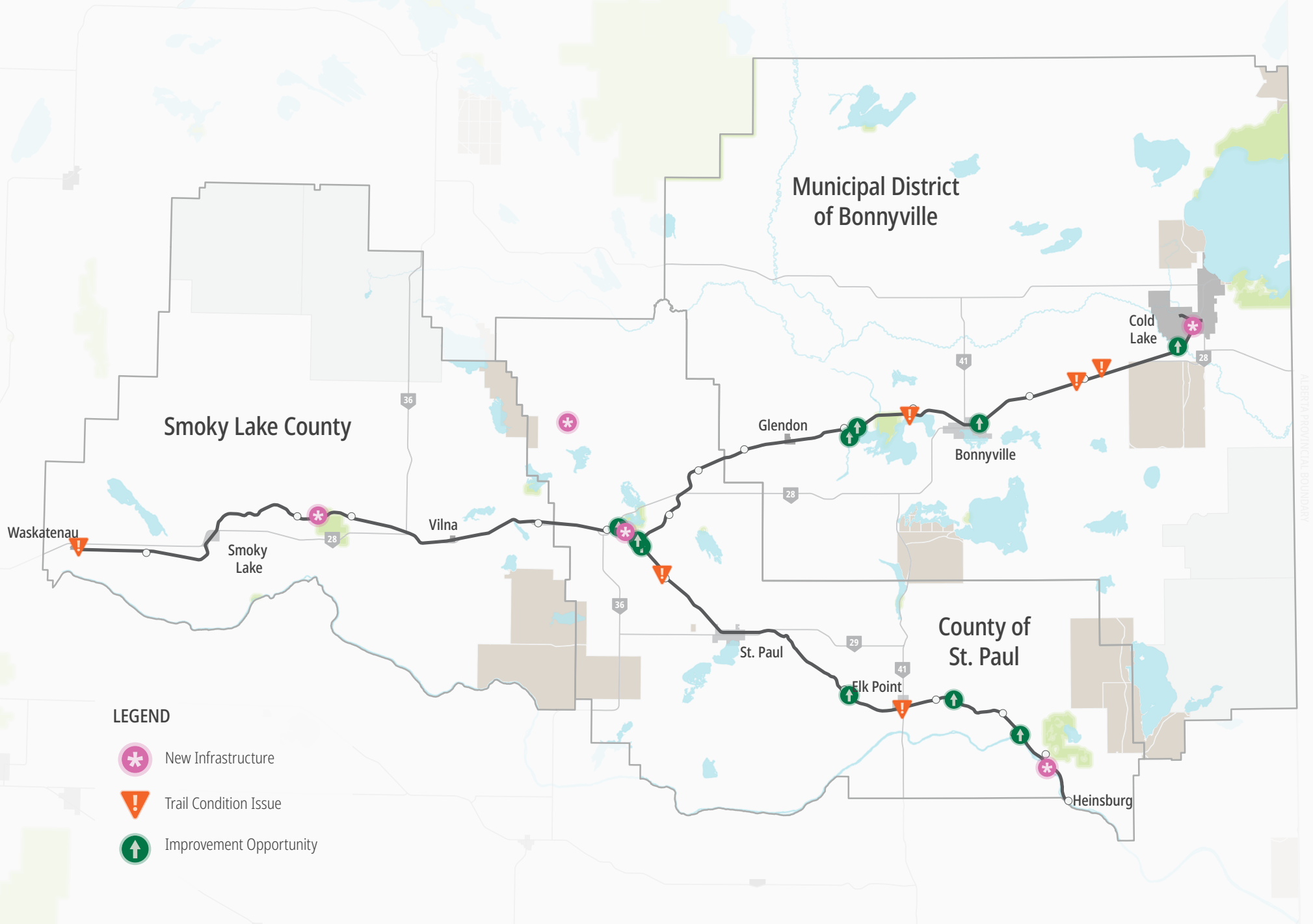
### Trail Condition Issues

- 7 total points
- Trail tread issues (3 locations)
- Regulatory signage repair needed (1 location)
- Potential safety issue with highway traffic (1 location)
- Lack of mapping and directional signage (1 location)

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<sup>1</sup> 26 total points were provided (26 total inputs). A number of these points and associated comments were provided by users from the same IP address.







# 4

## **STAKEHOLDER DISCUSSION SESSIONS**



Discussion sessions were convened with twenty-one regional stakeholders<sup>1</sup>, including all ten Northeast Muni-Corr partners as well as a variety of other organizations and individuals that were identified as having insight into the Iron Horse Trail. **Please refer to Appendix A for a list of participating stakeholders.** Based on stakeholder availability and limitations as a result of COVID-19, some of the discussion sessions were held in-person while others were facilitated virtually. The discussion sessions provided the project team with an opportunity to further explore successes, issues, and opportunities pertaining to the trail.

While diverse viewpoints and opinions were expressed during the discussion session, a handful of prevalent themes did emerge. These themes and other notable points of interest are summarized as follows in this section.

## The Value and Benefits of the Iron Horse Trail

- The value of the Iron Horse Trail as a recreational and active living amenity for regional residents is widely recognized. It was also commonly mentioned that the trail helps physically and perceptually connect communities and other places of significance in the region.
- A diversity of perspectives exist over the tourism and associated economic benefits of the Iron Horse Trail. Some stakeholders believe that the trail is a significant driver of non-local spending in some communities, while others were unsure or suggested that these benefits have not been fully accrued.
- It was commonly expressed by stakeholders that more and better supporting data is needed to help identify, analyze and communicate the recreation and economic benefits of the trail. It was also suggested that this supporting data could help create a stronger case for future investment and partnerships.
- A number of municipally affiliated stakeholders pointed to the importance of the trail corridor as an important land holding through Northeast Muni-Corr. Further to this point, it was expressed that major regional projects such as the recent waterline development would be significantly more challenging and costly if not for the existence and ownership structure of the trail.

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<sup>1</sup> *Twenty four total discussion sessions were convened as some of the stakeholder organizations were engaged through multiple sessions.*


## Current State of the Iron Horse Trail

- Varying viewpoints existed over the physical condition of the trail – these perspectives were primarily based on the geographic and activity interest(s) of the stakeholders. Concerns with “washboarding” and the impacts of agricultural and construction traffic along (or across) the trail were noted by some stakeholders.
- Some stakeholders expressed the viewpoint that the intent of the trail was never to be one that is routinely graded or maintained to a pristine level of trail tread. Managing expectations and keeping operational costs realistic were often expressed as important considerations by these stakeholders.
- The existence of functional staging areas in most communities along the trail was identified as a strength. However, concerns over vandalism of these staging areas were commonly mentioned and are a point of frustration for many stakeholders (especially those involved with trail maintenance or municipalities that have invested in these amenities).
- Stakeholders were keen to express appreciation and positive comments towards the efforts of the Riverland Recreational Trail Society and trail stewards. The collaborative nature of the trail’s history and continued operation is a source of pride for many in the region.
- Some issues exist with landowners along the trail, however the volume of these issues is not generally considered indicative of any broader management issues. Most of the issues identified pertained to livestock (e.g. cattle guards, landowners moving livestock or machinery along the trail, putting up unapproved barriers along the trail, etc.).

## Priorities and Future Opportunities

- Stakeholders commonly expressed that a significant opportunity exists to increase local and regional resident utilization of the trail. The impacts of the pandemic, notably more residents vacationing and recreating locally, was identified as a potential opportunity to encourage more use of the trail.
- The trail passing through most regional communities was identified as a key strength of the trail. Enhancing staging areas and creating (or communicating existing) linkages from the trail to services and amenities was commonly identified as an investment that could help improve user experience and maximize the value of the trail.
- A number of stakeholders expressed that more can be done to profile local heritage and connect the trail (physically and perceptually) with points of interest.
- Related to the previous point, opportunities also exist to profile unique experiences in communities or other focal points along the trail. Examples provided included: eating at a unique local diner, visiting local museums and other heritage features (e.g. murals or restored buildings), nature and bird watching, etc.





## Priorities and Future Opportunities (continued)

- Stakeholders were keen to discuss the market potential of the trail as a tourism destination. Common viewpoints and opinions expressed around this topic are noted below.
  - » Future investment and initiatives need to be realistic and focused in such a manner that can achieve success (e.g. don't compete with mountain trails for individuals that are seeking a higher degree of trail difficulty or adventure)
  - » Leveraging the duration of the trail and connection with the Great Trail and the Great Canadian Snowmobile Trail
  - » Appeal to residents in the Edmonton and Calgary metropolitan areas that are looking for easily accessible weekend or day trips
  - » Services and amenities along the trail are crucial to attracting non-local residents and some work is required to provide appealing accommodations and food services
  - » The importance of vehicle, trailer, and OHV security was commonly identified as being important for non-local visitors (safe and secure places to stage from need to be provided and promoted)
- In general, most stakeholders believe that the trail should remain multi-purpose in nature but that the highest level of potential and continued use is likely to be with the OHV market. As such, any investments with regards to amenities and trail improvements may be best focused on this market segment. However, a number of stakeholders did point to the different uses and needs of the urban vs rural sections of the trail. Creating parallel hard surfaced sections of the trail in the urban centres were viewed as being beneficial (and have been beneficial where they already exist).
- Opportunities to make use of mobile technologies were identified during some of the discussions. More specifically, it was mentioned that the creation and promotion of an app could help communicate services and provide convenient mapping of the trail.
- The opportunity to learn from other similar trails or trail networks across North America was identified by a number of stakeholders. During the discussion sessions, stakeholders were keen to reference or ask questions about best practices, innovative / appealing amenities, and other aspects of trails in other jurisdictions.



## Future Resourcing and Partnerships

- While the Northeast Muni-Corr partnership and ownership model was generally viewed as a positive, some concerns were expressed over the financial state of the entity and how that may impact future trail enhancements and investment.
- It was noted by some stakeholders that the level of maintenance care undertaken by municipalities for their sections of the trail is inconsistent.
- Stakeholders (especially those representing municipal interests) pondered how funding could be procured to undertake the enhancements and opportunities discussed during the sessions. A key theme reiterated by many stakeholders was the need to ensure sufficient supporting data exists that articulates the active living, social, and economic value of the trail. It was suggested that having this data will be critical to “selling” future investment into the trail both to regional municipalities and other funding sources.
- As previously referenced, the Riverland Recreational Trails Society and trail steward individuals and groups are highly regarded and appreciated. Stakeholders did express the importance of broadening the volunteer base, mitigating volunteer fatigue, and ensuring overall sustainability of the various groups and organizations involved in the trail.





A red CN locomotive is shown on tracks, viewed from a side-rear perspective. The locomotive has 'CN' and the number '78108' visible on its side. A large, semi-transparent green number '5' is overlaid on the upper part of the locomotive. The entire scene is framed within a green, rounded hexagonal border.

5

**INPUT FROM  
SPECIAL INTEREST  
GROUPS**

Two web surveys were developed and fielded to obtain additional input from trail user groups and tourism operators (and related businesses and organizations) in the region. Summarized as follows in this section are key findings from each of the two web surveys.

## Tourism Operators Web Survey (18 responses)

*\*Refer to Appendix B for a list of businesses or organizations that responded to the Tourism Operators Web Survey*

### Satisfaction with the Tourism Experience

As a tourism business / organization, how satisfied are you with the quality of the tourism experience the Iron Horse Trail provides for your clients / visitors to the region? 15 responses to this question.



Based on what you hear from your clients and visitors to the region, how satisfied do you believe your clients / visitors to the region are with the quality of the tourism experience provided by the Iron Horse Trail? 15 responses to this question.



Trail concerns and issues (those identified by 4 or more responding organizations / businesses as being “frequently” or “somewhat frequently” mentioned to them in discussions with their clients or visitors)



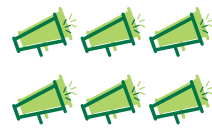
## Investing in the Trail

7 organizations / businesses “agreed” and 5 organizations / businesses “somewhat agreed” that greater investments and effort should be put into elevating the tourism attraction of the Iron Horse Trail (2 organizations / businesses had no opinion).

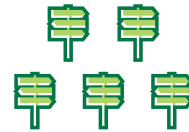
Most important actions that can enhance the tourism attraction potential of the Iron Horse Trail (identified as “very important” by 5 or more responding organizations / businesses).



Connecting the trail into the communities along the trail



Improved marketing of the trail



Improved signage and wayfinding along the trail



Providing better / more interpretive opportunities



Improved rest rooms



Connecting the trail to nearby attractions and other trails



Improved trip planning tools



Providing up to date information on the status / condition of the trail

## Permitted Uses for the Iron Horse Trail

Responding tourism organizations / businesses supported allowing the trail to be used for multiple purposes. A handful of concerns were raised over the notion of permitting off-road and on-road motorcycles.





# Trail User Group Web Survey (2 responses)

*\*Refer to Appendix C for a list of organizations that responded to the Trail User Group Web Survey*



Both responding groups (Lakeland Geocachers and the Cold Lake Snowmobile Club) expect to experience participant / membership growth over the next 10 years.



When asked about their group's level of satisfaction with the quality of your experience using the Iron Horse Trail, one group was "very satisfied" and one group was "somewhat satisfied."



Both responding groups expressed satisfaction with most aspects of the trail. However, both groups gave safety and security along the trail a "fair" rating which suggests that some improvement is needed.



Groups were asked if the gates along the trail have an impact on their trail experience. One of the responding groups indicated that the gates have a slight impact on their experience while the other group indicated that the gates do not negatively impact them.

Both responding groups identified the following trail enhancements as being "very important".



**Improved maintenance of the trail tread**



**Connecting the trail into the communities along the trail**



**Connecting the trail to nearby trails**

Both responding groups indicated that they foresee having the following roles as it pertains to future trail enhancement projects.



**Fundraising for new projects**



**Advocating on behalf of the trail to municipalities in the region, the Province, or other potential funding partners**



**Donating supplies or labour**

# 6

## SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS



Summarized as follows in this section are key findings and other notable points of interest from the engagement findings presented in this “What We Heard” Engagement Summary Report document.

Key Finding	Supporting Engagement Findings
The value of benefits of the trail are well recognized.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Stakeholder discussion participants frequently expressed that the trail is an important recreational amenity that supports active living and connects communities within the region.</li> <li>Stakeholders, tourism operators and residents generally value the economic benefits of the trail but believe more can be done to leverage non-local spending.</li> </ul>
<p>Most regional residents spend between 2 and 8 hours on the trail per outing.</p> <p>Trail users are generally satisfied with the experience provided by the trail, however opportunities for improvement exist.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>39% of Public Survey respondents indicated that their typical outings are between 2 and 4 hours while 38% spend between 4 and 8 hours on the trail.</li> <li>48% of Public Survey respondents indicated that they are “very satisfied” with the recreational experience provided by the trail while 37% are “somewhat satisfied” (8% were “neutral” and 8% indicated some level of dissatisfaction).</li> <li>Tourism operators that provided a web survey response indicated that the majority of their clients / visits were satisfied with their trail experience but noted improvements that can be made.</li> </ul>
Opportunities exist to enhance trail knowledge.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>43% of Public Survey respondents identified that a lack of knowledge about the trail route and amenities prevented or limited their enjoyment of the trail (highest identified barrier to enjoyment).</li> <li>Increasing local, regional, and provincial knowledge of the trail was a key theme of the stakeholder discussions.</li> <li>Improved marketing was identified as being “very important” by one-third of Tourism Operators that provided a web survey response.</li> </ul>
Safety, security and related issues emerged as an issue through the engagement.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The importance of providing safe and secure staging areas for vehicles, OHV’s, trailers and other equipment was commonly mentioned during the stakeholder discussions.</li> <li>Vandalism of staging areas was identified as an issue by a number of stakeholders.</li> <li>78% of Public Survey respondents identified vandalism as an issue and 64% identified theft as an issue.</li> </ul>
Some level of support exists for paying a user fee to access the Iron Horse Trail.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Over two-thirds of Public Survey respondents indicated some level of support for an annual trail pass fee. 44% of these respondents supported paying between \$11-20 annually with 40% supporting an annual fee &gt;\$20.</li> </ul>

Key Finding	Supporting Engagement Findings
There is consensus that the trail should remain multi-use.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Findings from the Public Survey, stakeholder discussions, and the web surveys fielded to user groups and tourism operator all reflect a preference for the trail continuing to support a wide cross-section of motorized and non-motorized uses.</li> <li>Some stakeholders expressed that different sections of the trail should be focused on different types of uses (e.g. trails that go through communities are well suited to active transportation and non-motorized uses while trails in rural areas are better suited for motorized uses).</li> <li>Differing viewpoints exist on whether off-road and on-road motorcycle use should be permitted.</li> </ul>
While there is consensus that the trail should remain available for multi-purpose use, there is also a common belief that the generation of incremental non-local spending and tourism visitation is likely to come as a result of increased OHV use.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A number of stakeholders suggested that future trail investment and initiatives need to be realistic and focused on OHV based use.</li> <li>The Public Survey supports many anecdotal beliefs that the trail is primarily used for OHV purposes</li> </ul>
Improving trail connectivity was identified as a key priority.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The three top investment priorities identified by Public Survey respondents were: connecting the trail to nearby visitor attractions, connecting the trail into communities along the trail, and connecting the Iron Horse Trail to other nearby trails.</li> <li>Improving trail connectivity between the staging areas and services that exist in communities was identified as a key priority by stakeholders (in some cases it was suggested that these connections already exist and better communication, directional signage and mapping is needed).</li> <li>Trail connectivity into communities along the trail as a priority was the highest identified priority by tourism operators that provided a web survey response.</li> </ul>





# APPENDICES

## Appendix A: Stakeholder Discussion Session Participants

#	Stakeholder*
1	Alberta Parks
2	Alberta Snowmobile Association
3	Alberta Trail Net
4	City of Cold Lake**
5	County of St. Paul
6	Del Huchaluk (long-time resident and business owner)
7	Government of Alberta (Economic Development, Trade and Tourism)
8	Lakeland Community Futures
9	Municipal District of Bonnyville No. 87**
10	Northeast Muni-Corr Ltd. (joint session with representatives from the partner municipalities)

#	Stakeholder*
11	Riverland Recreational Trail Society
12	Sheila Thompson (founding RRTS Board member)
13	Smoky Lake County
14	Town of Bonnyville
15	Town of Elk Point**
16	Town of Smoky Lake
17	Town of St. Paul
18	Travel Alberta
19	Victoria Economic Development Strategy (representatives from Smoky Lake County)
20	Village of Glendon
21	Village of Vilna

*\*The organization represented by the discussion session participants is identified unless the session was with an individual that is not affiliated with a specific organization.*

*\*\*Two separate sessions were convened with these three municipalities based on staff and elected official availability.*



## Appendix B: Tourism Operator Web Survey – Participating Groups

1	Hamilton House Inn and Adventures
2	Rocky Meadows Country Get Away
3	Mallaig Beach
4	Water Charters and Rentals
5	Muriel Creek Ranch House
6	Cherry Grove Recreation and Agricultural Society
7	Cold lake Brewing
8	Alberta's Lakeland DMO
9	ACFA Bonnyville / Cold Lake
10	Jennie's Diner & Bakery
11	Impact Tourism / History Check Mobile App
12	Victoria Settlement/Fort George Buckingham House
13	Smoky Lake Home Hardware
14	The Topsy Cow
15	Smoky Lake Mechanical
16	Smoky Lake Centex Service
17	Community Futures
18	Aston Signs Inc.

## Appendix C: Trail User Group Web Survey – Participating Groups

- 1 Lakeland Geocachers
- 2 Cold Lake Snowmobile Club











