

**UNDER**   
**GARDINER**  
**PUBLIC**  
**REALM**  
**PLAN**

Interim  
Consultation  
Summary

September 2022

We would like to acknowledge that the Gardiner Expressway operates on the treaty lands of the Mississaugas of the Credit and the traditional territory of the Huron-Wendat, the Haudenosaunee, the Métis, and many other Indigenous nations.

Toronto is now home to many diverse Indigenous people. We recognize them as the past, present and future caretakers of this land. We would like to pay our respects to all who have gathered and will continue to gather in this place. We are grateful to have the opportunity to work together to care for this land and act as stewards of these spaces.



Special thanks for the invaluable contributions from the Bentway Design Advisory and our community partners. Much like the public realm itself, this work relies on trust, accountability and reciprocity.

**Design Advisory:**

PUBLIC WORK: office for urban design and landscape architecture  
Two Row Architect  
Transsolar KilmaEngineering  
Third Party Public

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# 1.0 ROUND ONE CONSULTATION OVERVIEW

Throughout summer 2022, the Bentway team and the City of Toronto (the Project Team) executed Round One of consultation for the Under Gardiner Public Realm Plan (Under Gardiner PRP). This first round of consultation included both asynchronous engagement (including surveys, Social Pinpoint mapping, social media, direct mail campaigns, and a project website) and synchronous engagement (including the Street Summit, direct stakeholder engagement, and street team outreach). The engagement objective in Round One was to seek stakeholder and public feedback about things people liked, things people disliked, and ideas and suggestions for improvements to the spaces under the Gardiner Expressway.

The feedback received in Round One will inform the development and draft recommendations in the Under Gardiner PRP that will be part of the next round of engagement

Third Party Public wrote the following takeaways based on the comments collected by the Project Team through Social Pinpoint and stakeholder engagement summaries. Third Party Public assisted the Project Team's engagement efforts by providing strategic advice on developing a consultation strategy and other elements for public engagement.

## Round One Outreach "At a Glance" May to August 2022

### Asynchronous Tactics

Direct Mail Campaign:  
15 000+

Project Website Visits:  
900+

Survey and Interactive Map  
Unique Users:  
380+

Interactive Map Comments:  
150+

Online Survey Responses:  
65+

### Synchronous Tactics

Street Summit Attendance:  
600+

Stakeholder Round Table  
Sessions:  
5

Street Team Outreach:  
850+ interactions over 2 days

## 2.0 HIGH-LEVEL KEY TAKEAWAYS

**Many like the Bentway and feel it is a creative use of a previously underused space.**

Specifically, participants like the Bentway's approach to activating diverse spaces with public art and recreation. Many said they'd like to see the creative use of space and programming expanded across the areas under the Gardiner.

**Lack of safety, poor connections, and an unpleasant environment are key challenges.**

Participants identified conflicts between different road users, an environment that feels dominated by fast-moving cars, and noisiness / dirtiness were frequently mentioned as things that are challenging or not working well under the Gardiner.

**There are many opportunities for improvement.**

Many comments spoke to improving safety, accessibility, and comfort overall; improving the public realm (through plantings, landscaping, and other beautification); improving the cycling and pedestrian experience (especially with improved safety and connections); adding and expanding on commercial uses; and adding more public art.

# 3.0 DETAILED TAKEAWAYS

## What’s working well and/or liked

Participants generally shared positive feedback about the Bentway as a model for the potential of improved Under-Gardiner spaces, saying it was a great use of the space. Specifically, many said they liked the creative programming of the space, kids’ spaces and activities, public art (including murals and sculptures), shade and weather protection, and recent improvements to pedestrian connections within and across the space.

## What’s not working well and/or could be improved

A few common themes emerged in what participants said they didn’t like or felt could be improved in the spaces under the Gardiner, including:

- An unsafe environment resulting from: too-short pedestrian crossings, lack of sidewalks in some areas (such as the south side of Housey), the poor condition of street markings (making it hard to see where pedestrians should go), flooding of paths of and roads (such as Lower Simcoe), and lack of clear separation of pedestrians, cyclists, and cars (leading to conflicts).
- A few said the presence of unhoused people in the space made them feel unsafe, with some suggestion for the City to provide good shelter or funding for those in encampments (rather than

clearing them or otherwise ignoring underlying issues).

- Missing or challenging connections, both within the Bentway (such as the dead end at the Bathurst Street bridge) and to areas beyond (such as to Coronation Park in the west, the Don Valley in the east).

## Defining characteristics

Participants said some of the defining characteristics under the Gardiner were: the height of the space, its potential for multiple uses, the shelter it offers from rain and snow. They used words like “raw,” “decay” and “darkness” to describe it, with both positive and negative connotations. A few described the area negatively, saying it was “lifeless” and reflected society’s lack of care for those with deep needs.

## Opportunities, suggestions for improvement, and ideas for the future

Participants identified a wide range of opportunities, suggestions for improvement, and ideas for the future, including:

Overall, improving safety, accessibility, and comfort through strategies like:

- Widening sidewalks or adding missing sidewalks.
- Removing bus laybys, right turn channels, and double left turn lanes.
- Carefully considering the pedestrian experience at Gardiner off- and on-ramps.
- Adding more shade, weather protection, water fountains, and public restrooms.
- Improving crossings with longer cross

- times, fewer two-stage crossings.
- Improving street lighting.
- Finding ways to mitigate traffic noise.
- Applying Complete Streets thinking to surrounding areas (such as along Spadina south of King Street).

### Improvements to the public realm, including:

- Painting the Gardiner. This was the top-rated suggestion on Social Pinpoint.
- Improving landscaping with bioswales, or green walls and hanging greenery off the bents themselves.
- Adding curb-less streets, such as at Maple Leaf Square and on Housey Street.
- Recognizing heritage, for example by installing “Lost Station” rest stops and heritage maps (similar to what’s being done for the Beltline) and retaining existing “acorn” light fixtures.
- Improving connections (including to future destinations like the new Ontario Line at Exhibition).
- Adding more places for people to sit, like at Union Station.
- Adding dog parks (such as east of Dan Leckie Way).
- Cover the underside to prohibit birds from nesting and leaving droppings in high traffic areas.

### Many suggestions for improving the cycling experience, including:

- Improving existing bike infrastructure (such as upgrading the Lower Simcoe lanes, adding lights to the rail corridor underpass, extending the Harbour bike lanes east, and more).
- Adding new bike infrastructure (such as on Dan Leckie Way, Bremner Boulevard, Rees Street, and more).
- Extending multi-use trails (such as on the north side of Lakeshore east of Yonge).
- Adding indoor bike parking at Exhibition GO, Stackt, Billy Bishop Airport, and the Jack Layton Ferry Terminal.

### Many suggestions for improving the pedestrian experience, including:

- Installing sidewalks where they’re missing (such as south side of Front between Bathurst and Spadina) and paths where there are clear desire lines (such as between the Garrison Crossing stairs and Fort York Visitor Centre).
- Improving wayfinding signage (to help people connect to the waterfront, local destinations, and beyond).
- Adding or extending pedestrian bridges (such as extending an eastbound ramp from the Fort York bridge to connect to The Well).
- Adding more pedestrian lighting to improve safety.

### Other suggested improvements, such as:

- Expand the Bentway’s footprint. Many participants shared support for expanding the creative use of space under the Gardiner.
- More murals and public art installations, commissioned by people who reflect the diversity of Toronto’s cultural communities, as well as artworks that elevate and celebrate Indigenous histories.
- More commercial spaces like restaurants, a beer garden, food trucks, farmers markets, or other public markets.
- More play spaces for kids, including a bike or skate park and/or more basketball courts.
- More cultural events and performance spaces.

# 4.0 DISTRICT-SPECIFIC TAKEAWAYS

## Exhibition Place: West Anchor

Participants said they like:

- The temporary exhibit space in the City of Toronto building under the Gardiner.

Participants said they dislike:

- The "back of house" condition at the point of arrival from Exhibition Station and expressed interest in improvements to the public experience on Manitoba Drive.

Ideas and suggestions shared by participants:

- There should be a connected pathway from the Bentway to the planned Ontario Line station and existing Exhibition GO station.
- Accessibility improvements are a key consideration for many of the sites of the area which currently lack safe circulation routes.
- Clear, accessible multi-use paths to and from major trip generating uses, are an essential upgrade for the success of the area, however improvements to the public realm should not inhibit the operational capacities of Exhibition Place, the TTC and Metrolinx.

## Bentway-Fort York Core

Participants said they like:

- The War of 1812 public art, and want more public art under the Gardiner.

- Pedestrian bridges over the rail corridor. Destinations and attractions such as the Bentway and Stackt Market.

Participants said they dislike:

- Noise from traffic on the Gardiner.
- The underused parking lot at the end of Stadium Road because it should be used to connect the two parks.
- The crowded and narrow multi-use path by HMCS York and at Bathurst and Queens Quay. These trails are often crowded with cyclists, pedestrians, and dogs.

Ideas and suggestions shared by participants:

- Pave a path straight from the foot of the Garrison Crossing stairs to the stairs at the Fort York Visitor Centre, going down to The Bentway. The grass is worn because people walk this desired path anyway.
- Add a dog park to the open space north of the Garrison Crossing bridge.
- Create a wide bike/skate corridor under the Gardiner that connects to the skate trail.

## Under Gardiner Islands

Participants said they like:

- The beautiful green space and plantings along the south side of the rail corridor between Spadina and Dan Leckie Way.
- Planting strategies which incorporate native plant species.
- Public art, murals, and Indigenous art.
- Widespread support for more public spaces and landscaped areas, such as the planned the Mouth of the Creek Park,
- Connected bike lanes, and would like to see the network expanded.



## Participants said they dislike:

- Areas under the Gardiner here because are dirty (with litter and bird droppings) and left flooded or muddy after the rain.
- Areas that seem unsupportive of public spaces and connected pathways. For example, there are no sidewalks on Housey Street.
- Long wait times for pedestrian crossings.
- Dangerous pedestrian crossings at off-and-on-ramps.
- Construction barriers that act as barriers to pedestrians.
- Unprogrammed spaces where there is not much to do.
- A few participants noted that car traffic conflicts with pedestrians particularly when drivers will make right turns at no-turning-on-red intersections.

## Ideas and suggestions shared by participants:

- Mitigate traffic noise near residences
- Add outdoor cultural event and/or performance spaces. These spaces could accommodate food trucks, live music, and other artistic events.
- Use the under-utilized space under the Gardiner to the east of Dan Leckie Way; and between Queens Wharf and Bathurst. Suggestions include: a fenced dog park, market space, basketball or tennis courts, or general public space.
- Add sidewalks to the south side of Front between Spadina and Bathurst.
- Add an eastbound ramp down from the rail corridor pedestrian bridge.
- Turn Housey into a woonerf.

## Toronto Terrace

### Participants said they like:

- The pedestrian crossing at Spadina and Lakeshore because there is a rapid movement for pedestrians, bikes,

and cars without having to wait long compared to Jarvis. However, others said this intersection is difficult, feels unsafe and they would like to see better markings, signage and lights installed.

### Participants said they dislike:

- The walkway in Southern Linear Park is not well maintained and should have better lighting.
- Disconnected pathway at the south side of Roundhouse Park.
- The pedestrian crosswalk timer is too short at Spadina and Lake Shore.

### Ideas and suggestions shared by participants:

- Widen the sidewalk on the north side of Lake Shore west of Lower Simcoe. It is currently a pinch point and cannot fit wheelchairs or motorized wheelchairs.
- Connect the sidewalk on the north side of Lake Shore Boulevard West between Rees Street and Spadina Avenue to the walkway in Southern Linear Park.
- Replant the trees that were at the northwest corner of Lower Simcoe Street and Lake Shore Boulevard West.
- Add traffic lights at Rees and Bremner for pedestrian safety.

## **Glass Gardiner**

### **Participants said they like:**

- The continuous weather protection from the canopies/shelters on the west side of Bay south of Lake Shore; as well as the We the North mural.

### **Participants said they dislike:**

- The crossing at Lake Shore at Bay because there is a high volume of pedestrians walking to and from Union Station.
- Overcrowded sidewalks right next to a high-speed roadway which contributes to an unpleasant and dangerous pedestrian experience.

### **Ideas and suggestions shared by participants:**

- Add more landscaping, such as bioswales, street trees, vines, and green walls, on the north and south side of Lake Shore. This could also dampen noise from the traffic and add visual interest to the street. Replant the planter box at the northeast corner of Lower Simcoe and Lake Shore.
- Improve the street lighting along Lake Shore between Spadina to Cherry. Many of the streetlights on the pillars of the Gardiner are out and should be replaced with brighter lights. The light fixtures are currently very dusty and dim.
- Explore opportunities to expand sidewalks by removing bus laybys and low volume turning channels and off- and on-ramps and consider a road diet along Bay.

## 5.0 OTHER FEEDBACK

Participants also shared a number of comments about spaces and actions that are outside of the scope of the Under Gardiner PRP.

The following represents the range of participant feedback about topics and priorities beyond the scope of this study:

### What's working well and/or liked

- Safe and connected cycling infrastructure like the cycle tracks on Wellington Street or the separated bike lanes on Fort York Boulevard.
- Roundhouse Park because of the play spaces for kids.

### What's not working well and/or could be improved

- Disconnected pathways, such the dirt path between Queens Wharf and Bathurst, and the stairs to nowhere east of the Garrison Crossing path at Wellington.
- No pedestrian crossing at the south side of Front and Spadina.

### Opportunities, suggestions for improvement, and ideas for the future

- Expanding public space by decking over the rail corridor, replacing surface parking lots, or removing/replacing streets (such as Fleet Street).
- Open the Island Yacht Club dock to the public and add restaurants, shops, and activities.
- Connect the outer piers along the waterfront to create a seamless waterfront trail.
- Deck over the parking lot beside Jack Layton Ferry Terminal to expand the park space.
- Build the park at the foot of Yonge Street, east of the slip on the west side of 25 Queens Quay, in accordance with the Waterfront Plan.
- Open the "highline" park on the roof of the Hydro Substation at the Roundhouse.
- Suggestions to improve public transit (like constructing the Waterfront East LRT).
- Adding a toll or congestion charge to the Gardiner.
- Find ways to address traffic congestion and bottlenecks (for example ... adding double turning lanes on busy routes and alleviating the long car line-ups).
- Remove street parking in Liberty Village to expand the public realm with landscape improvements.