



City of Merritt

**Active Transportation Plan**  
**Existing Conditions Summary**

July 2020





## Prepared For

City of Merritt  
2185 Voght Street  
PO Box 189  
Merritt BC V1K 1B8

## Prepared By

Urban Systems Ltd.  
550 - 1090 Homer Street  
Vancouver, BC V6B 2W9

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# 1 Introduction

The City of Merritt is a vibrant community of over 7,100 residents in British Columbia's picturesque Nicola Valley. The City sits at the confluence of the Nicola and Coldwater rivers, within the traditional unceded territory of the Nlaka'pamux and Syilx. Merritt serves as a regional hub to the Nicola Valley, offering access to nature and recreation, public services, education, health care, employment, social support, and many other benefits. The City boasts a favourable climate, including mild winters with little snowfall and warm, dry, sunny summers with long hours of daylight, creating ideal conditions for walking, rolling, and cycling.

The City of Merritt is committed to improving walking, biking, and other active mobility options. Merritt is now creating an Active Transportation Plan that will provide direction for City staff to develop a well-connected, attractive trails and cycling network that is safe, convenient, and user-friendly, no matter what mode of transportation people use. This Existing Conditions Summary is intended to set the stage for the development of the Active Transportation Plan.

## What is Active Transportation?

Active transportation includes any form of human-powered transportation, such as walking, cycling, or rolling using a skateboard, in-line skates, scooter, wheelchair, and other modes. It may also include winter-based active modes (e.g. cross-country skiing and snowshoeing), water-based active modes (e.g. canoe, kayak, and stand-up paddle boarding), and even horseback riding. There are also several new and emerging transportation modes that can fit in this category and may use the same trails and pathways, such as e-scooters, electric skateboards, and other small, one-person electric vehicles.

The focus of the Merritt Active Transportation Plan is on people walking, rolling, and cycling. This includes people of all ages and abilities using a variety of mobility devices (e.g. walkers, wheelchairs, and mobility scooters) and bicycle types (e.g. bicycles with trailers, e-bikes, bicycles built for people with mobility challenges, and others). Considering all these active modes is crucial when planning the overall transportation network.

Active transportation facilities should be comfortable, convenient, safe, and attractive for everyone, regardless of age or ability. This is often referred to as All Ages and Abilities (AAA) facilities. Planning and designing for people of all ages and abilities is a national and international best practice that should be aspired to for all active transportation facilities in Merritt.



## 1.1 Study Purpose and Objectives

The Active Transportation Plan will provide a course of action that reflects the community's priorities and available resources. The Plan will focus on the cycling network in Merritt, looking at trails and off-street pathways as well as potential on-street bicycle facilities. It will also provide recommendations for making the City safer and more comfortable for people walking and rolling. The goal is to make Merritt even more sustainable, dynamic, equitable, and inclusive for people of all ages and abilities.

Key objectives include:

- Outlining strategies, recommended infrastructure, policies, and education to help enable and encourage active transportation as preferred modes of transportation.
- Preserving and enhancing cycling and walking trails along the Nicola and Coldwater Rivers, and connecting to the regional cycling network including the Kettle Valley Railway Corridor and nearby mountain biking trails.
- Connecting existing trails with neighbourhoods and key destinations within the City and ensuring cycling and trail infrastructure is integrated into new developments.
- Promoting safe and connected active transportation routes in the city centre to provide greater transportation options.
- Looking for opportunities to promote cycle tourism and other ways to promote and strengthen the City's economy, including revitalizing the downtown.
- Encouraging a healthy lifestyle by providing active transportation infrastructure and promoting cycling as a form of transportation and recreation.

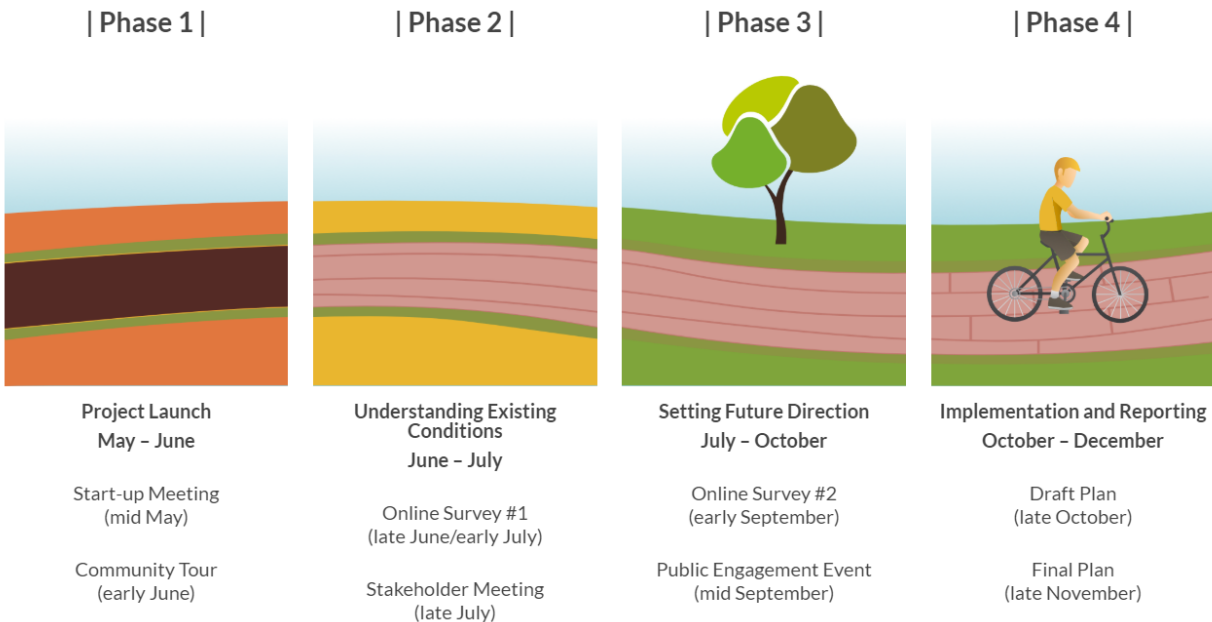
## 1.2 Study Process

The Active Transportation Plan is being developed over approximately six months and involves four phases, as described below.

- **Phase 1: Project Launch (May - June 2020).** This phase involved the project kick-off meeting between City staff and the consultant team, collecting and reviewing background information and data, and conducting a community tour to explore existing conditions. This also included preparing a communications and engagement strategy for future phases of the planning process.
- **Phase 2: Understanding Existing Conditions (June - July 2020).** This phase focused on understanding the existing state of active transportation in the City, including a review of existing related policy documents, policies, and facilities, as well as engaging with the public to better understand existing issues and opportunities related to active transportation. We are currently completing Phase 2.
- **Phase 3: Setting Future Direction (July - October 2020).** This phase will focus on exploring possibilities for the future of active transportation in Merritt. This includes confirming the Active Transportation Plan's vision, goals, and key principles. It will then develop a draft active transportation network and identify policies and programs to enhance active transportation for all. Community and stakeholder engagement will take place to develop ideas and review the draft content.
- **Phase 4: Implementation and Reporting (October - December 2020).** This phase will involve refining and prioritizing the draft content presented in Phase 3 and developing an Implementation Plan, including identifying project costs and funding strategies. A final Active Transportation Plan document will be created and then presented to City Council for approval.



This Existing Conditions report summarizes the findings of the first two phases of the Active Transportation Plan process.



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## 1.3 Communications and Engagement

An effective and meaningful communications and engagement strategy is critical to the success of the Active Transportation Plan. The City is keen to hear from a range of voices so that the final Active Transportation Plan is inclusive, forward-thinking, and reflects the needs and desires of the community. During Phase 2 of the planning process, Merritt residents were invited to provide input on the challenges they face when using active modes of transportation in Merritt, as well as the opportunities for improvements.

Engagement was initially scheduled for June and September. With the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and the need for physical distancing, engagement activities in June were held virtually through an online survey and social media dialogue. The online survey was available through the City's website and promoted heavily through social media and other marketing tactics from June 19 to July 8, 2020. In total, 164 responses were collected. A separate Online Survey Summary Report has been created to outline the detailed engagement results (**Appendix A**).



## 2 Setting the Context

This section describes key community features in Merritt that are relevant to the Active Transportation Plan. Understanding the geographic, demographic, and policy influences on walking, rolling, and cycling in Merritt will ensure the development of a Cycling Master Plan that meets the community's needs.

### 2.1 Benefits of Active Transportation

Promoting and providing more opportunities for active transportation can play an important role in enhancing the community's health, environment, and economy. It also ensures community members can safely move in and around Merritt. Key benefits of active transportation include:

- **Health Benefits:** Walking and cycling are some of the easiest and most affordable ways for people in Merritt to add exercise to their daily routines. Investing in active transportation has been shown to create more physically active communities, which can in turn improve psychological well-being, prevent weight gain and obesity, and reduce the risk of numerous chronic diseases.
- **Safety Benefits:** Properly designed active transportation facilities that provide dedicated spaces for active transportation users and make people more visible within the roadway have the potential to reduce the risk of collisions, creating a safer transportation system for all road users. Roads designed for slower motor vehicle speeds have been shown to decrease the probability of serious injury and death for active transportation users, and they are much more comfortable for people walking, rolling, and cycling.
- **Economic Benefits:** Neighbourhoods and destinations that are attractive and accessible for people walking and cycling can attract more visitors, who will in turn be patrons of local services and amenities. Investing in active transportation can result in a more balanced transportation system that is cost-effective and more equitable, making sure that people of all socioeconomic backgrounds are able to travel safely throughout the City.
- **Environmental Benefits:** Transportation is one of the largest contributors to greenhouse gas emissions in the province, with motor vehicles the main culprit. Active transportation can help to lower emissions while also reducing air pollution and motor vehicle congestion.
- **Societal Benefits:** Active transportation encourages social interaction, helping to build trust, respect, understanding, and a sense of co-operation amongst community members. Studies have shown that these important social interactions diminish when motor vehicle volumes increase and walking infrastructure decreases. These interactions are vital for people of all ages and abilities.

### 2.2 Community Profile

Merritt serves as a regional hub for the Nicola Valley, offering a diverse array of services and opportunities for residents, businesses, and visitors. Forestry, agriculture, ranching, and mining traditionally formed the backbone of the economy, but the City's diversifying economy now includes growing retail, high-tech, and tourism sectors. The City works closely with its neighbouring First Nations and is home to the Nicola Valley Institute of Technology (NVIT), BC's only Indigenous public post-secondary institution, which draws in students from across the province.



## Demographics

Merritt is a diverse community of over 7,600 people. The City grew by only 0.4% between 2011 and 2016, which is less than the Thompson-Nicola Regional District (TNRD) growth rate of 3.3%. In recent years however, the number of building permits and development applications for housing has increased and the City's population has grown.

The average age in Merritt is 43.9, which is nearly identical to the TNRD average of 43.3. Approximately 16% of Merritt's population are under the age of 15, while 22.5% are over 65 – slightly higher than the TNRD average of 20%. This means that about 39% of Merritt's population is either too young to drive or are seniors. Each of these groups benefit from safe and convenient alternatives to driving. Walking and cycling can provide a range of independent mobility options for those who do not have access to motor vehicles.

In 2016, 51% of Merritt's population was female and 49% were male. About 23% of Merritt's population identified as Indigenous, and another 10% were immigrants. Furthermore, over 17% of the population were considered low income in 2015.

Understanding community demographics is important for creating an equitable transportation system that is safe, comfortable, and accessible for all, regardless of their identity. It is especially important to focus on centering equity and supporting marginalized populations, which may include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Women
- Seniors
- The Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour (BIPOC) community
- Immigrants and refugees
- The 2SLGBTQ+ community
- People who are socio-economically disadvantaged
- People experiencing homelessness
- People experiencing addiction

Marginalized populations face unique and intersecting challenges when navigating the transportation system, including the threat of discrimination and violence. They may be uncomfortable walking, rolling, and cycling due to personal safety concerns. These populations – especially seniors and the BIPOC community – also tend to be overrepresented in traffic fatalities and serious injuries.

Additionally, these populations may not have the same level of access to motor vehicles or transit. Transportation costs are second only to housing as a percentage of household spending in North America, and transportation spending is disproportionately high among low- and moderate-income families. This lack of access to transportation services can limit individual economic development and cause social exclusion. Active transportation is an affordable transportation option that can help all residents participate fully in society, as long as their personal safety needs are met.

## Land Use

Merritt is a compact community covering an area of 26 square kilometres. The City's relatively flat topography – aside from the steep hillsides – and its compact form make it ideal for active transportation.

A community overview with land use designations is shown in Figure 1. The City's 2011 Official Community Plan (OCP) – which is currently being updated – divides Merritt into eleven sectors. The City has two primary commercial areas – the main City Centre downtown and the service district in the Voght Street/North Entry sector, on either side of the Coquihalla Highway interchange. The Walmart Supercentre on the east side of the Coquihalla Highway is an important destination. The Voght Street/North Entry sector is also home to the Nicola Valley General Hospital.

Downtown Merritt is defined by walkable local streets with a 'small town' feel and a distinct country character – Merritt has deep connections to ranching and is known as the Canadian Country Music Capital of Canada. The City Centre includes several key destinations that generate active transportation trips, including City Hall, the library, Nicola Valley Memorial Arena, and various health services. The City is prioritizing revitalizing the City Centre and promoting tourism.

Residential sectors containing several schools surround the City Centre. A belt of parks, natural grassland, and ranchland dominate the eastern part of the City, running along the Nicola River. Popular parks such as Central Park and Rotary Park, as well as the Merritt Golf and Country Club, sit just north of the City Centre. Central Park contains a skateboard park, a multi-use sports box, and the Rotary Bike Park, a popular pump track that attracts cyclists – especially children – from across the City.

South of the Coldwater River, there is a residential neighbourhood called Collettville and industrial land, including the Merritt Green Energy Plant. Another strip of industrial land runs along the north side of the Coldwater River.

The East Merritt/Diamond Vale sector southeast of downtown has a mix of residential, commercial, and industrial lands. This sector of the City is lacking in community amenities, including parks and greenspace. Other sectors of the City are also lacking in amenities, which will be examined as part of the OCP update.

The benchlands to the north of the City comprise a growing residential neighbourhood, NVIT, and a hillside filled with grasslands, forest, and trails. The North Bench Neighborhood Development Plan is currently being developed. Most of the existing residential land use in this neighbourhood is lower density single family, however the OCP identifies higher density future developments. The City is ensuring that existing hillside trails remain in place. New developments in the southern parts of Merritt are also being planned around existing trails to ensure that residents maintain access to these valuable community amenities.



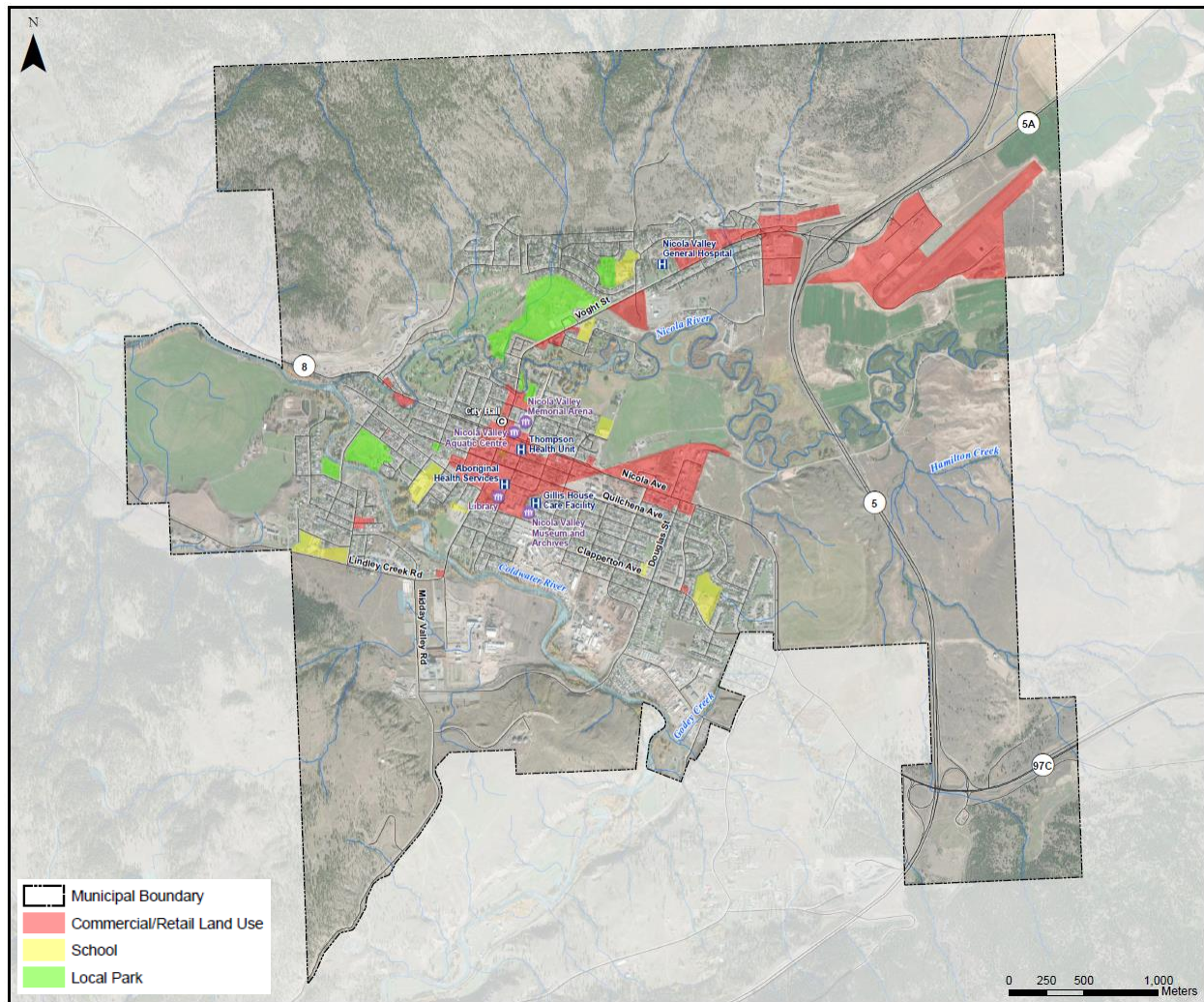


Figure 1: Merritt Community Overview and Land Use

### Barriers

Merritt's geography leads to physical barriers that create mobility challenges for people walking, rolling, and cycling (see Figure 2). The Coldwater and Nicola rivers form north-south barriers as they snake through the City. There are limited crossings of each river, and many of these crossings are narrow and missing safe and comfortable active transportation facilities.

The highways and major arterial roadways can also be challenging to cross and travel along for active transportation users. Highway 5 (Coquihalla) runs along the eastern edge of the City but acts as a major barrier to the commercial area along Crawford Avenue next to Merritt Airport, which also contains the bus terminal for Merritt's regional bus service, operated by Ebus. Nicola Avenue and Voght Street are major arterial routes that run through the City. The high motor vehicle volumes and speeds along with a lack of comfortable walking and cycling facilities on these roadways creates a disconnect between different sectors of the City.

The surrounding hillsides and ranchland also serve to define movement patterns in the City, with the topography of the slopes in the benchlands area create a potential barrier for some users.

Finally, there can be a psychological barrier to the uptake of cycling in Merritt. Cycling is sometimes perceived as a last resort, reserved for those who cannot afford to drive. This negative perception needs to be addressed for cycling to become a more common choice for daily trips and commuting. The City is working on addressing this barrier through educational and promotional events such as Bike to Work Week.

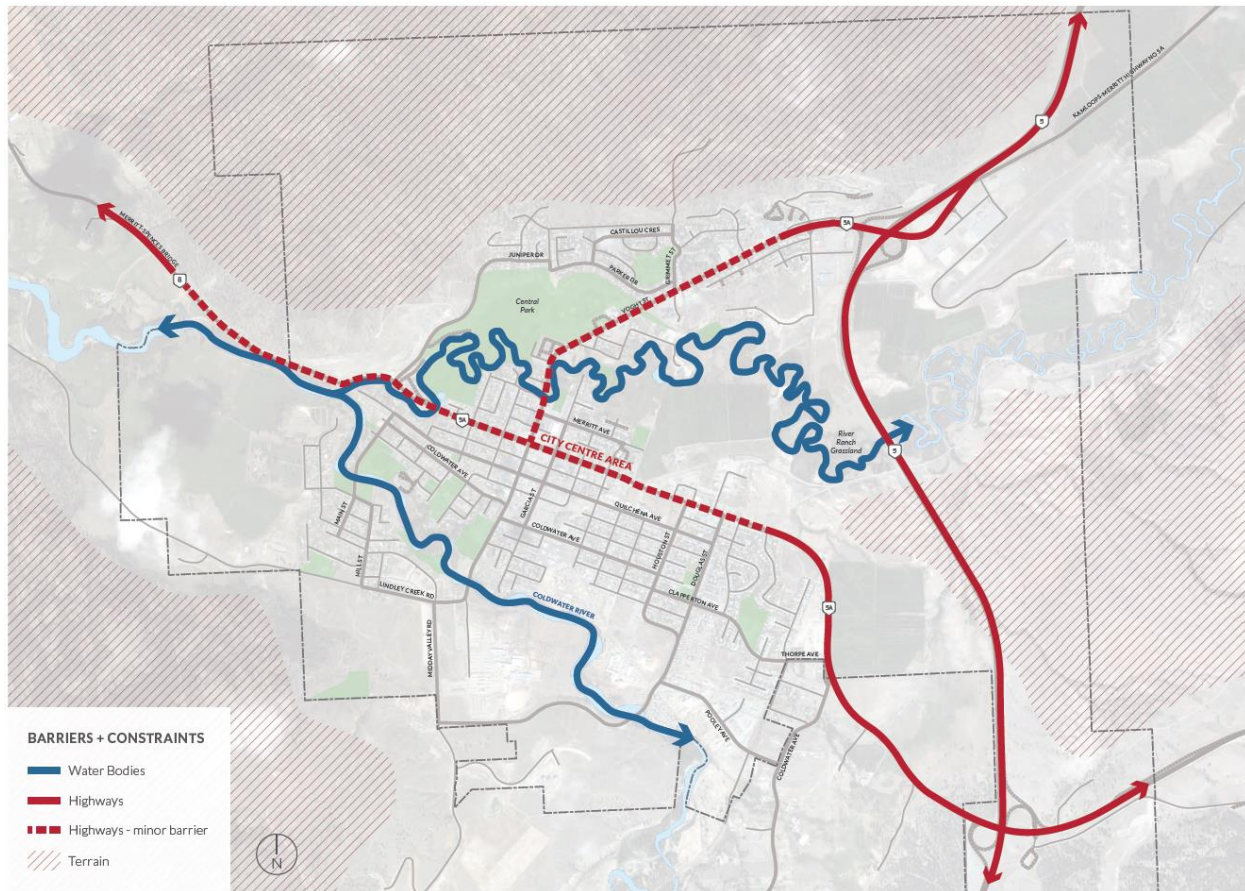


Figure 2: Barriers and Constraints (Source: Merritt Wayfinding Signage Strategy)

### 2.3 Related Programs and Policies

Several of the key plans and policies that are guiding Merritt's development and growth highlight the role active transportation plays in maintaining a healthy and sustainable community. The following policies, plans, bylaws, and initiatives were reviewed to help inform the development of the Active Transportation Plan.

#### Official Community Plan (OCP) - (2011)

The City's current OCP has several sections and policies that touch on active transportation and promoting more walking and cycling in Merritt. The community vision has a component that speaks to residents and visitors being able to move freely through the City by walking and cycling both on streets and trails. It also speaks to connections to regional trails and access to outdoor recreation. Some of the specific transportation related policies focus on the need to implement new and upgrade existing streets, pathways, and trails to facilitate safe and efficient movement of people throughout the community. It highlights the need to install new sidewalks and enhance existing infrastructure to ensure they are accessible to all. It also identifies developing a city cycling and pedestrian trail plan that



connects all neighbourhoods to downtown. In the spring of 2020, the City initiated an update to the OCP. The recommendations of the Active Transportation Plan will be incorporated into the OCP update.

### Parks, Recreation, and Culture Master Plan (2017)

The Parks, Recreation and Culture Master Plan provides direction to the City regarding park use, facilities, and services. The plan's vision focuses on providing a system of inclusive, accessible, and diverse parks, trails, recreation, and cultural opportunities, which promote a healthy and active lifestyle for residents and attracts visitors. The plan notes that through discussions with community members and stakeholders, trails are considered a priority for residents and the use of trails is a popular recreational activity. The plan has several recommendations and a proposed trail network that will be reviewed and incorporated into the Active Transportation Plan.

### Zoning Bylaw (2015)

The Zoning Bylaw includes bicycle parking space requirements based on building use and size. Requirements are included for both short-term and long-term bicycle parking as part of new developments. The number of bicycle parking spaces depends on the class of building. The City has completed a draft update to the Zoning Bylaw which includes updated requirements for bicycle parking and includes parking guidance on electric mobility scooters, e-bikes, push scooters, and similar active transportation modes.

**Short-term bicycle parking** is typically outdoors and located in front of a building or within the public right-of-way.

**Long-term bicycle parking** is typically indoors or covered and located within an enclosed space, making it more secure.

### Traffic Bylaw (2008)

The City's current Traffic Bylaw identifies an area within the downtown where people on roller skates, inline skates, skateboards, foot-propelled scooters, and other small apparatuses are not permitted. It also notes that no person shall ride a bicycle on a sidewalk or walkway. It does note that light carriages, and chairs that are for children or used as mobility aids can be operated in a bikeway.

### City Centre Improvement Plan (Updated 2008)

The City of Merritt completed the "City Centre Improvement Plan" in July 2005 and it was updated in 2008. The plan highlights the opportunities and barriers for enhancing active transportation within the City Centre including, walking tours, adding bicycle parking, furnishing features, streetscape enhancements, and sidewalk upgrades (widening and adding a boardwalk style esthetic). It also recommends investigating the potential for a downtown staging and a service point for touring on the KVR trail.

Other City plans that were reviewed as part of the existing conditions review include the:

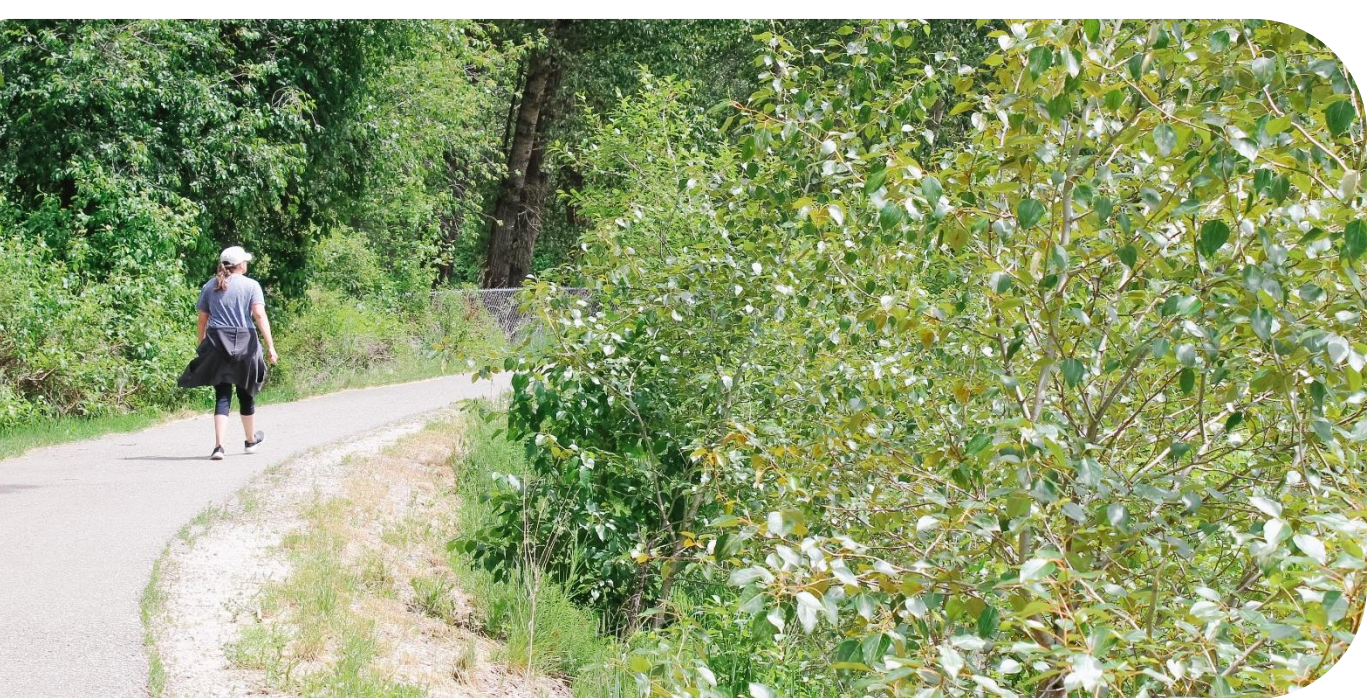
- Wayfinding Signage Strategy (2017)
- Age Friendly Action Plan (2016)
- Economic Development Action Plan (2015)
- Integrated Growth Strategy (2010)
- Voght Corridor Traffic Study (2005)
- Subdivision and Development Servicing Bylaw (1987)

The City also has several programs, facilities, and information available that support active transportation, such as participating in Bike to Work and Bike to School Week, the Rotary Bike Park, the promotion of mountain biking and hiking, and providing some short-term bicycle parking within the downtown.

### Regional Plans and Studies

There are also several regional plans and documents that were reviewed to understand existing conditions and will be incorporated into the Active Transportation Plan. Many of these documents highlight the importance of promoting more transportation options. This includes promoting walking, cycling, and trail infrastructure to provide more recreational and tourism opportunities, and promoting more transportation events. The plans reviewed include:

- Climate Action Revenue Incentive (CARIP) Public Report from 2018
- Tourism Plan for Merritt and Nicola Valley (2014)
- Thompson Nicola Regional District's Growth Strategy (2013)





### 3 Active Transportation in Merritt Today

This section describes existing conditions in Merritt, including travel patterns, infrastructure, and key issues and opportunities.

#### 3.1 Travel Patterns

Understanding the existing travel patterns in Merritt will allow for the development of an Active Transportation Plan that meets the context and needs of the community.

##### Mode of Travel

Merritt's compact community core means that most residents commute relatively short distances (15 minutes or less) to work and school. Based on Canadian Census Journey to Work census data from 2016, approximately 12% of residents in Merritt travel by foot to work and/or school, while 2% travel by bike (Figure 3). This does not take into consideration the number of trips made for recreational purposes, errands, and other daily tasks.

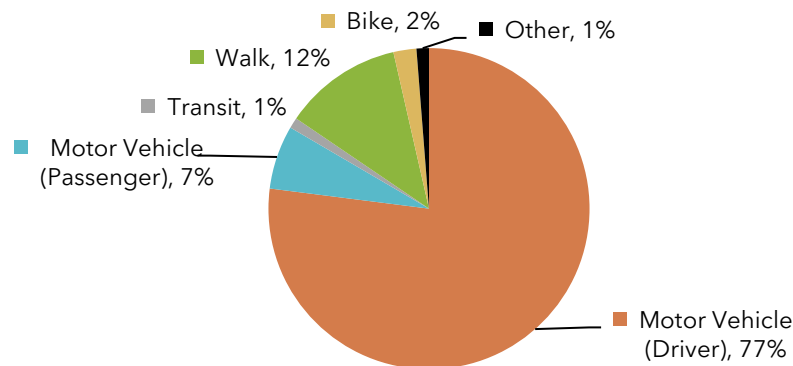


Figure 3: Journey to Work Mode Share, 2016 (Source: Statistics Canada)

In addition to Census Data, information collected through public engagement conducted in the first phase of the project (June-July 2020) has led to a greater understanding of travel patterns in Merritt. Survey respondents were then asked to specify their typical pre-pandemic mode of transportation for their daily needs, such as going to work, school, an appointment, or picking up groceries. As shown in Figure 4, more than 75% of respondents drive alone as their main mode of transportation. Transit was also provided as an option; however, those who participated in the survey did not choose this mode of transportation as their typical mode.

Weather is known to influence transportation mode choice, especially regarding active transportation. Over half (58%) of respondents noted that weather does not influence the mode of transportation they use, which may reflect the high percentage of respondents that typically drive.

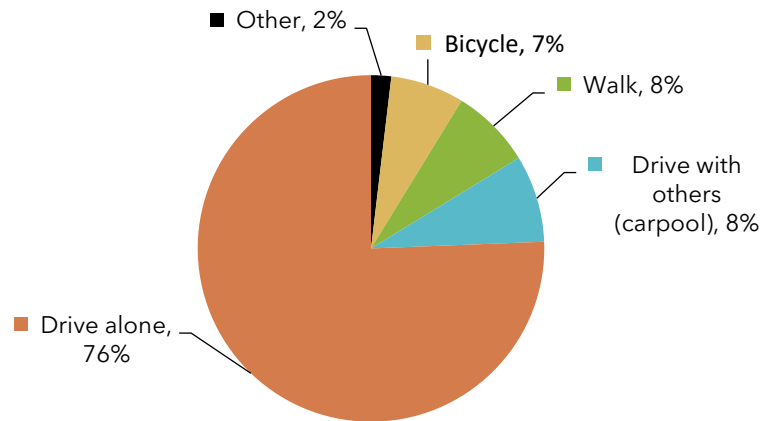


Figure 4: Typical Commuting Mode, pre-COVID-19 Pandemic (Source: ATP Survey)

## Impact of COVID-19 on Travel Patterns

It is important to note that the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic represents a serious new public health challenge that has impacted travel patterns in communities around the world, including Merritt. During the height of the pandemic in spring 2020, regular travel patterns were disrupted as people stayed home for all but the most essential trips, with many people still working or attending school virtually as part of the 'new normal'. As a result, many of the survey questions asked participants to consider their transportation patterns before the pandemic began.

With COVID-19 impacting individuals in different ways, it was important to understand whether Merritt residents have changed their transportation habits because of the pandemic. The majority of those who participated in the survey (73%) indicated that their typical transportation habits have not changed because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Those who answered yes were asked to specify how their transportation habits have changed. In total, 44 respondents provided a response, with 45% indicating that they are driving and commuting less due to working at home. Respondents also noted they have been walking, running, hiking, and cycling more (36%), and others have limited their travel outside of their home to only necessary trips (16%).



### Trip Purpose and Frequency

People walk, roll, and cycle in Merritt for a variety of reasons and to many different destinations. According to the ATP survey, residents choose to bike for exercise (64%), to have fun (51%), and to enjoy nature, parks, and trails (49%). A quarter of respondents cycle to work or school, while 24% access shops, restaurants, or services by bike. The survey found that 30% of respondents ride a bicycle 1-4 days a month and 24% ride 1-3 days per week, while only 4% of respondents identified as daily bicycle riders. Approximately 32% of respondents never ride a bike.

The survey found that exercise (82%), enjoying nature, parks, or trails (69%), and spending time with family or friends (60%) were the most popular reasons for walking. Importantly, over half (54%) of respondents walk to access shops, restaurants, or services, while another 24% indicated that they commute to work or school by foot. About 37% of respondents walk daily, compared to 12% who either never walk or walk only a few times a month.

Survey respondents were also asked how they currently use Merritt's existing trail network, with walking or hiking listed as the most popular reason (76%). Enjoying nature/wildlife (44%), biking (43%), accessing a park (42%), and spending time with friends and family (42%) were also popular activities among respondents. The survey found that trails were used more frequently for recreation purposes than commuting.



### 3.2 Existing Transportation Network

Merritt's existing transportation network, including its roads, active transportation facilities, and transit network, are summarized below. End-of-trip facilities and safety are also outlined.

#### Existing Road Network

Merritt's road network consists of a series of local, collector, and arterial streets, in addition to a provincial roadway that bisect the City. Figure 5 identifies the major roadways in Merritt. There are limited road connections to the North Nicola, Bench, and North Entry areas. Voght Street serves as a primary north-south connector, while Nicola Avenue is the primary east-west connector.

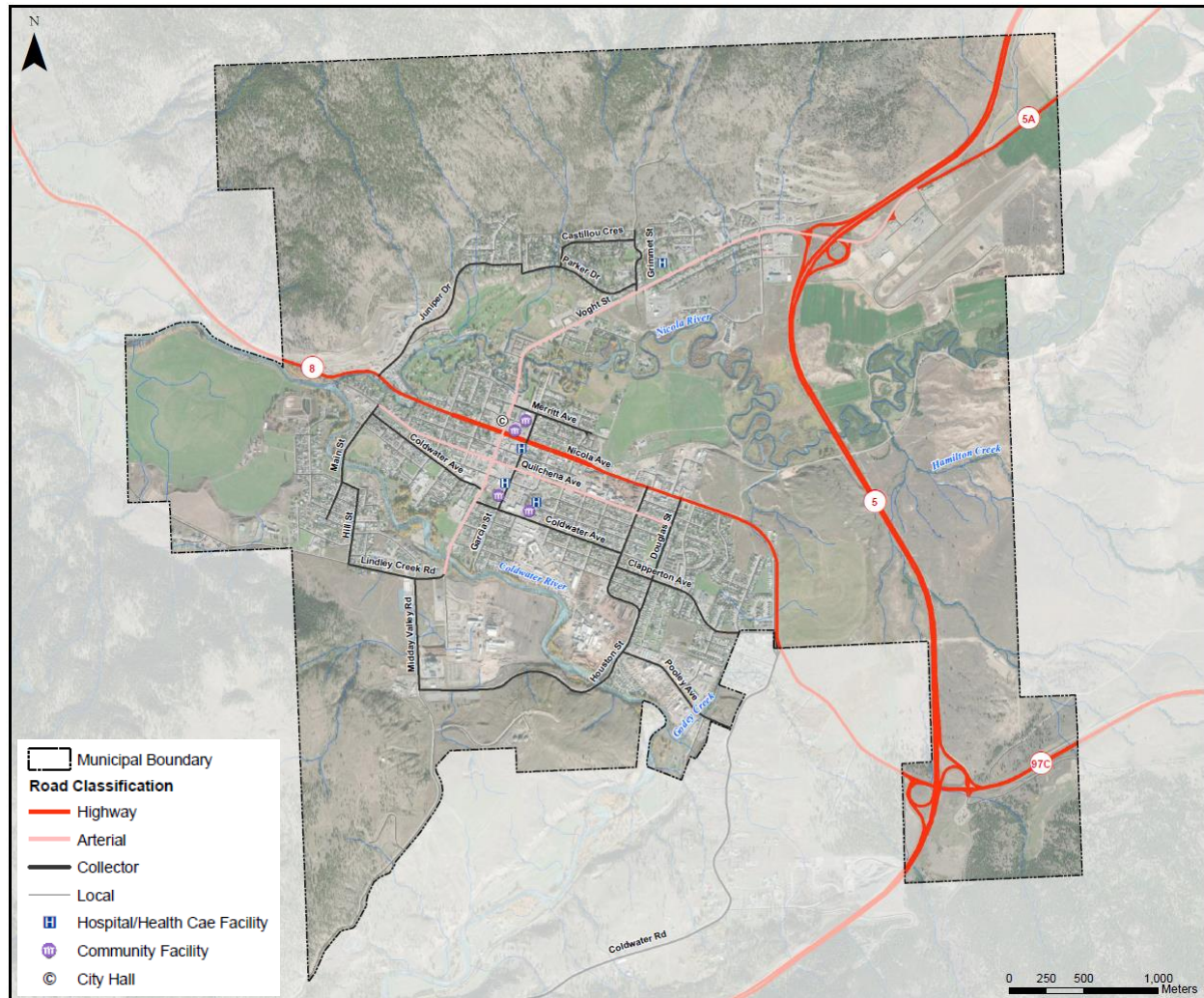


Figure 5: Road Classification



### Existing Active Transportation Network

Merritt's existing active transportation network consists of sidewalks, multi-use paths, walking paths, and trails (Figure 6). Table 1 shows the total length and percentage of each active transportation facility. Merritt has over 36 km of sidewalks, with good coverage in the City Centre and portions of East Merritt / Diamond Vale. However, there are significant gaps in the sidewalk network, with some neighbourhoods lacking sidewalks on one or both sides of most roads.

There are currently no on-street bicycle facilities in Merritt, with cyclists having to share the lane with motor vehicles or use the 3.6 km of multi-use trails through Central Park and along the Coldwater River. The City is currently constructing painted bicycle lanes along Voght Street, which would tie into the existing multi-use pathway on Voght Street and connect the North Entry and North Bench areas to the City Centre.

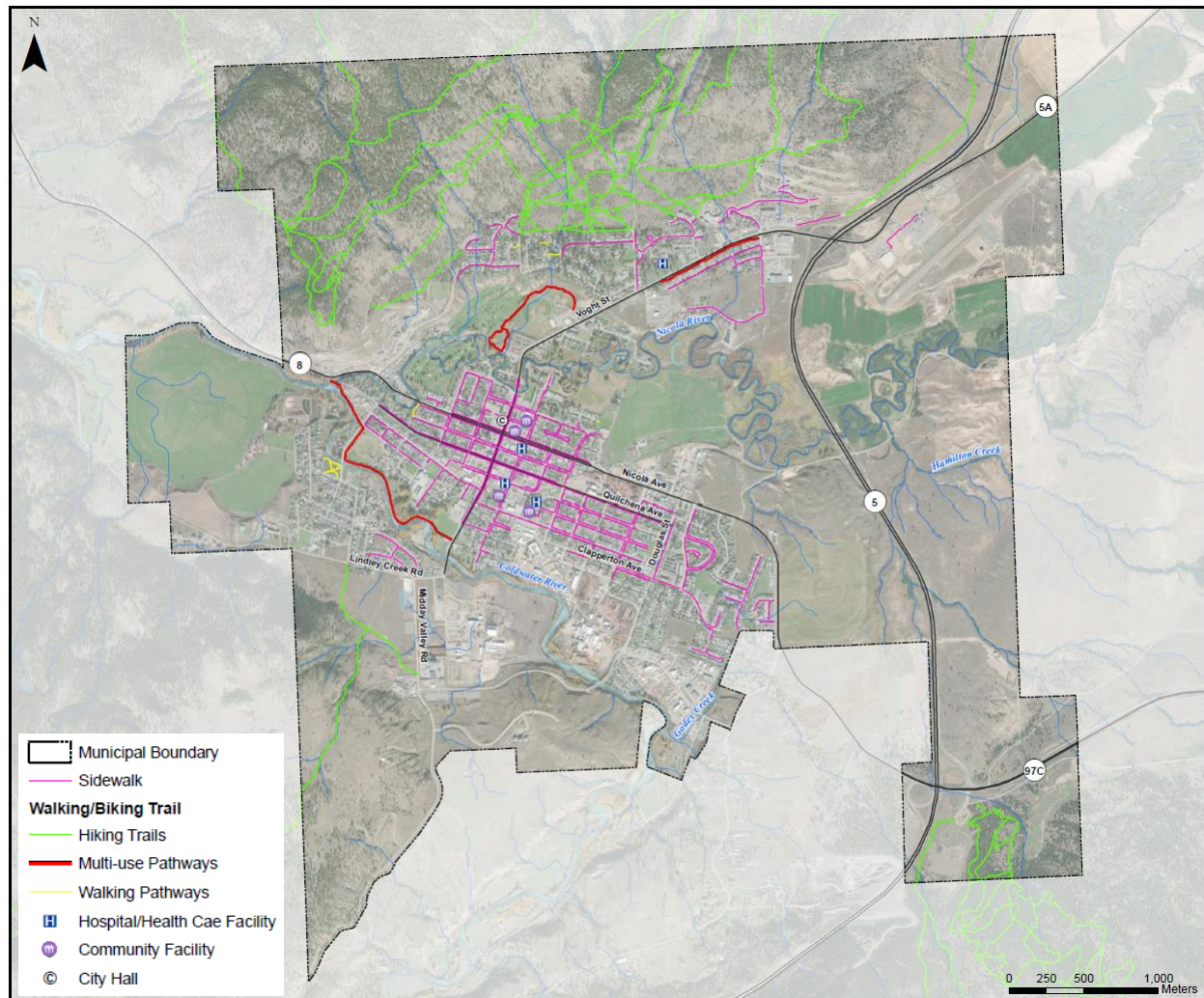


Figure 6: Existing Active Transportation Facilities

Table 1 – Existing Active Transportation Facilities

| Active Transportation Facilities | Length   | %     |
|----------------------------------|----------|-------|
| Hiking trails                    | 153.5 km | 79.0% |
| Multi-Use Pathways               | 3.6 km   | 1.9%  |
| Walking Pathways                 | 0.7 km   | 0.4%  |
| Sidewalks                        | 36.4 km  | 18.7% |

Merritt has an extensive network of over 150 km of trails on the outskirts of the City. These trails are well used by walkers, hikers, dog walkers, joggers, and cyclists, including mountain bikers. The primary biking trails in Merritt are Swakum Mountain, Coutlee Plateau, Iron Mountain, and Sugarloaf Mountain.

Merritt's trail network also connects to a larger regional trail network, including the Kettle Valley Rail (KVR) Trail. The KVR and the Columbia & Western Rail Trail is the longest rail trail network in BC, with almost 650 km of connected pathways extending from Hope to Castlegar. The segment of KVR connecting to Merritt is a spur from the main trail running along the Coldwater River and south towards Kingsvale.

### Transit Integration

Multi-modal integration is an important aspect of creating a convenient and attractive active transportation network. Active transportation users often utilize multiple different transportation modes throughout their journey, so it is important to ensure that all modes are safe, appealing, and convenient for all users.

Merritt's transit system is operated by BC Transit and is shown in Figure 7. It consists of three routes offering daily service within the City, including the North End, Collettville, and Diamond Vale routes. A fourth route, Lower Nicola, runs west along Highway 8 to the Lower Nicola community and offers service Monday to Saturday. All four routes meet in the City Centre at Voght Street and Nicola Avenue.

Certain routes offer a curb-to-curb, shared transit service on-request to and from destinations in the Merritt area. On-request service operates five days a week, Monday through Friday, with trips operating at 8:45 AM, 9:45 AM, 12:45 PM, and 2:45 PM. Trips must be booked by phone 24 hours in advance. Most BC Transit buses have bicycle racks capable of holding two bicycles at a time. However, the bike racks block the headlights on community buses, so they cannot be used after dark.



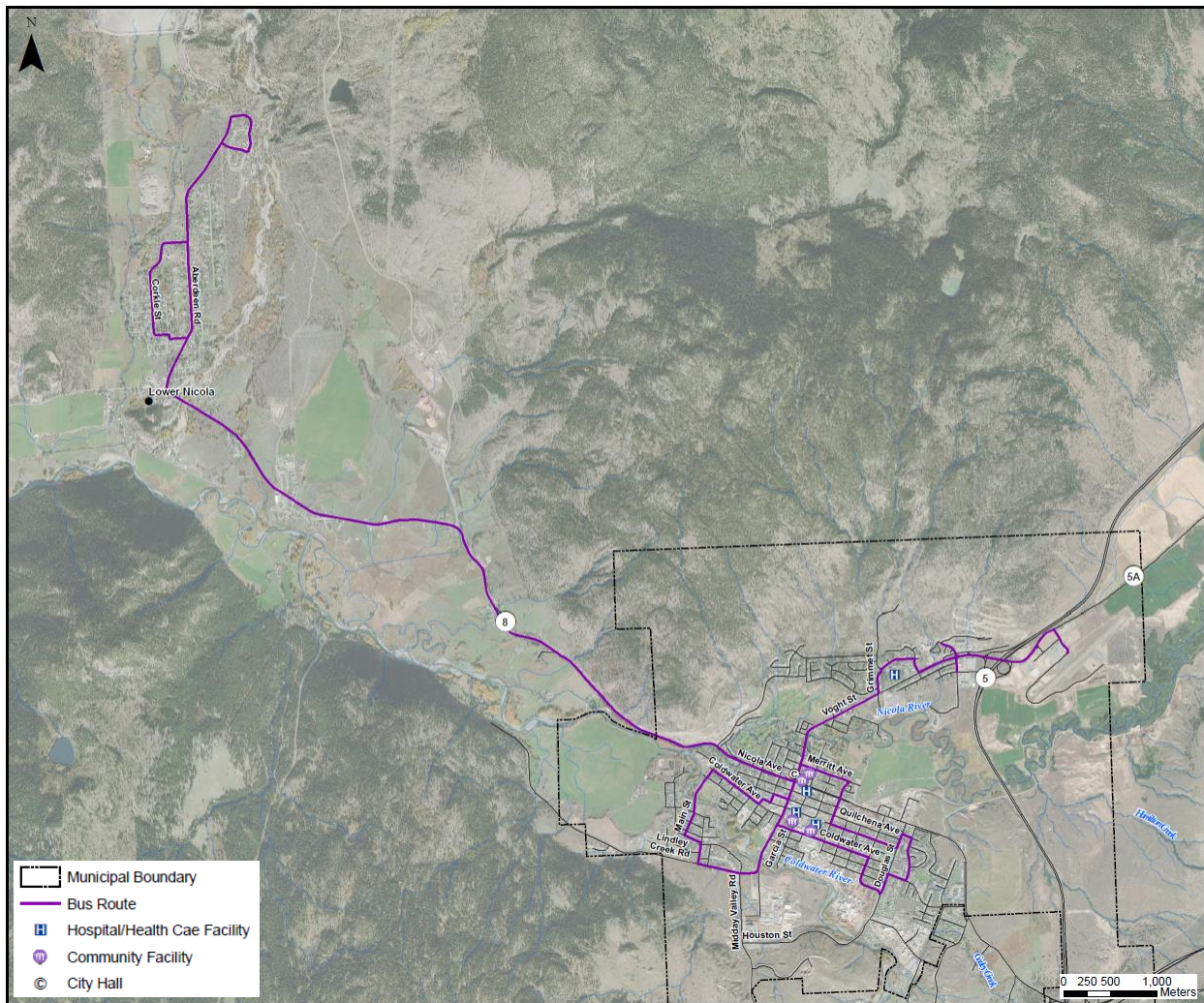


Figure 7: Transit Network

BC Transit operates a regional Health Connections transit service to Kamloops and Kelowna is available for people requiring access to non-emergency medical appointments. Although medical appointments have priority, everyone is eligible to use this service if space is available. Trips must be pre-booked and cost \$5 for a one-way fare.

Additionally, private bus operator Ebus - which provides regional bus service across BC and Alberta - offers service to Merritt. Passenger must board at the Husky Truck Stop along Airport Road in the North Entry area. Ebus connects to several BC destinations, as shown in Figure 8.





Figure 8: Ebus Regional Route Map (Source: Ebus)

### End-of-Trip Facilities

End of trip facilities such as secure bicycle parking, showers, and change rooms can make cycling and multi-modal trips seamless and enjoyable. Bicycle racks can be found throughout Merritt at key destinations such as the Library, Arena, and City Hall.

Merritt's current and proposed updated Zoning Bylaw lay out requirements for short- and long-term bicycle parking, including design standards and supply requirements. Limited bicycle parking is required at several land uses in the City, including multi-family housing, schools, recreation facilities, and offices. The Zoning Bylaw is still in draft and these requirements may change as a result.

The ATP survey asked respondents to identify where bike parking is most needed in Merritt. More than half of respondents identified downtown (70%), grocery stores (64%), and shopping centres (51%) as locations in most need of bike parking (Figure 9).

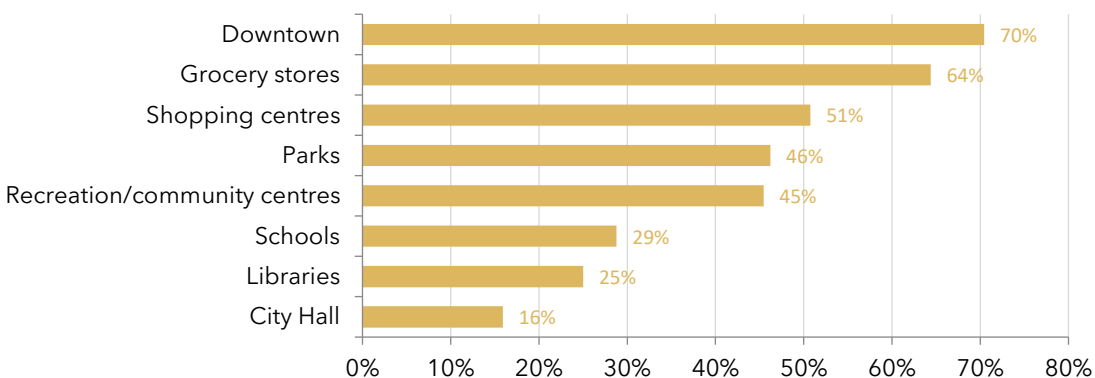


Figure 9: Locations where Bike Parking is Needed (Source: ATP Survey)

## Safety

Transportation safety is a core consideration in the planning of a transportation system. All residents, workers, and visitors have the right to access the transportation system safely, regardless of their mode choice. Unfortunately, traffic collisions and other transportation safety issues have had a substantial toll on human life and well-being. Traffic collisions also produce significant personal and societal economic impacts due to emergency response spending, long-term healthcare costs, and property damage.

A review of ICBC data found that between 2014 and 2018, there were a total of eight motor vehicle collisions involving a cyclist and 13 involving a pedestrian. Four of the 13 pedestrian-involved collisions occurred at the intersection of Voght Street and Quilchena Avenue, while another two occurred at Voght Street and Coldwater Avenue. The most common locations of cyclist-involved collisions were at Blair Street and Quilchena Avenue (2) and Chapman Street and Nicola Avenue (2).

Over the same five-year span, there were a total of 196 collisions in Merritt that involved a casualty (injury or fatality). Twenty of these collisions occurred at the Highway 5 and Highway 5A interchange. Another 14 occurred at the intersection of Nicola Avenue and Voght Street in the City Centre. Within the City, Voght Street, Nicola Avenue, and Quilchena Avenue stand out as the highest casualty locations.

### Safety Issues from Survey Respondents

Safety issues were identified in the ATP survey, especially regarding cycling. Half of respondents noted that they feel mostly or very unsafe when cycling in Merritt, compared to 37% of respondents who feel mostly or very safe cycling. By comparison, only 18% of respondents feel mostly to very unsafe when walking in Merritt, with more than half of respondents feeling mostly safe (64%) or very safe (12%) when walking.

Respondents noted that the lack of active transportation facilities made them feel unsafe, and that there are conflicts between people cycling and driving. When asked to identify three neighbourhoods where they would like to see active transportation improvements, residents identified the City Centre (86%), East Merritt/Diamond Vale (48%), and Bench (35%) as the top three locations.



### 3.3 Key Issues and Opportunities

Survey respondents were asked to identify what the main issues or challenges are when it comes to walking and cycling in Merritt.

#### Issues

In terms of issues or challenges for cycling in Merritt, the lack of bicycle routes separated from traffic and dedicated on-street bicycle lanes were identified by more than half of respondents (61%) as a main challenge (Figure 10). Of those who selected 'other', theft and a lack of cycling knowledge from drivers and cyclists were identified as additional issues/challenges.

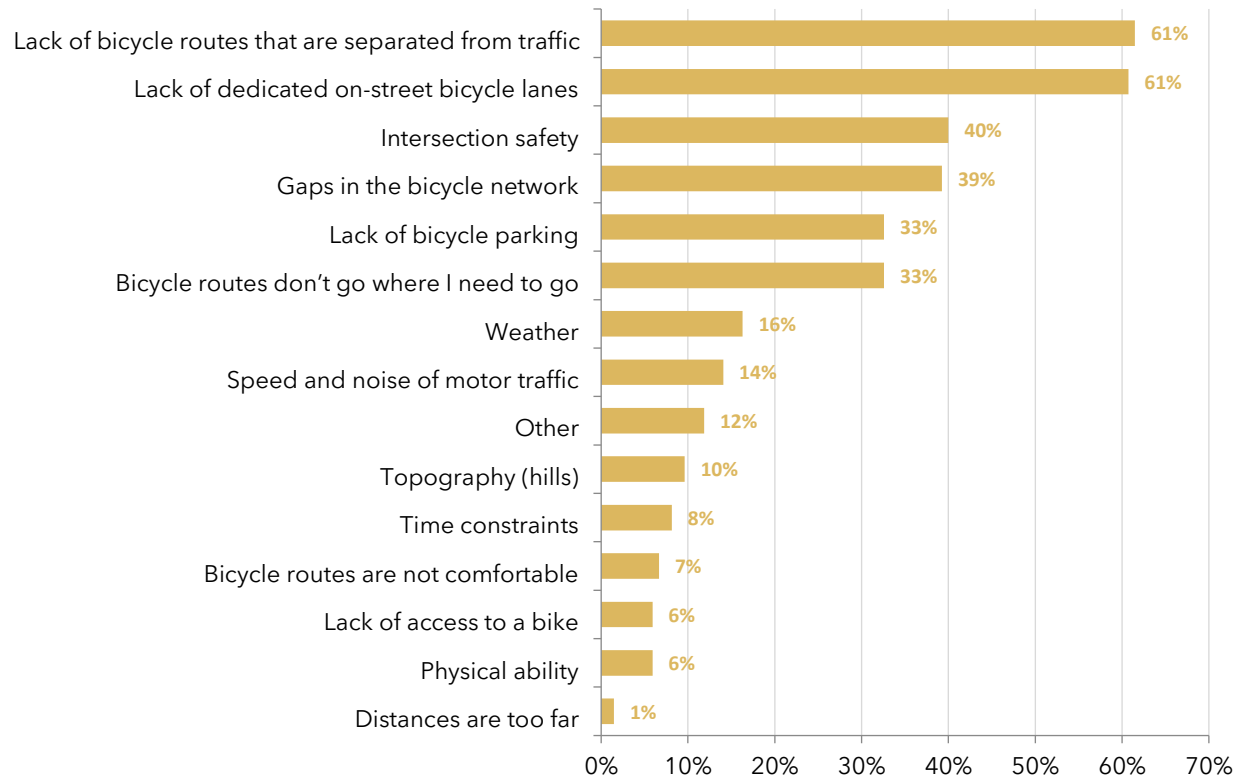


Figure 10: Main Issues or Challenges for Cycling in Merritt (Source: ATP Survey)

The main issues and challenges for walking in Merritt include a lack of trails (42%) and lack of sidewalks (40%) (Figure 11). Those who selected “other” identified feeling unsafe and lack of amenities as additional barriers to walking in Merritt.

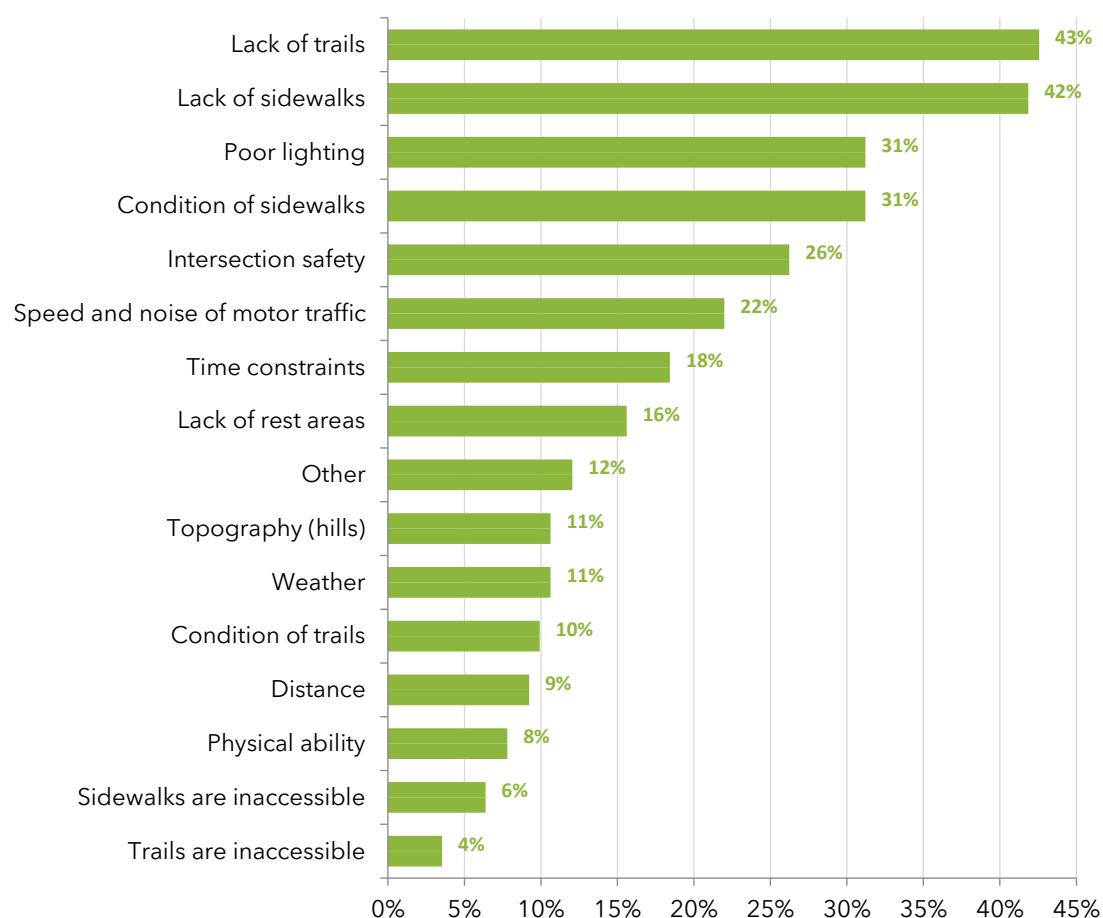


Figure 11: Main Issues or Challenges for Walking in Merritt (Source: ATP Survey)

### Opportunities

Opportunities for enhancing active transportation in Merritt include adding sidewalks, prioritizing the trail network, and reducing conflicts between active transportation users and motor vehicles. Respondents also indicated a desire for safer routes to school and listed several other desired active transportation connections.

The survey results revealed that residents enjoy walking, rolling, and cycling for exercise and to enjoy nature and wildlife, so connecting to and expanding the City’s multi-use pathway and trail network represents a significant opportunity. Building stronger regional connections can also help to strengthen the tourism sector while better connecting Merritt with its neighbouring communities, including First Nations.

Providing additional end-of-trip facilities is another way to enhance cycling in particular. Additionally, ensuring that new neighbourhoods and key destination – such as the residential, commercial, and transit



destinations in the North Entry and North Bench areas – are connected to the City Centre will help ensure a well connected City and a vibrant downtown core.

Finally, there is an opportunity to promote active transportation as a regular, convenient, and enjoyable mode of daily transportation, helping to reduce the stigma of walking and cycling as a primary transportation mode. At the same time, the City must support marginalized populations who rely on active modes, and it must ensure that people of all ages, abilities, genders, ethnicities, and other identifying factors feel safe and comfortable when travelling throughout the City.



## 4 Next Steps

This existing condition report has been prepared as part of the process to develop Merritt's Active Transportation Plan. This document summarizes existing conditions for active transportation in Merritt today based on technical analysis and public input received to date.

The next Phase of this project will focus on charting the course for the future of active transportation in Merritt. Based on input received from the public and stakeholders, a future vision, supporting goals, strategies, actions, and a proposed active transportation network will be developed. Further opportunities for engagement will take place in Phase 3.







## Appendix A

# Online Survey Summary Report



# Online Survey Summary Report

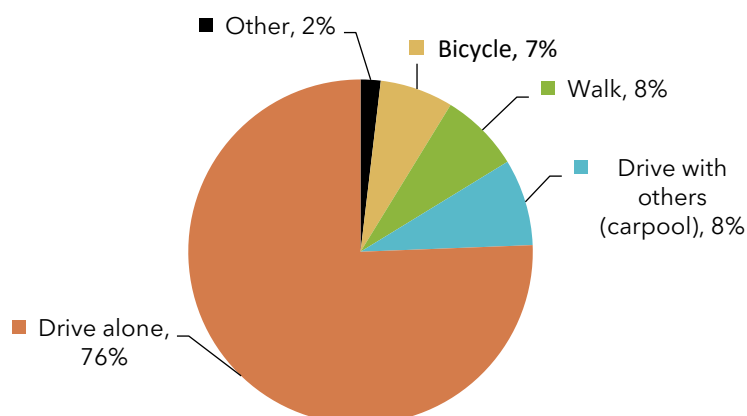
As part of the Active Transportation Plan engagement process, District of Merritt residents were invited to provide input on the challenges they face when using active modes of transportation in Merritt as well as the opportunities for improvements. The online survey was available through the District's website and promoted heavily through social media and other marketing tactics from June 19 to July 8, 2020. In total, 164 responses were collected.

Because of the online COVID-19 pandemic, many of the questions asked participants to consider their transportation before the pandemic began as many residents are now working/studying from home or not currently working/attending school. The following is a summary of what we heard from those who participated in the online survey.

## 1.1 Typical mode of transportation

Respondents were asked to specify their typical mode of transportation for commuting purposes, such as going to work, school, an appointment or picking up groceries before the pandemic. As shown on the graph below, more than 75% of respondents drive alone as their main mode of transportation. Transit was also provided as an option, however those who participated in the survey did not indicate this mode of transportation as their typical mode. Respondents who answered "Other" specified that they are dependent on others to drive (x2) or they have an equal division between walking and driving.

*Before the COVID-19 pandemic, on a typical day, what was your usual mode of transportation for commuting purposes?*

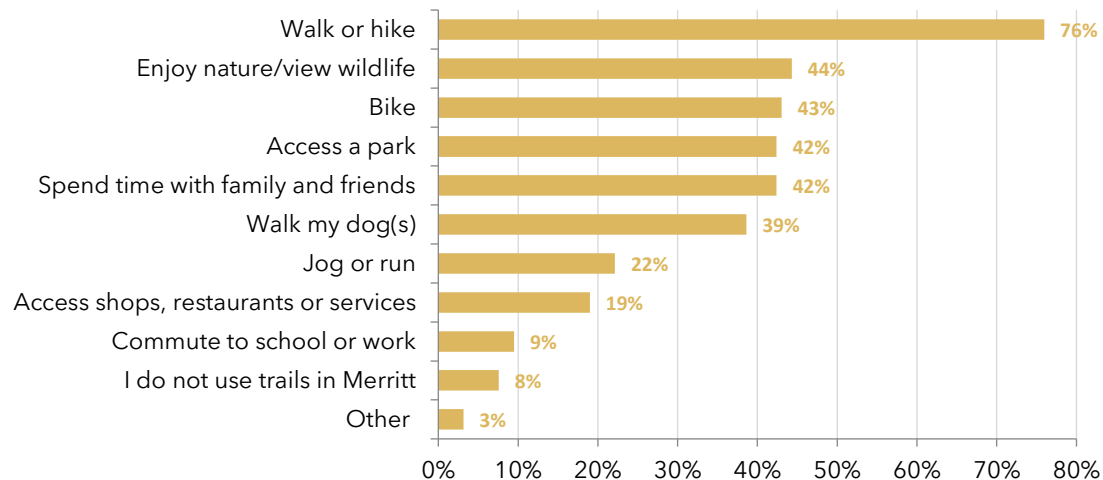


Weather is a factor known to influence what mode of transportation is used when commuting. This question was put to respondents with more than half (58%) indicating that weather does not influence what mode of transportation they use. This result reflects the high percentage of respondents that typically drive along as their main mode of transportation.

## 1.2 Using Merritt's Trail Network

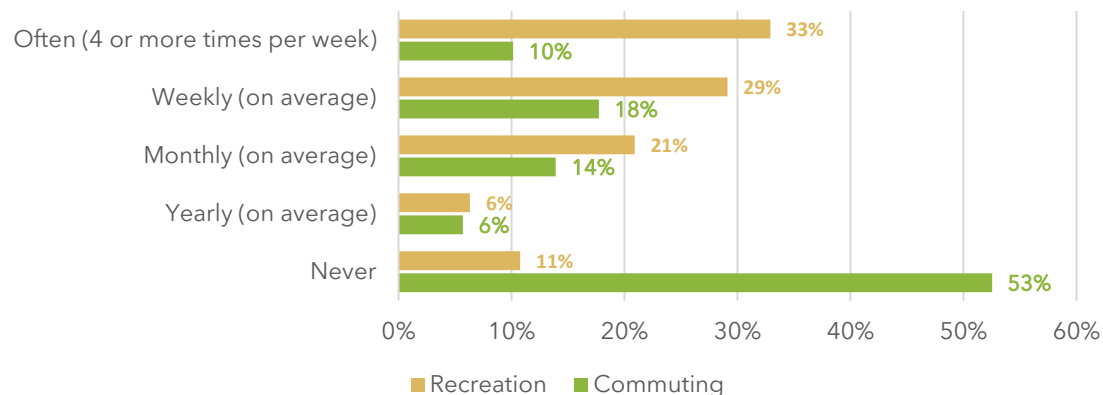
Next, respondents were asked how they currently use Merritt's existing trail network. Ten options were presented with the opportunity to list other uses. Participants were able to select as many options that apply to them. As shown on the graph below, to walk or hike is the most popular reason why respondents use Merritt's trail network (76%). Enjoying nature/wildlife (44%), biking (43%), accessing a park (42%), and spending time with friends and family (42%) were also popular activities among respondents. Of the respondents who answered "Other", the majority commented that they do not believe a trail network exists in Merritt.

*Before the COVID-19 pandemic, how did you use Merritt's existing trail network?*



Respondents were asked how often they use trails in Merritt for both commuting and recreation purposes. When it comes to commuting, the majority of respondents (53%) indicated they do not use the trail network for this purpose. The survey found trails were used more frequently for recreation purposes, as shown on the graph below.

*Before the COVID-19 pandemic, how often did you use the trails in Merritt for recreation and commuting purposes?*



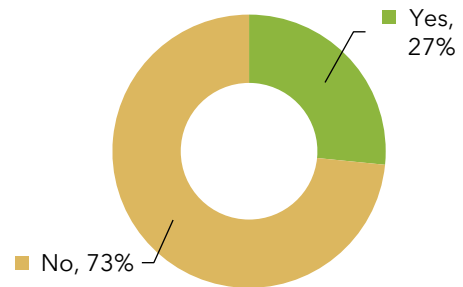


### 1.3 COVID-19 Impacts of Transportation

With COVID-19 impacting individuals in different ways, it was important to understand whether Merritt residents have changed their transportation habits because of the pandemic. The majority of those who participated in the survey (73%) indicated that their typical transportation habits have not changed because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Those who answered yes, were asked to specify how their transportation habits have changed. In total, 44 respondents provided a response, with 45% indicating that they are driving and commuting less due to working at home. Respondents also noted they have been walking, running, hiking, and cycling more (36%), and others have limited their travel outside of their home to only necessary trips (16%).

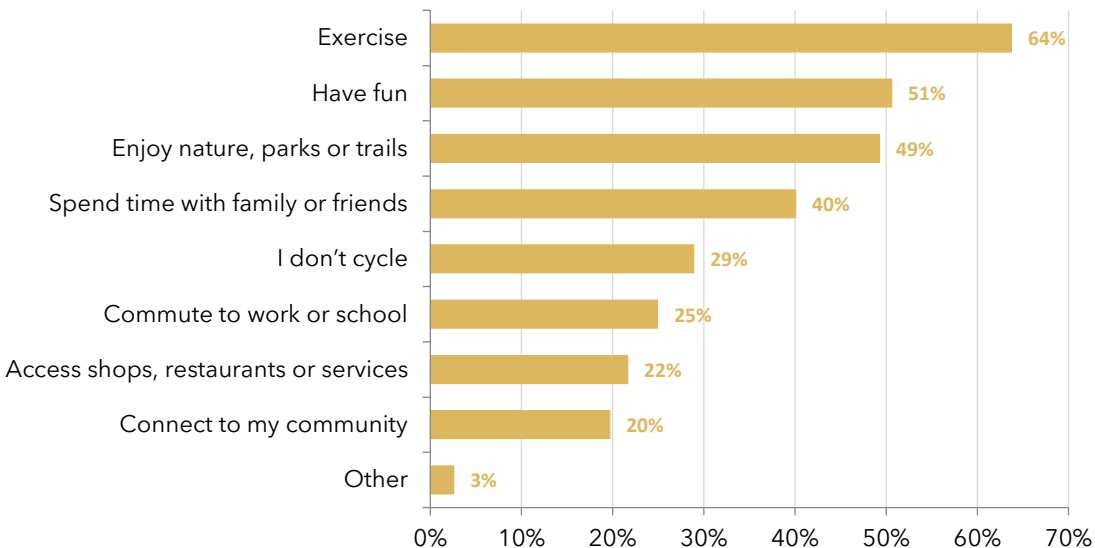
*Since the COVID-19 pandemic, have your typical transportation habits changed?*



### 1.4 Cycling in Merritt

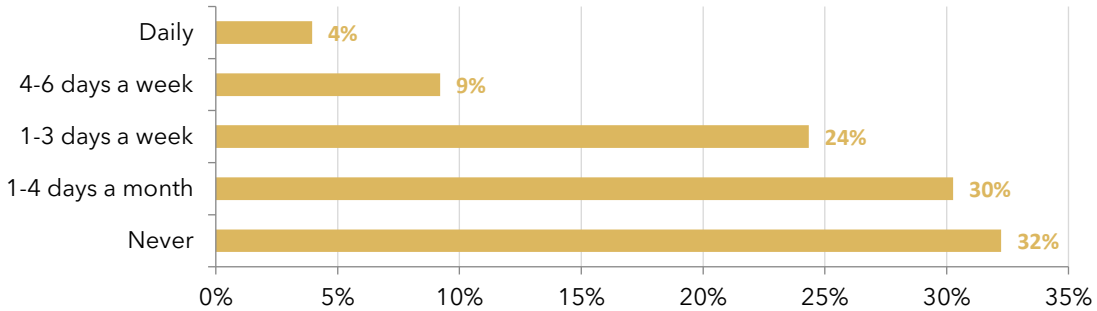
Respondents were presented with a series of questions focused on biking in Merritt. The first question provides a snapshot of the reasons why survey respondents choose to bike. Respondents were presented with nine options and were able to select more than one option. Biking for exercise (64%) and to have fun (51%) were the most popular reasons why respondents bike. Respondents who selected "Other" said that they would like to cycle more, but do not feel safe cycling in Merritt.

*When I cycle, it's to:*



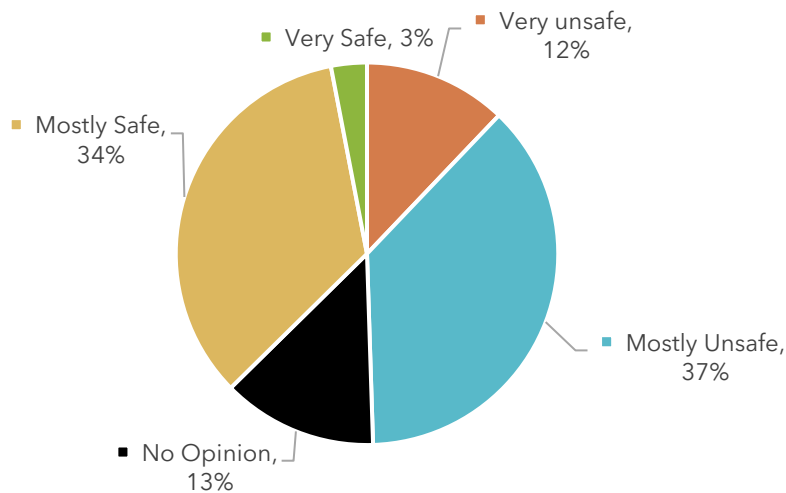
Respondents were then asked to indicate how frequently they ride a bike in a typical month. The survey found 30% of respondents ride a bicycle 1-4 days a month, while only 4% of respondents identified as daily bicycle riders.

*In a typical month, how many times do you ride a bicycle?*



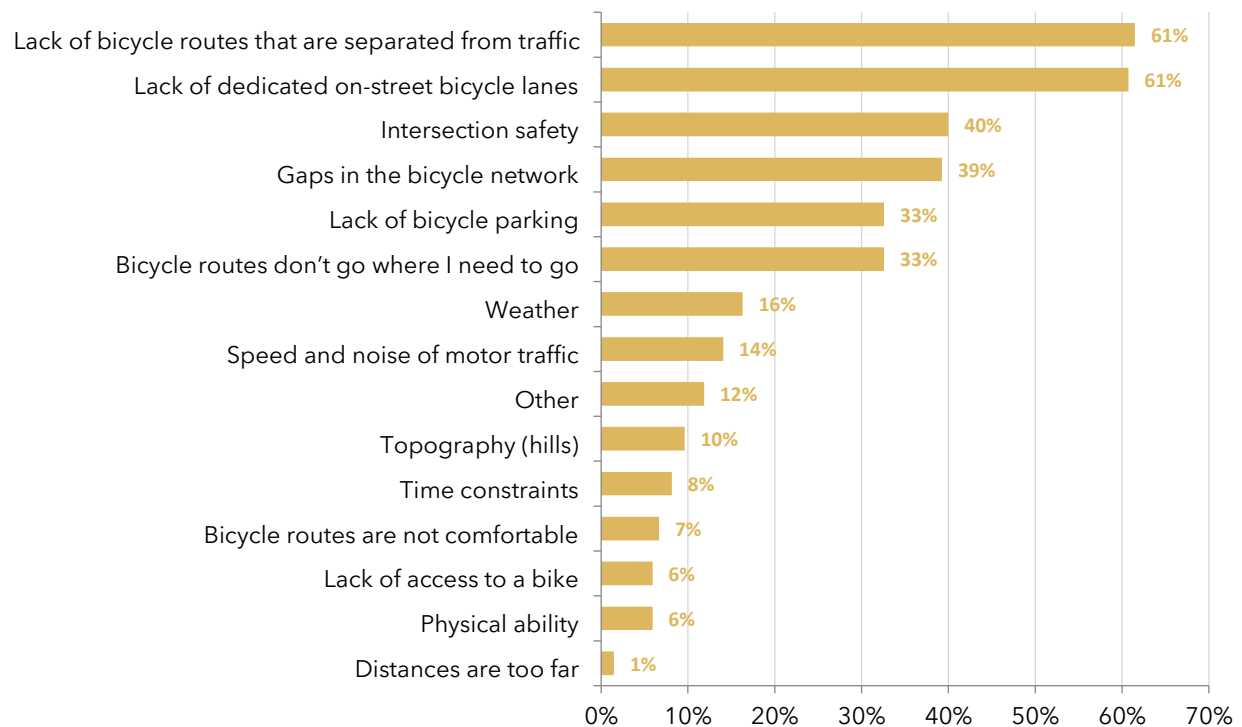
The next question focused on gaining a better understanding of how safe Merritt residents feel when biking in their community. Half of respondents shared they feel (very to mostly) unsafe when cycling in Merritt, compared to 37% of respondents who feel (mostly to very) safe cycling in Merritt.

*How safe do you feel cycling in Merritt?*



Survey respondents were asked to identify what the main issues or challenges are when it comes to cycling in Merritt. A list of possible issues/challenges were displayed with participants able to select more than one or add additional issues/challenges not listed. Lack of bicycle routes separated from traffic and dedicated on-street bicycle lanes were identified by more than half of respondents (61%) as a main issue/challenge. Of those who selected 'other', theft and a lack of cycling knowledge from drivers and cyclists were identified as additional issues/challenges.

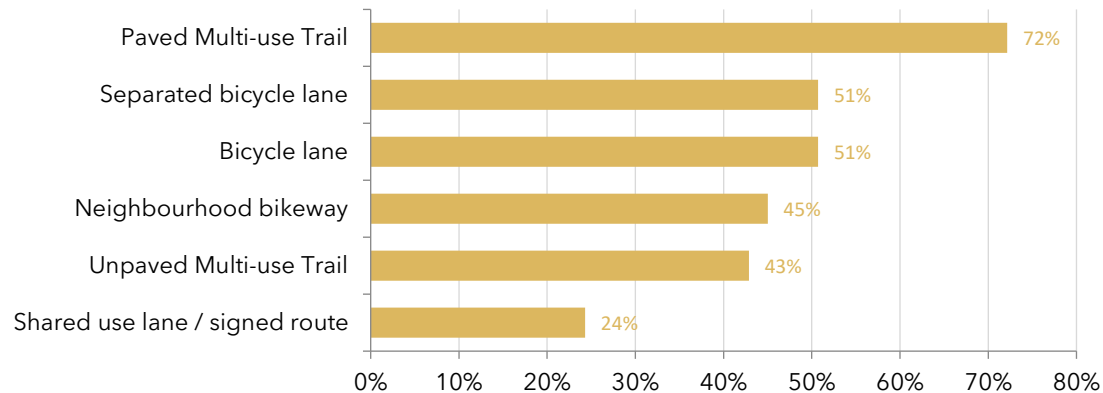
*What are the main issues or challenges for cycling in Merritt?*





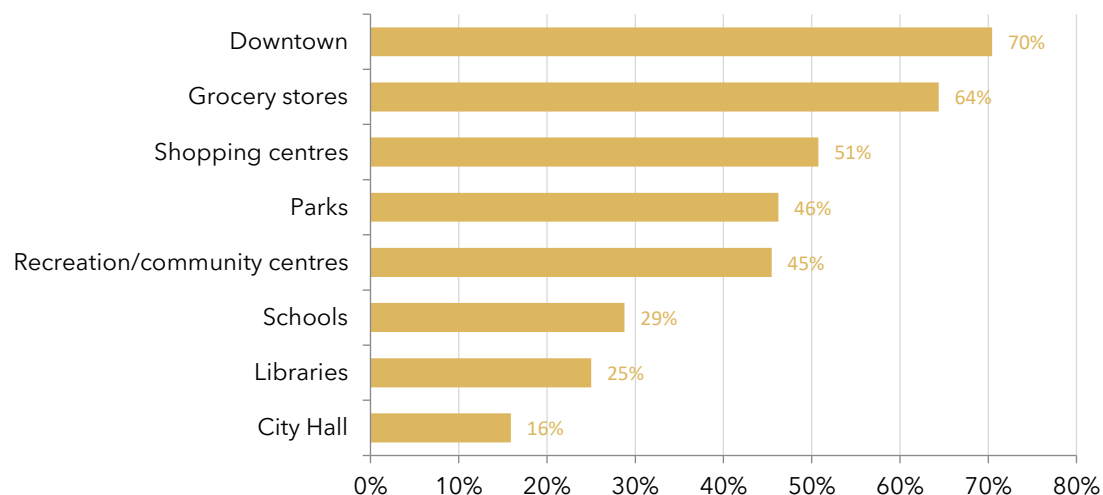
The next question focused on understanding the type(s) of cycling facilities that would make cycling in Merritt more comfortable. Six facility types were displayed with participants able to select more than one option. Paved multi-use trails (72%), bicycle lanes (51%), and separated bicycle lanes (51%) were found to be the most popular facility types among respondents.

*What facility type(s) would encourage you to cycle more in Merritt?*



End-of-trip facilities is another component to making biking an accessible and convenient form of transportation. The survey asked respondents to identify where bike parking is most needed. Eight options were provided, with survey participants able to select multiple locations. More than half of respondents identified downtown (70%), grocery stores (64%), and shopping centres (51%) as locations in most need of bike parking.

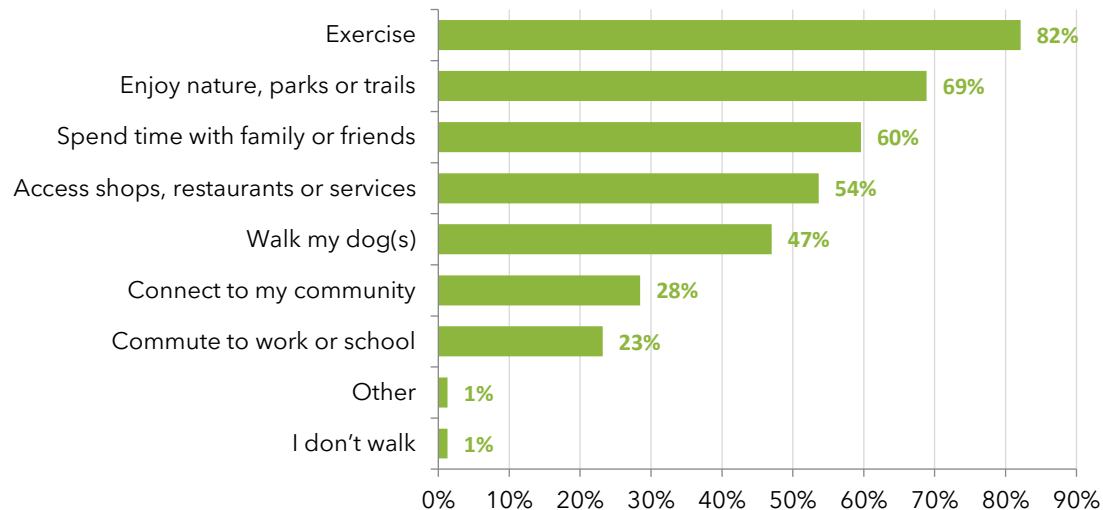
*Where is bike parking most needed?*



## 1.5 Walking in Merritt

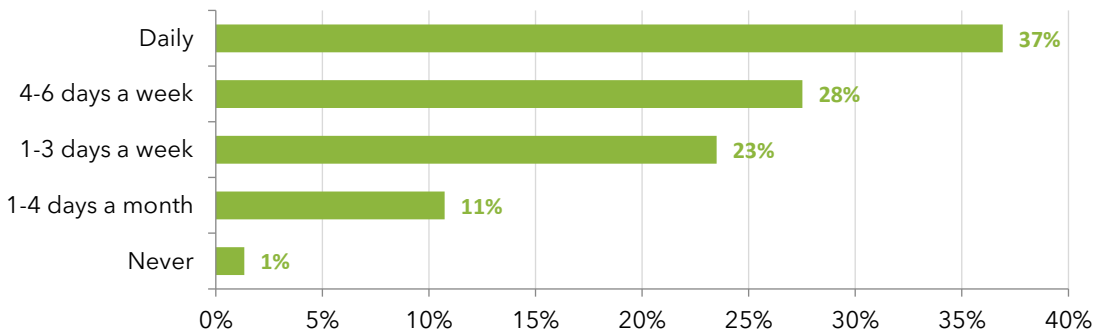
Respondents were presented with a series of questions focused on walking in Merritt. The first question provides a snapshot of the reasons why survey participants choose to walk. Respondents were presented with nine options and were able to select more than one option. Walking for exercise (82%) and to enjoy nature, parks or trails (69%) were the most popular reasons why respondents walk. Respondents who selected "other" said they walk to catch the bus and keep children active.

When I walk, it's to...

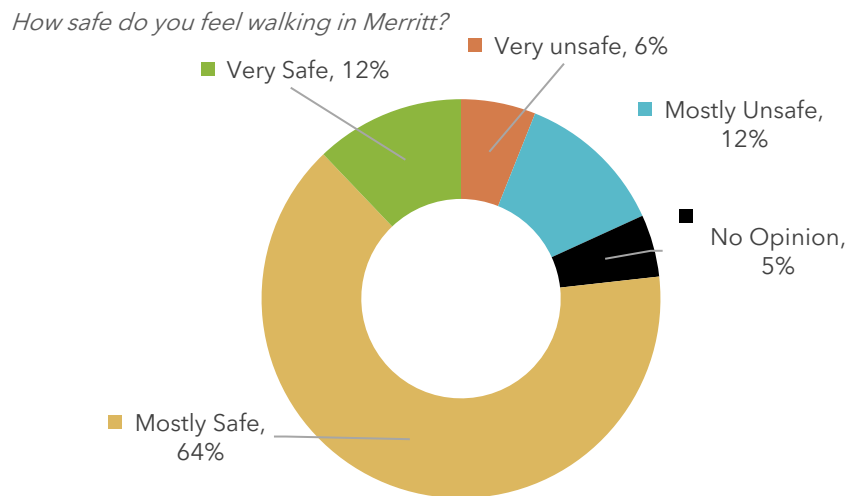


Respondents were asked to indicate how frequently they walk in a typical month. The survey found 37% of respondents walk daily, compared to 12% who either never walk or walk only a few times a month.

*In a typical month, how often do you walk?*



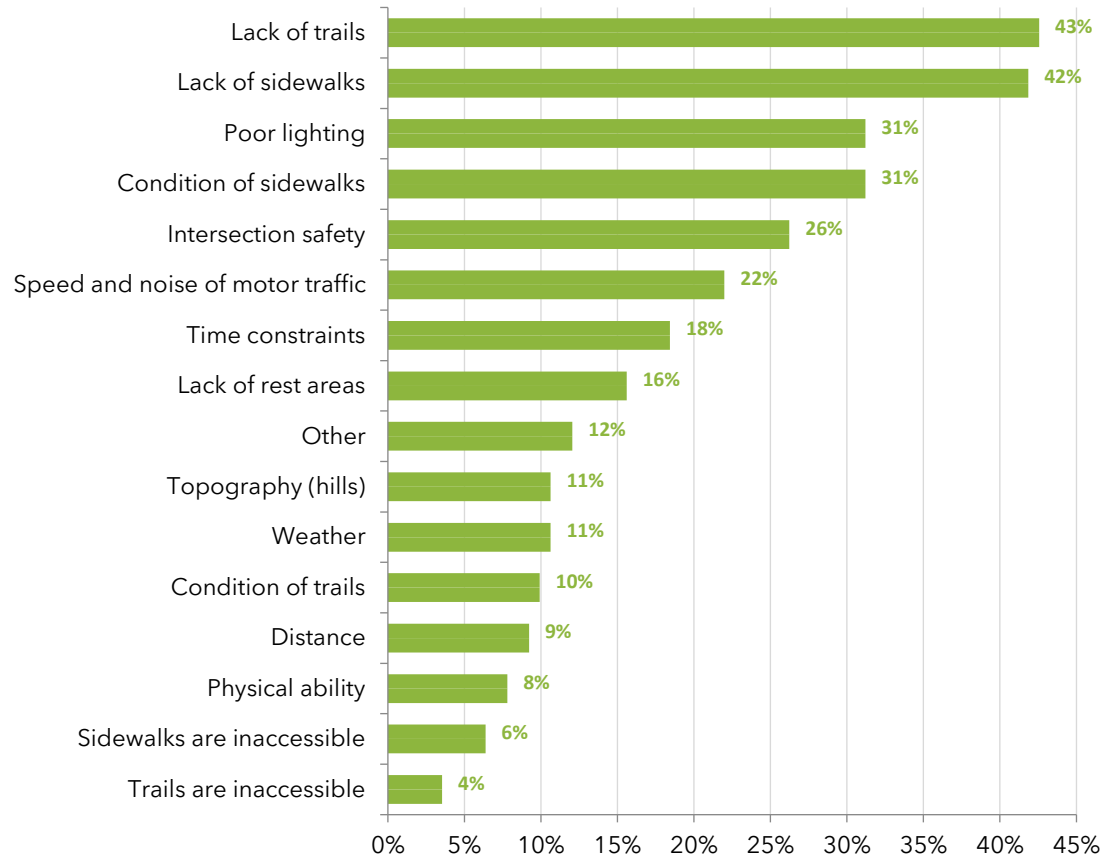
The next question focused on gaining a better understanding of how safe Merritt residents feel when walking in their community. More than half of respondents said they feel mostly safe (64%) or very safe (12%) when walking in Merritt, compared to 6% of respondents who feel very unsafe walking in Merritt.



Survey respondents were also asked to identify what the main issues or challenges are when it comes to walking in Merritt. A list of possible issues/challenges were displayed, participants were able to select more than one or add additional issues/challenges not listed. Lack of trails (42%) and lack of sidewalks (40%) were identified as some of the top issues related to walking in Merritt. Those who selected "other" identified feeling unsafe and lack of amenities as additional barriers to walking in Merritt.



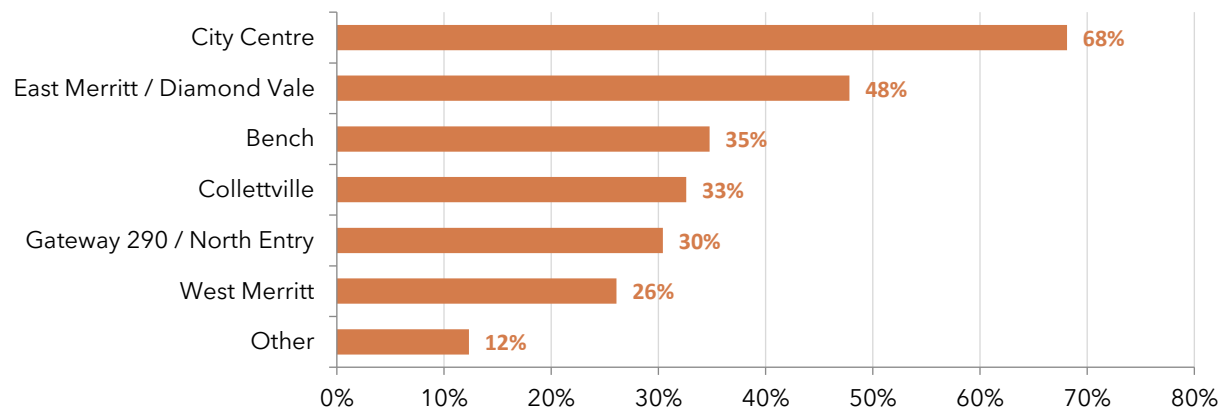
*What are the barriers for walking more often than you do in Merritt?*



## 1.6 Wrap-up Questions

Participants were asked to identify three neighbourhoods where they would like to see active transportation improvements. The City Centre was identified by 86% of respondents, followed by East Merritt / Diamond Vale (48%).

*In what neighbourhoods would you like to see active transportation improvements?*



Of those who selected “other”, the following responses were identified:

- All neighbourhoods (x3)
- Nicola Avenue and Vought Street (x3)
- Sidewalks along Armstrong Street and Ransom Avenue (x3)
- Routes to schools (x2)
- Facilities connecting Diamond Vale to the city centre
- Facilities connecting Bench to the city centre
- Connection from walking bridge at end of Quilchena to the hill by the cement plant
- Lower Nicola
- Lindley Creek

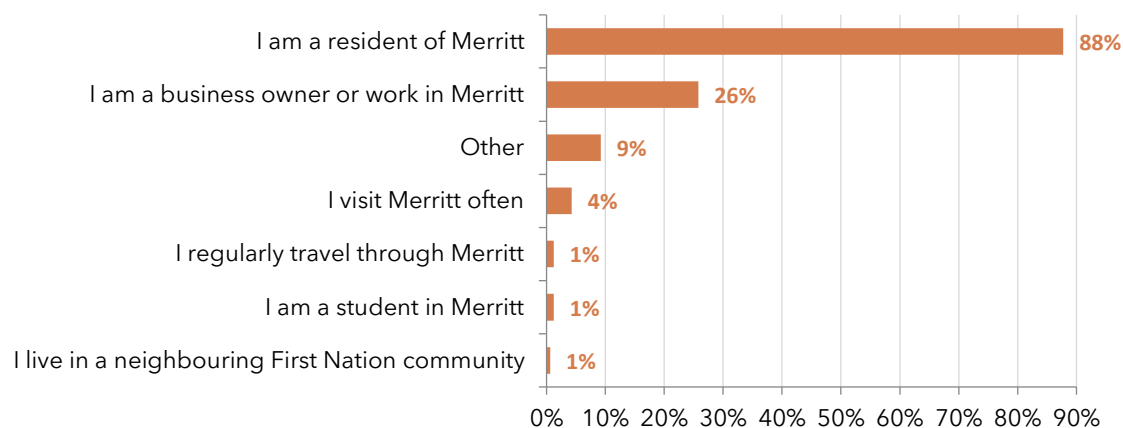
The survey ended with respondents given the opportunity to provide any final comments. In total, 65 comments were received. The following themes emerged from a review of the comments.

- Lack of facilities makes active transportation feel unsafe
- Improving active transportation is important
- More sidewalk infrastructure
- Conflicts between people biking and people driving
- Prioritize building the trail network

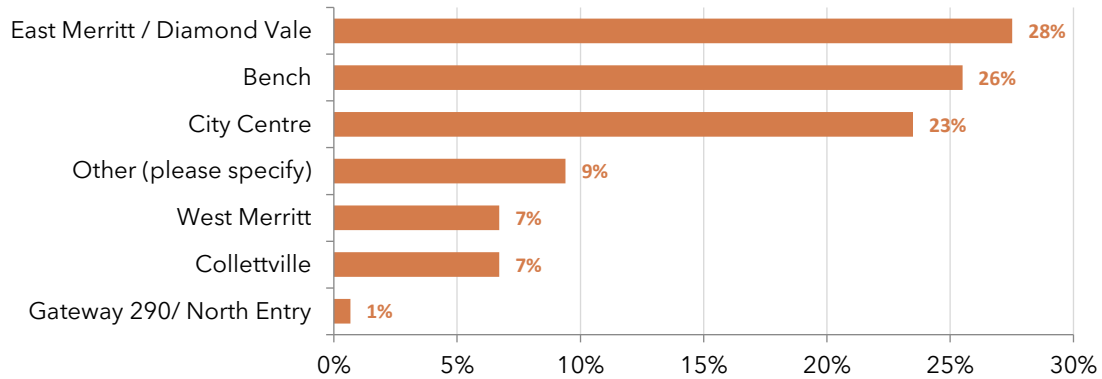
## 1.7 Demographics

Survey participants were asked the following demographic questions to capture who participated in the survey and identify groups we may have missed and need to seek out during later phases of engagement.

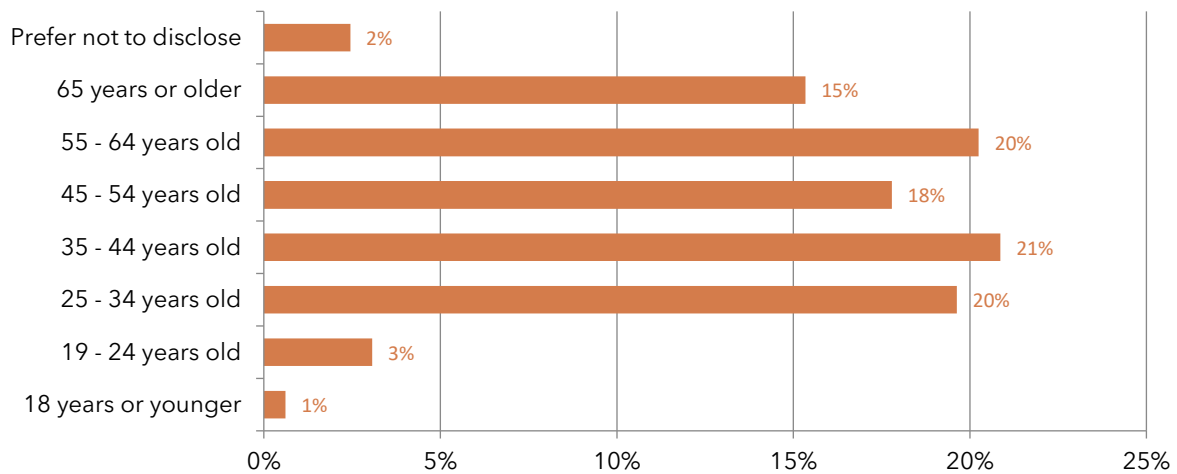
*Which best describes you?*



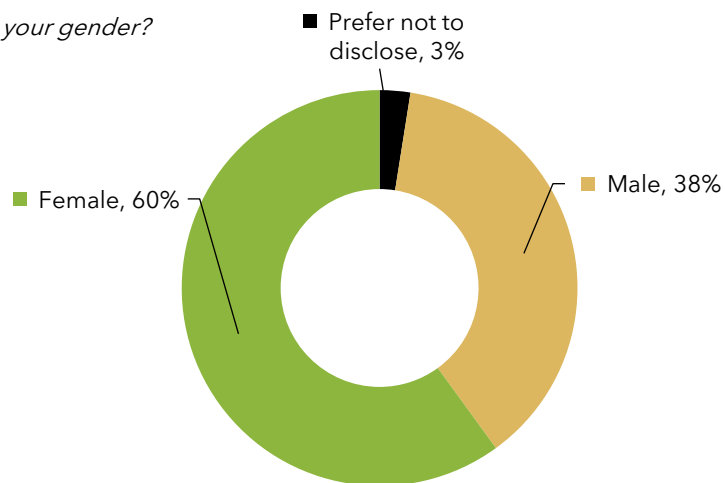
*If you are a resident of Merritt, what neighbourhood do you live in?*



*What is your age?*

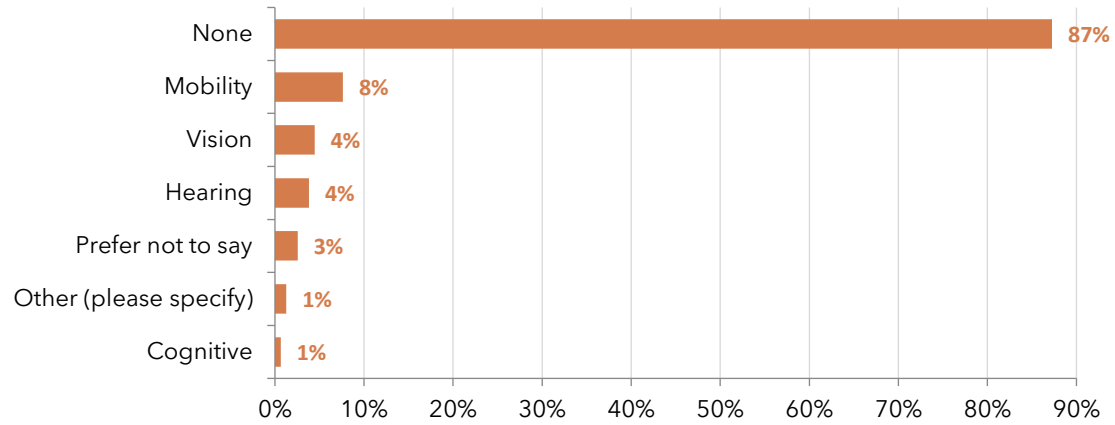


*What is your gender?*





*Do you have any limitations?*







  
**Merritt**  
FLOURISH UNDER THE SUN

**URBAN**  
S Y S T E M S