

OUR CITY. OUR FUTURE.

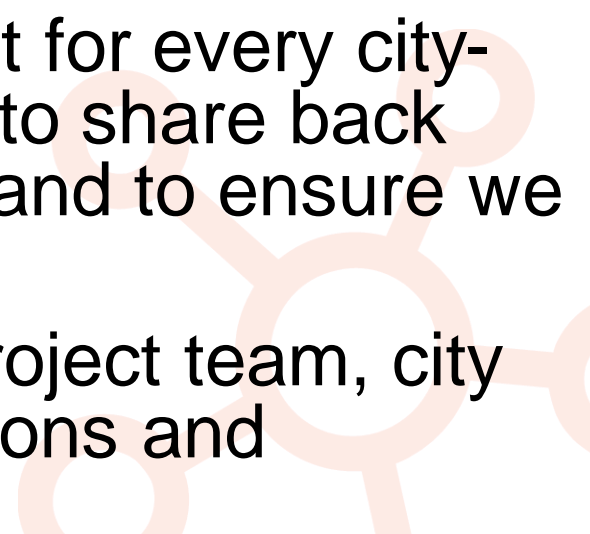


# Downtown Pedestrian Mall

What we Heard from Public Engagement  
November 2021

ST. JOHN'S

# Disclaimer

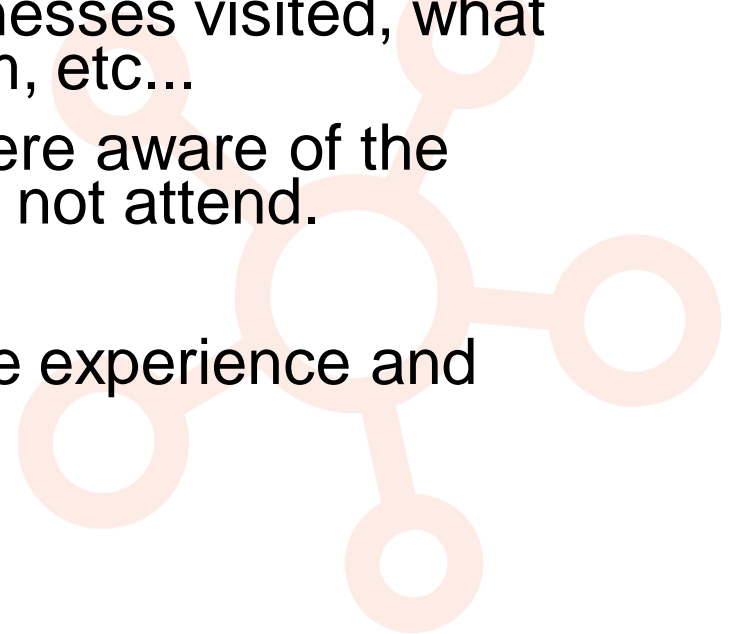
- This document aims to provide a summary of what was heard from participants during the public engagement process. It is not meant to reflect the specific details of each submission or conversation word-for-word.
  - The City produces a What We Heard document for every city-lead project where public engagement is used to share back with the community the commentary collected and to ensure we heard you correctly.
  - The full scope of commentary is used by the project team, city staff, and Council to help inform recommendations and decisions.
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# Context and background

- The Downtown Pedestrian Mall was developed in response to, and as a means of, providing a stimulant to the downtown economy and to create space for residents to enjoy the outdoors in a safe, public health guided way in 2020.
- Based on feedback from the business community and the public the 2020 Downtown Pedestrian Mall pilot was deemed a success. That said, some businesses on Duckworth St. and other areas of the downtown outside the mall footprint noted they had a loss of business or that the mall impacted them negatively in 2020.
- Sections of Duckworth St. were added for 2021 as was George St. Water St. maintained its footprint.
- The process of getting permits/building of decks was a frustration for many due to the number of steps/handoffs involved in 2020. Improvements were made to the process for 2021.
- Feedback from the Inclusion Advisory Committee and members of the disability community noted that accessibility was an issue in the 2020 mall. There was ongoing consultation with the committee in preparation for, and during, the 2021 mall.
- The parklet program was enhanced for 2021. More businesses availed of it both inside and outside the mall footprint.
- Summer 2021 and 2020 were different in terms of options available to people – travel was allowed in 2021 and there were some tourists around with an increase in visitor traffic through the airport as well.
- Animation was added in 2021.

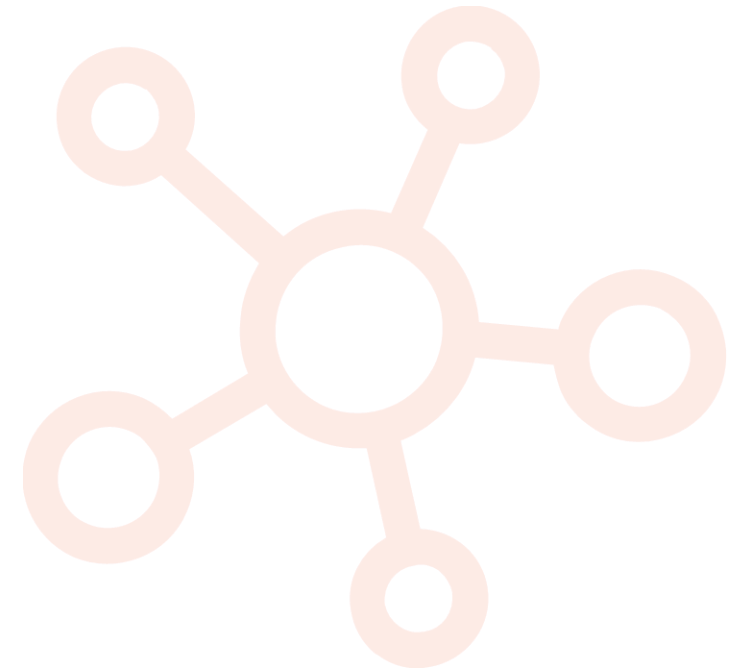
# Purpose of public engagement

- Gather feedback and perspectives from businesses within the pedestrian mall footprint and those outside the footprint about their experience from both the planning and implementation process as well as the impact on their business.
- Gather feedback and perspectives from users of the mall about their experience visiting the mall and Downtown including why they visited, how they got there, time spent, money spent, types of businesses visited, what they liked, what was challenging, where they were from, etc...
- Gather feedback and perspectives from people who were aware of the mall but did not visit, to better understand why they did not attend.
- Provide simple, easy to use tools to gather feedback.
- Ensure the engagement was timely to capture real time experience and respected businesses time.



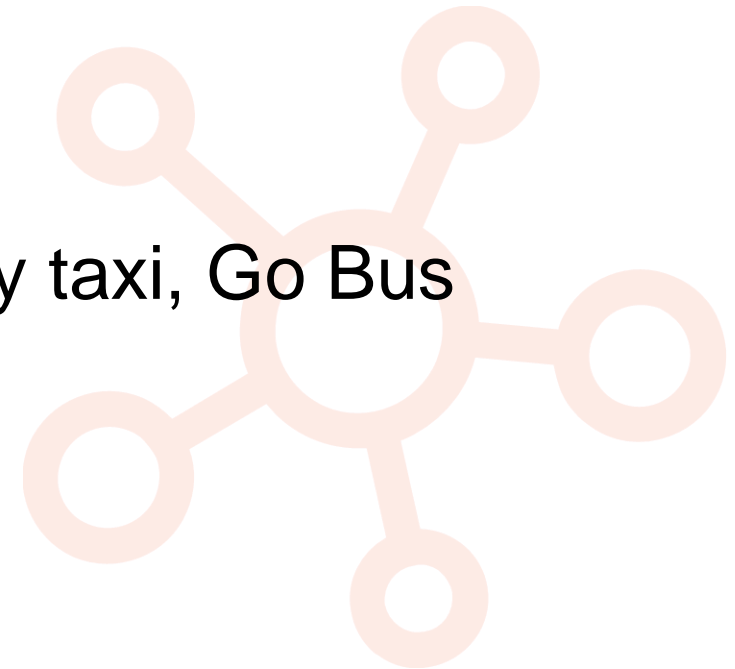
# Public engagement goal

- Be able to use the information gathered through public engagement along with technical assessments and feedback from the Special Events Regulatory Committee to make recommendations to Council for future pedestrian malls.



# Stakeholders

- Businesses within the mall footprint
- Businesses in the Downtown Business Improvement Area (BIA) but outside the footprint and those on the periphery of BIA
- Business Associations
- People who live Downtown
- Persons with Disabilities
- People moving in and around the Downtown by taxi, Go Bus
- Visitors/Users of the mall
- Non-visitors of the mall



# Public engagement tools

Tactic	Target Group
Engage Page with Quick polls, FAQ, Ideas (what worked well, what was challenging for you, what could we do to improve the user experience)	Users/non-users of the mall
Surveys	Business Survey Public Survey
Social Media – quick polls	Users/non-users
Focus groups – Key stakeholder groups	Inclusion Advisory Committee, Businesses in the downtown
Point in time feedback – Intercept survey	Users in real time
Email and calls to 311	Anyone who wanted to provide feedback through these means.

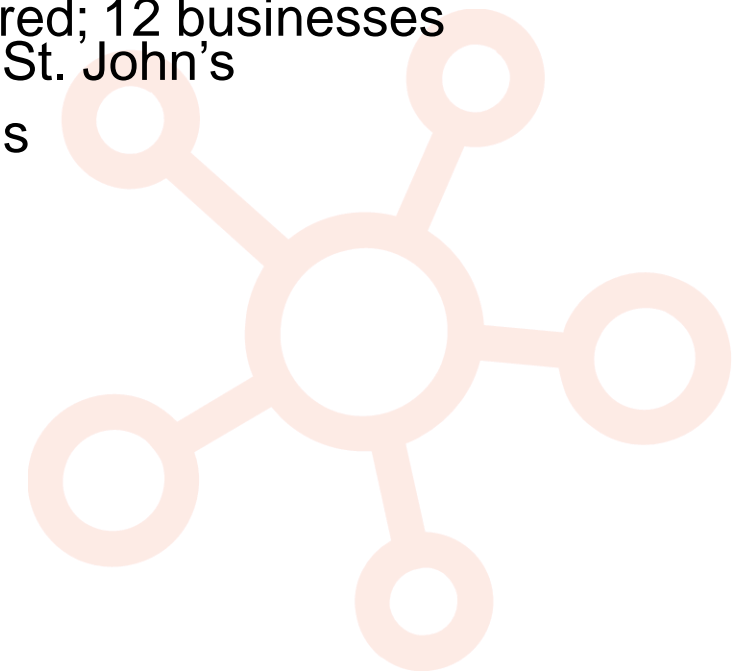


## Promotion of public engagement

- **Business Promotion:** The City shared information about the business stakeholder sessions and survey via business associations. These groups then communicated directly with their members. This included: Downtown St. John's, St. John's Board of Trade, George Street Association, Destination St. John's, Building Owners and Managers' Association, Canadian Federation of Independent Business. Promotion ran from Sept. 7 to Oct. 11.
- **Public Promotion:** Began on Sept. 7 and ran until Sept. 30 and included a newsletter to more than 3200 registered users of [EngageStJohns.ca](https://EngageStJohns.ca), social media posts (7 posts to Facebook and one advertisement, Instagram and 7 posts to Twitter) which included links to quick polls.
- **Other key stakeholder groups** were sent direct invitations to meetings.

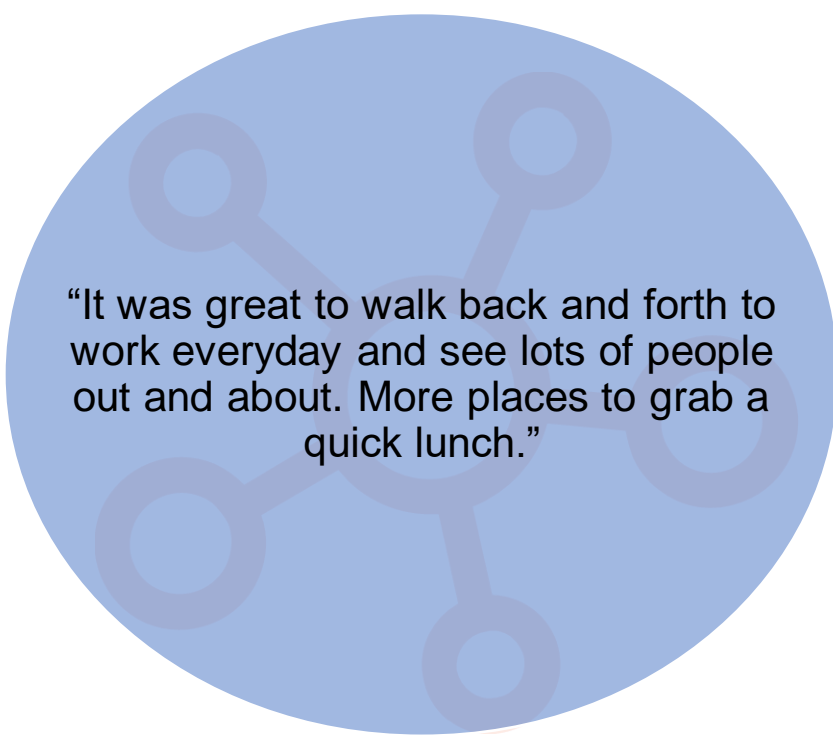
# Points of engagement

- [EngageStJohns.ca](https://EngageStJohns.ca): 1,300 visitors, 552 of whom were actively engaged; 42 people contributed to the ideas tool, 537 responded to the quick poll, three (3) people shared stories
- Public Surveys: 927 responses to the online survey; 73 intercept surveys in the mall during operation
- Business Survey: 37 surveys completed
- Business Stakeholder Focus Groups: Five (5) sessions were offered; 12 businesses participated as did the George Street Association and Downtown St. John's
- Business feedback via email or phone call; Seven (7) submissions
- Public feedback via email; 29 submissions
- Other stakeholder sessions:
  - One meeting with City's Inclusion Advisory Committee
- Social Media: reached 14,333 people with 638 engagements



# What the Public told us about the Pedestrian Mall

- Good public space
- Less noise in the downtown when the Mall is open
- Family friendly
- Livened up the downtown
- More decks/patios/options
- Activities/animation

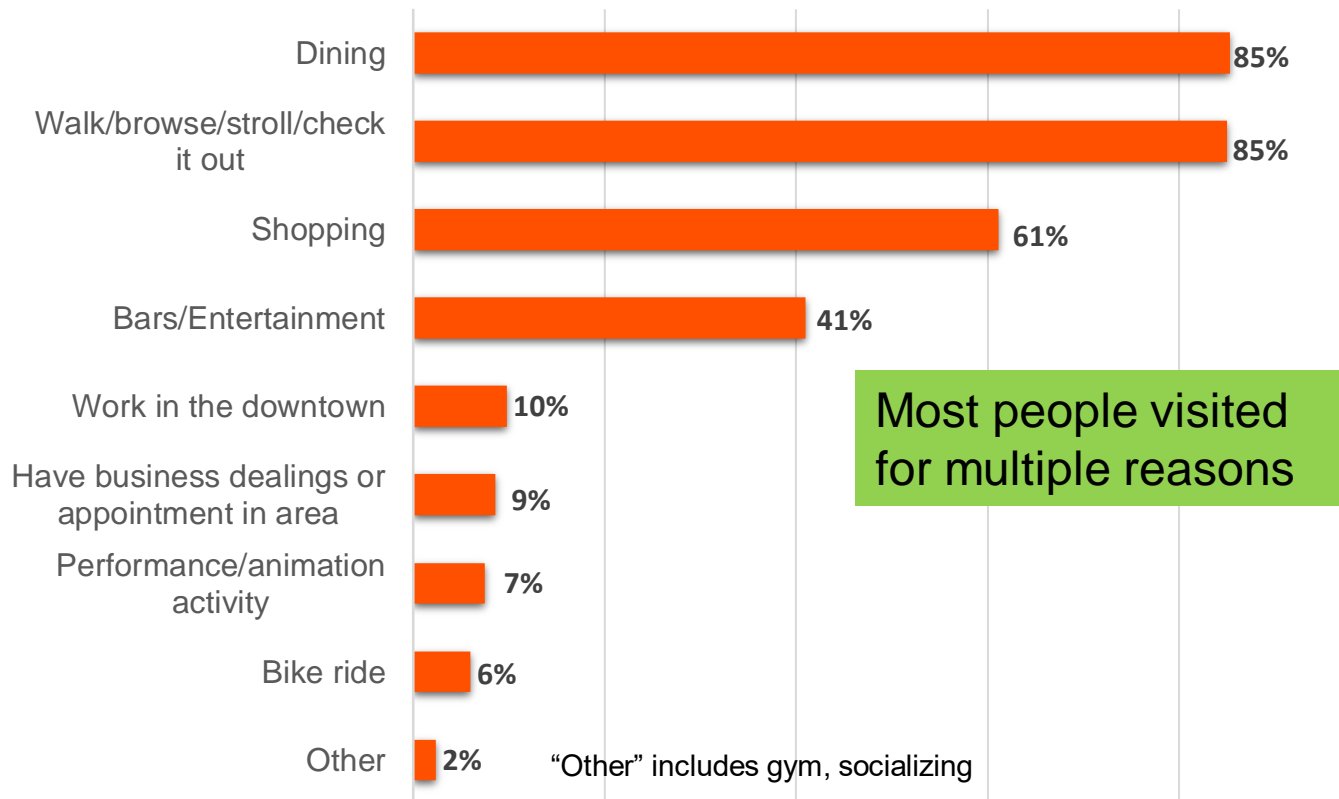


“It was great to walk back and forth to work everyday and see lots of people out and about. More places to grab a quick lunch.”

# Online Public Survey

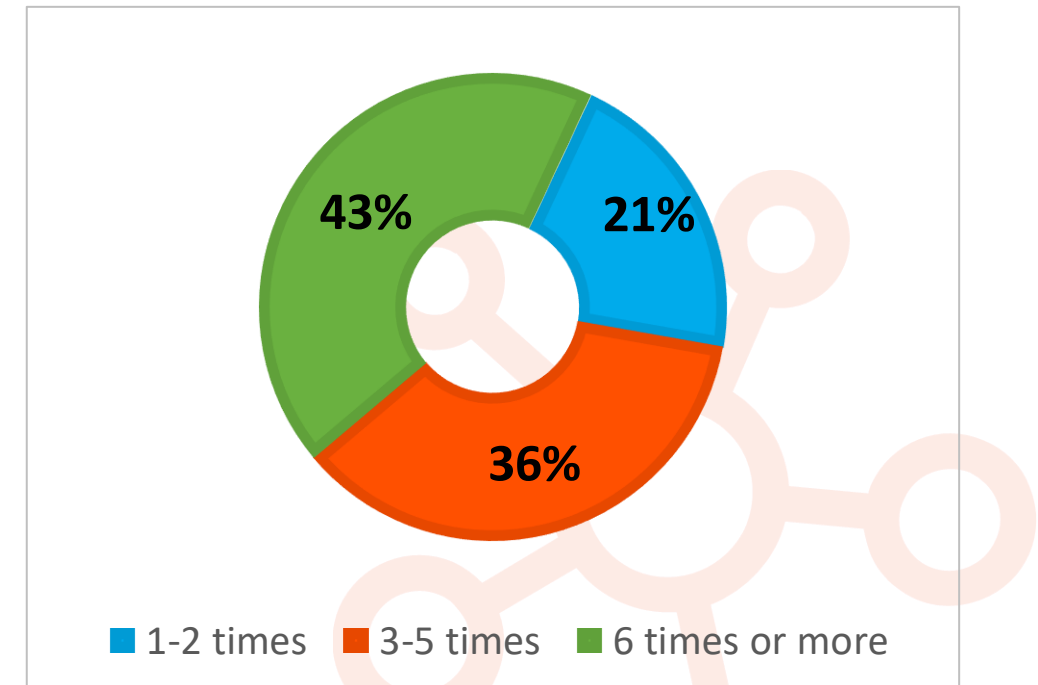
## Reasons for visiting the pedestrian mall

n = 857 (multiple responses permitted)



## Number of times visiting the pedestrian mall

n = 840

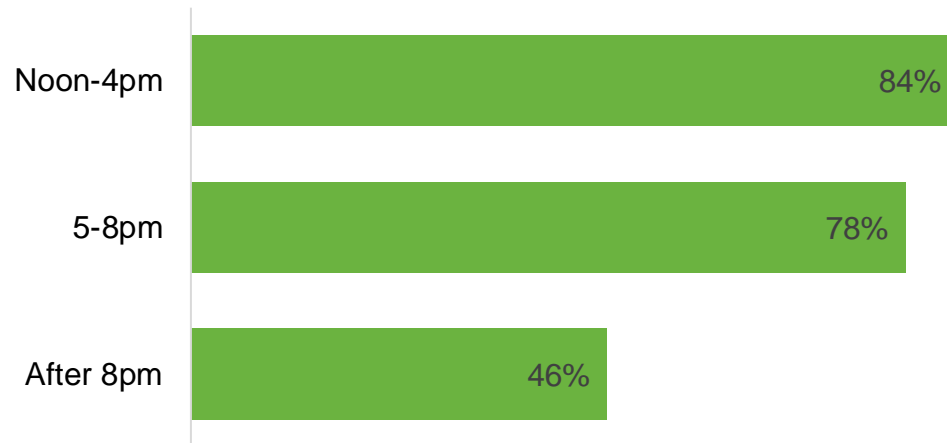


**79%**

Visited the mall 3 or more times

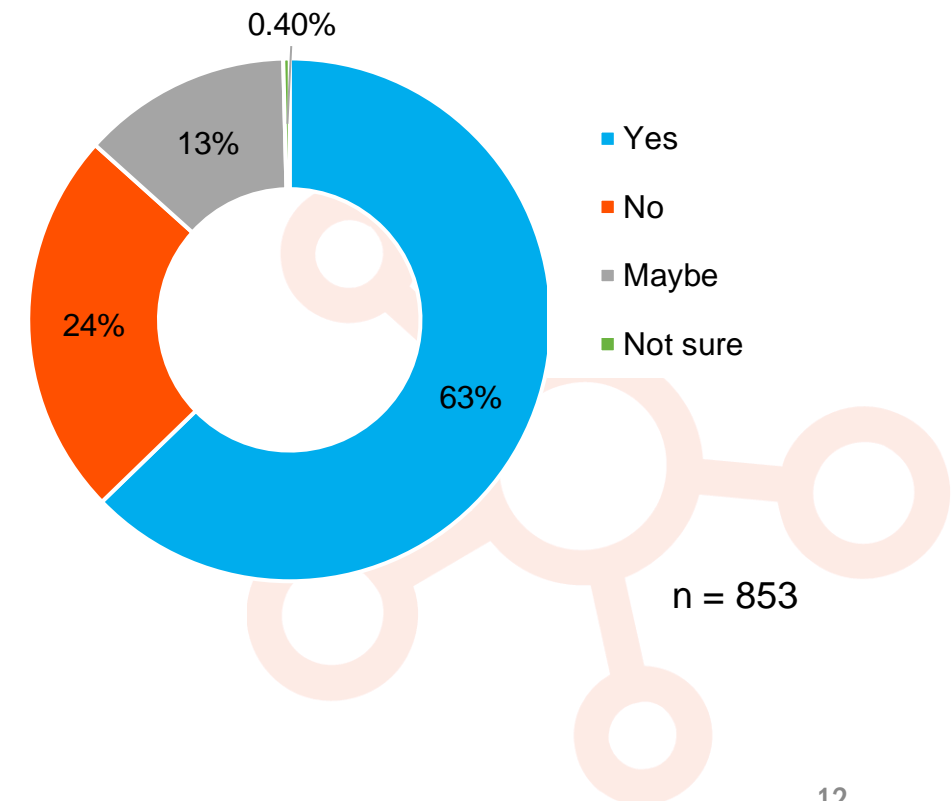
# Online Public Survey

## When people visited

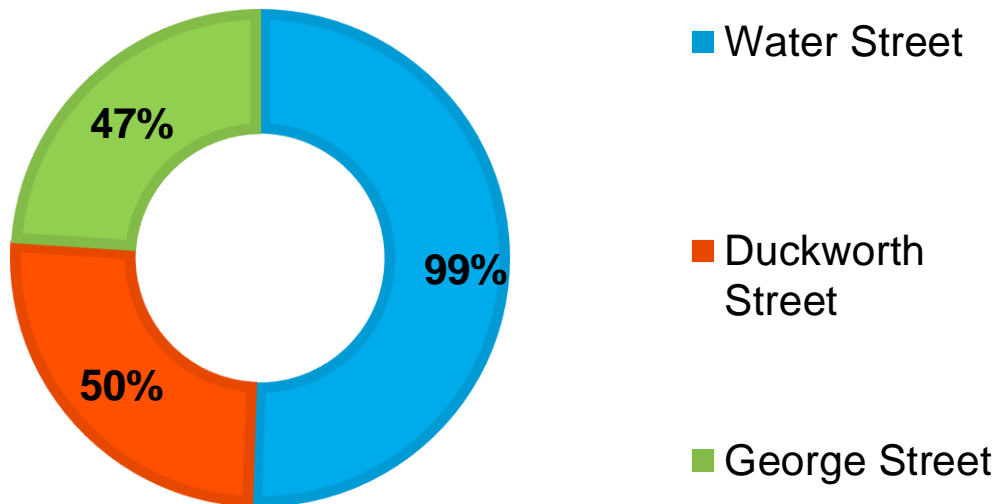


n = 839 (multiple responses permitted)

## Did the weather influence your decision?



## Sections of pedestrian mall visited



n = 849 (multiple responses permitted)  
41% of people in the intercept survey visited businesses outside the mall footprint.

## For the sections you did not visit, what was the reason for not visiting?

### Duckworth St.

(n=340)

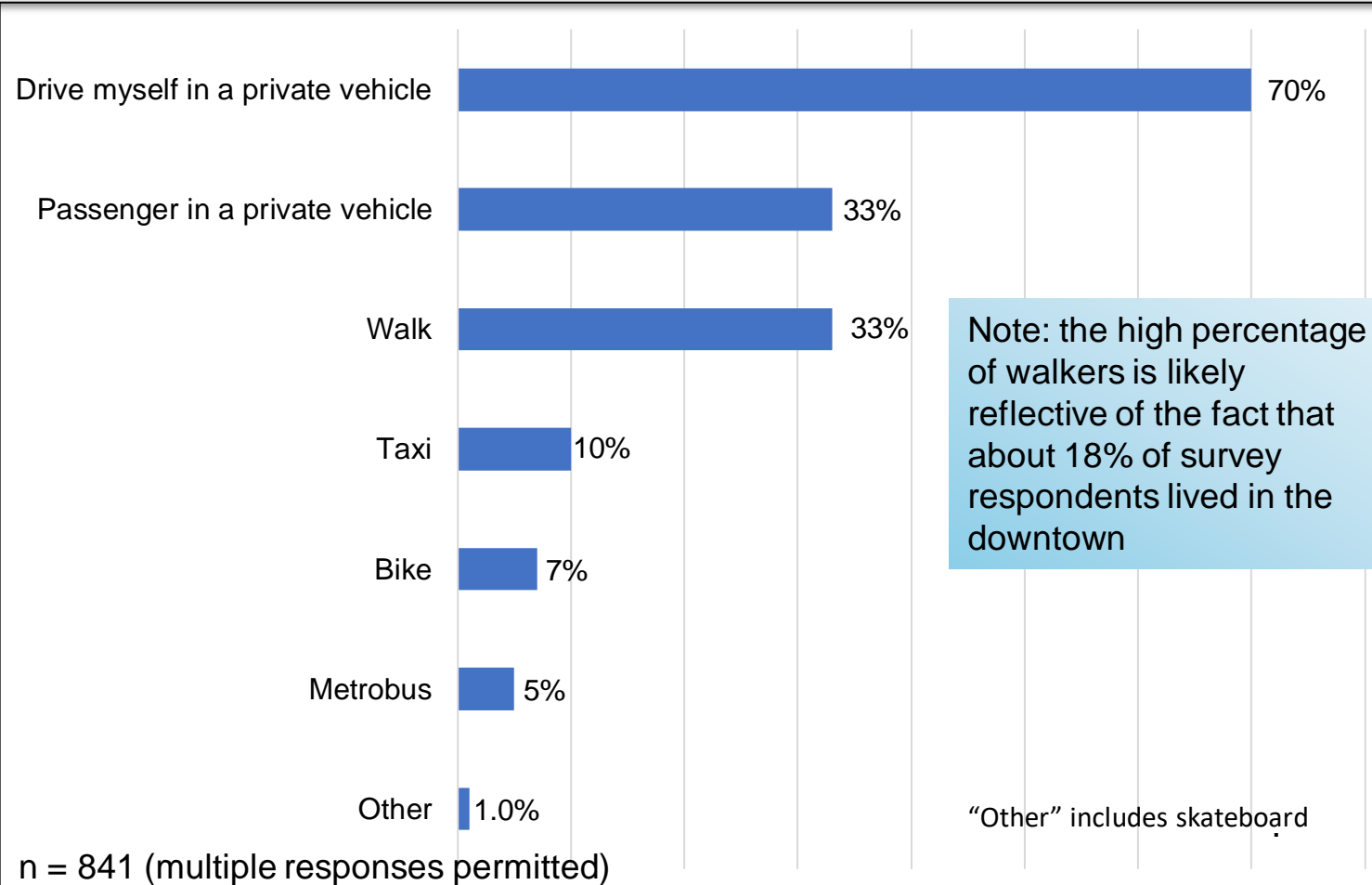
- Not interested or did not need to: 263
- Everything is on Water St.: 78
- Not convenient/Not connected: 66
- Vibe: 38
- Parking: 19
- Accessibility: 9
- COVID-19: 4
- Safety (i.e., road traffic): 2

### George St.

(n=266)

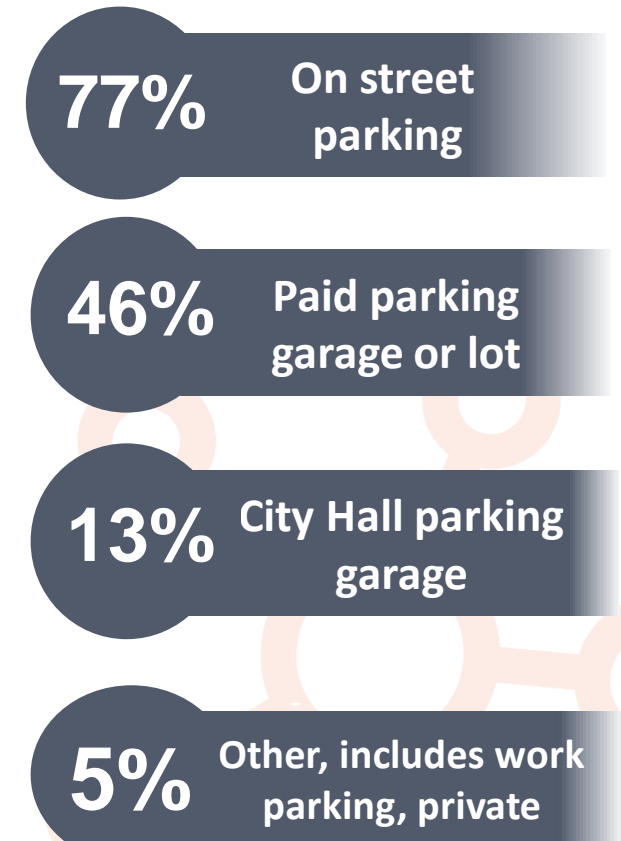
- Not interest or did not need to: 264
- Minor/Dislike bars: 41
- Not Convenient/ Not Connected: 18
- COVID-19: 16
- Everything is on Water St. : 15
- Not clean: 11
- Accessibility: 7
- Cyclists (i.e., in my way): 1

## How customers travelled to the mall



The in-person survey had similar data.

## Where people parked



- Public survey respondents rated their overall satisfaction with the pedestrian mall on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 was poor and 5 was excellent
- Overall satisfaction was down .5 in 2021
- Satisfaction was rated the highest (4.3) by visitors after 8pm
- 44% of [EngagStJohns.ca](https://engagstjohns.ca) respondents said the mall was better than 2020; 44% said it was about the same. This was similar to the online and intercept survey results.

## Overall Satisfaction



# What the Public told us about the Pedestrian Mall

## What was challenging/tricky

- Duckworth addition and impact on parking
- Getting around the downtown by car due to Duckworth closures
- Accessibility – distance to accessible parking and challenges for those who could not walk/wheel the distances required to get to stores/shops
- Lack of public/accessible washrooms
- No physical distancing and crowding
- Lack of garbage/recycling bins
- Weather was worse
- Reduced deck size impacted the “vibe”
- Animation was spotty/not well promoted
- Too many vacant storefronts

6% of people surveyed did not visit the Mall. Reasons for not visiting included:

Parking downtown is a challenge
Not interested in downtown
Prefer to shop/dine etc. elsewhere
COVID-19 (e.g., too crowded)
Schedule didn't permit/was working or away
Accessibility issues

# What the Public told us about the Pedestrian Mall

## What they want to see improved

- Change which sections are included in the road closures. There was a view that Duckworth St. closures did not work. Consider a standalone event/partial closure of Duckworth St.
  - Suggestions around changes to which sections of Duckworth to include/exclude/one-way traffic flow, etc.
  - Need to see public washrooms and handwashing areas
  - Better signage to direct people to businesses throughout the downtown
  - Do a holiday market
  - Add local farmers
  - Suggestion to purchase the parking space on Solomon's Lane and work with the province to use the Court House space
- Clean up George St.
  - Make it weekends only
  - Have booth rentals in place for local vendors
  - Open it earlier and keep it open longer
  - Make it permanent
  - Add permanent infrastructure, especially entrances
  - Allow/add food trucks
  - Do not allow bicycles/scooters
  - Add a hop on and off to help people with mobility issues be able to move around easier
  - Add shade/umbrellas
  - Better use and promotion of the animation; potential for private contracting of event management

# What we heard from the Inclusion community

## What worked well:

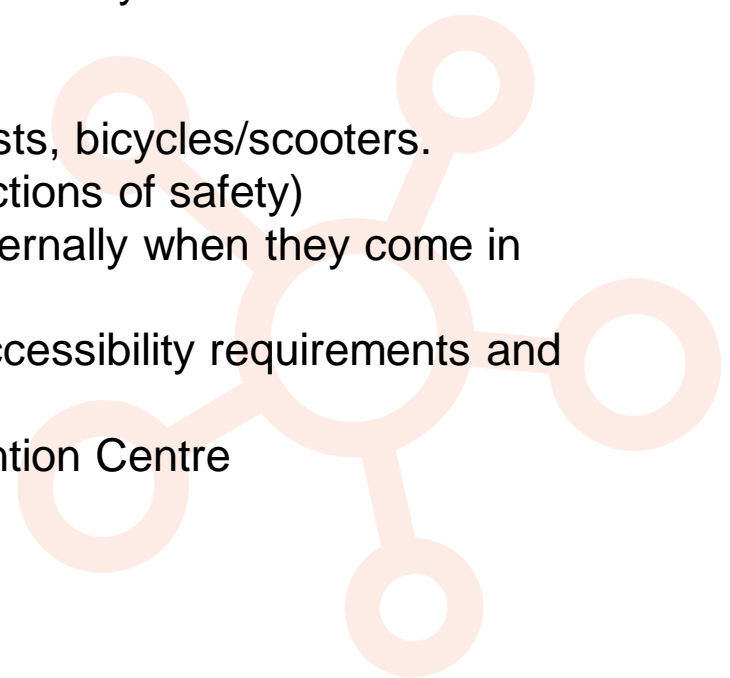
- Generally pleased with the planning process and involvement of Inclusion Advisory Committee (IAC) early in process.
- There was more clarity on where Go Bus was travelling. Good feedback from Go Bus users.
- Walk through showed there was more accessible seating, some businesses had entrances which was good, some creative things in place to accommodate all users.

## What was challenging or tricky:

- Need information earlier regarding Go Bus drop off; it was the end of July before it was fully fleshed out
- Getting businesses to participate in the inclusion training offered through City and Downtown St. John's to increase awareness of needs
- Anything fixed in place or high was not able to accommodate everyone
- No accessible public washrooms
- Use of ATV ramps, better to have none than those that are not safe
- Ramps that went nowhere
- Some specific businesses created more challenges by using sidewalk/bump outs for seating or other purposes which impacted mobility and flow
- 2-meter access on sidewalks sometimes impeded by signage, cleaning stations, etc..
- Businesses understanding "the why" of the 2 m. sidewalk access
- George St. accessibility was not obvious
- Skateboards and bikes speeding through the space were safety concerns
- No curb cuts to get off sidewalk if sidewalk was used for something else like sales, etc..

# Recommendations from inclusion community

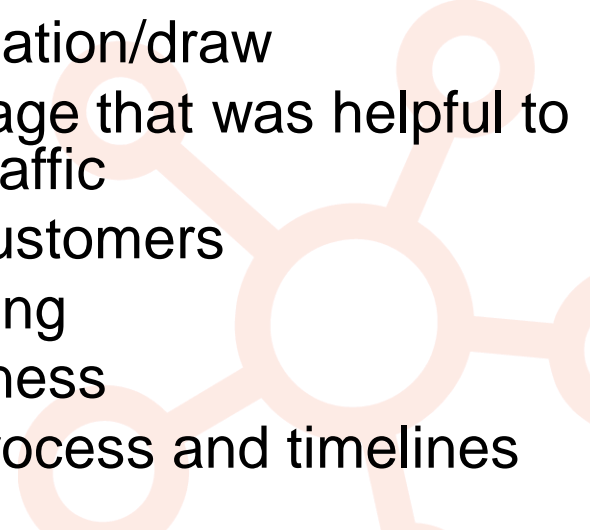
- Add information on where decks are to help people better plan and navigate
- Offer training to businesses earlier and provide clarity on the why it's important
- Make the map available earlier to help people plan – add Go Bus drop offs to the map
- Communication with security earlier on Go Bus locations and blue zone parking
- During the application process, need more information on accessibility and the why of it
- Need to know where the accessible public washrooms are on the map
- Businesses need to know what they can and cannot do vis a vis ATV ramps
- Need safety messages for all on how to use the space– pedestrians, motorists, bicycles/scooters.
- Security needs training on accessibility and inclusion (how to deal with infractions of safety)
- 311 staff need awareness of the potential infractions/where to direct calls internally when they come in
- Barricades still a challenge for mobility
- Ensure all staff involved in events/activities on the street are aware of the accessibility requirements and potential infringements on access, covering sidewalks, etc.
- Consider using City buildings for accessible washrooms such as the Convention Centre



# What we heard from the business community

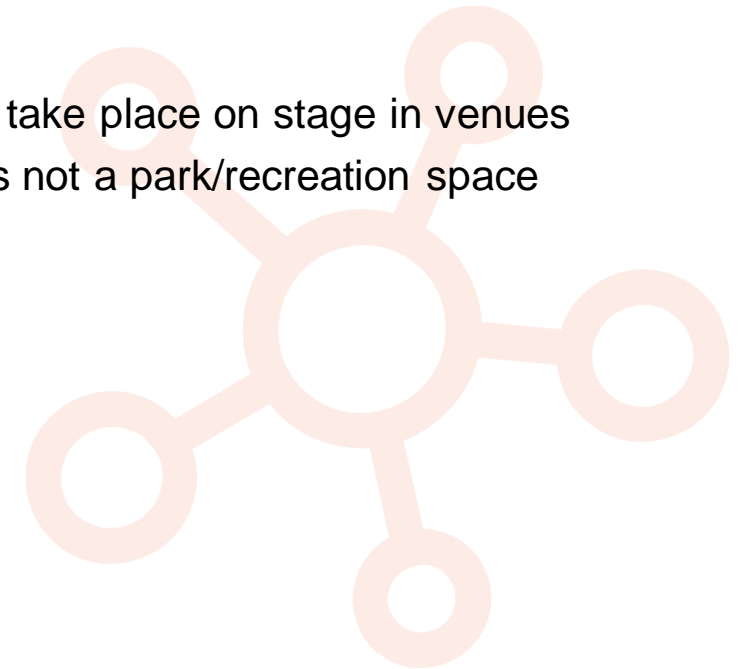
- With only 37 responses to the business survey (down significantly from 2020) and 20 businesses providing feedback via email, stakeholder meeting or on the [EngageStJohns.ca](https://engagestjohns.ca) page, there is no agreement among businesses about what worked well for the 2021 Mall.
- Businesses on Water St. who provided feedback were mostly positive about their experience and those on Duckworth St – both inside and outside the footprint – were mostly negative. There were some exceptions.
- Some businesses on Duckworth St. stressed that the Pedestrian Mall has negatively impacted their businesses for the past two years and created frustrations for their customers.
- Duckworth St. businesses felt that the decision to include them in a portion of the mall was not well planned and poorly executed.
- The George Street Association provided feedback via stakeholder meeting but none of the businesses submitted individual feedback.
- All agreed consultation with the business community is essential and needs to happen as early as possible in the planning process.
- While there were improvements noted in the permit application process, there were still points of confusion/lack of clarity in some areas.

# What we heard from the business community about challenges

- George Street
    - Lack of barricades at entry points lead to deliveries happening outside of the agreed upon times and blocking the street
    - Lack of security on the street to manage the traffic flow
    - Keeping things clean
  - Water St.
    - Clarity of process and rules re: decks/parklets
    - Loss of parking
    - Lack of public washrooms
  - Duckworth Street
    - Lack of meaningful consultation
    - Not enough time to determine what could work
    - Chopped up sections – no flow
    - Lack of animation/draw
    - Lack of signage that was helpful to attract foot traffic
    - Frustrated customers
    - Lack of parking
    - Loss of business
    - Permitting process and timelines
- 

# What we heard from the business community about future Pedestrian Malls

- George St. would like to be included again but need barricades, security, and adornments to enhance the street
- Businesses on Duckworth St. had mixed reviews; some suggested that they do not want the street closed at all; some suggested that if Water St. proceeds again, something else should be done for Duckworth St. such as a special event/series of special events; some suggested alternating months between Water St. and Duckworth St.; some suggested making each street one way
- Need to maintain enough parking to service the needs of the downtown regardless of where the mall is located
- Need public washrooms available with signage
- Need more security on the street(s) including police, potentially on foot
- Mall cannot compete with existing downtown activities such as performances that take place on stage in venues
- Keep the mall focused on what it is – support for businesses in the Downtown; it is not a park/recreation space
- Extend the duration (e.g., later into Fall, Christmas)
- More entertainment/animation
- More promotion
- Improved signage
- Open later at night



Business survey respondents rated their overall satisfaction with the pedestrian mall on scale of 1 to 5 where 1 was poor and 5 was excellent



**Satisfaction varied by section**

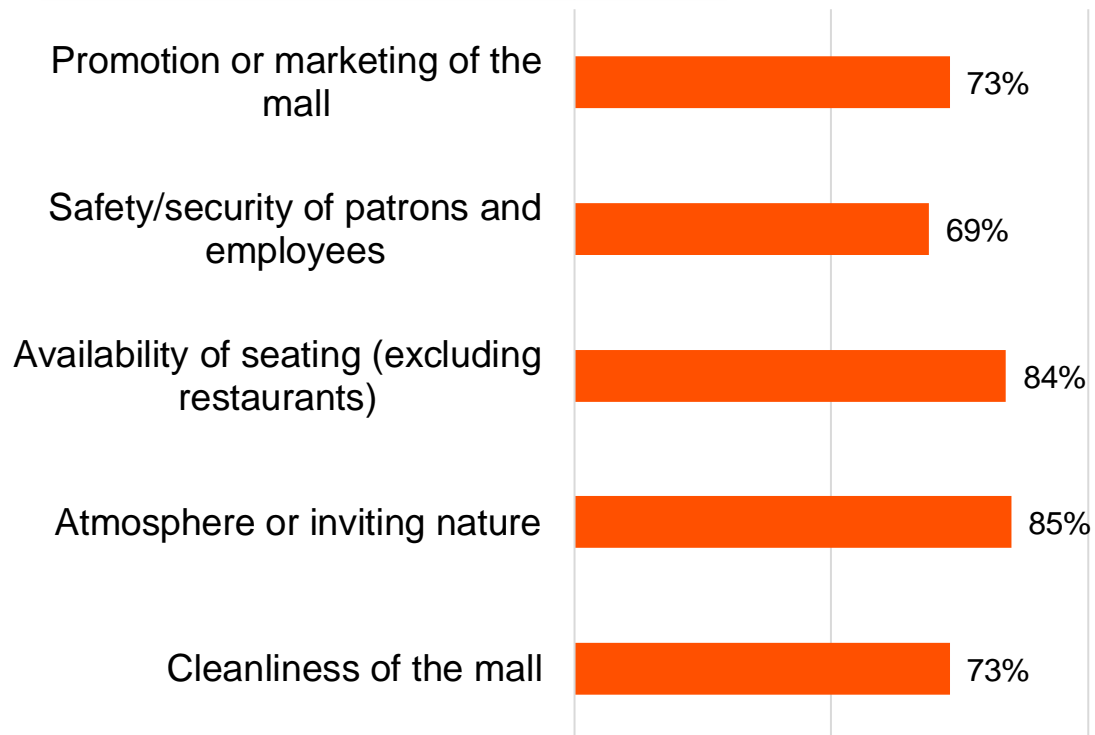
- Duckworth St., within mall: 2.0
- Duckworth St., outside mall: 1.8
- Water St, within mall: 4.0
- Water St, outside mall: 3.3

Note the # of responses to the survey are not representative of all businesses.

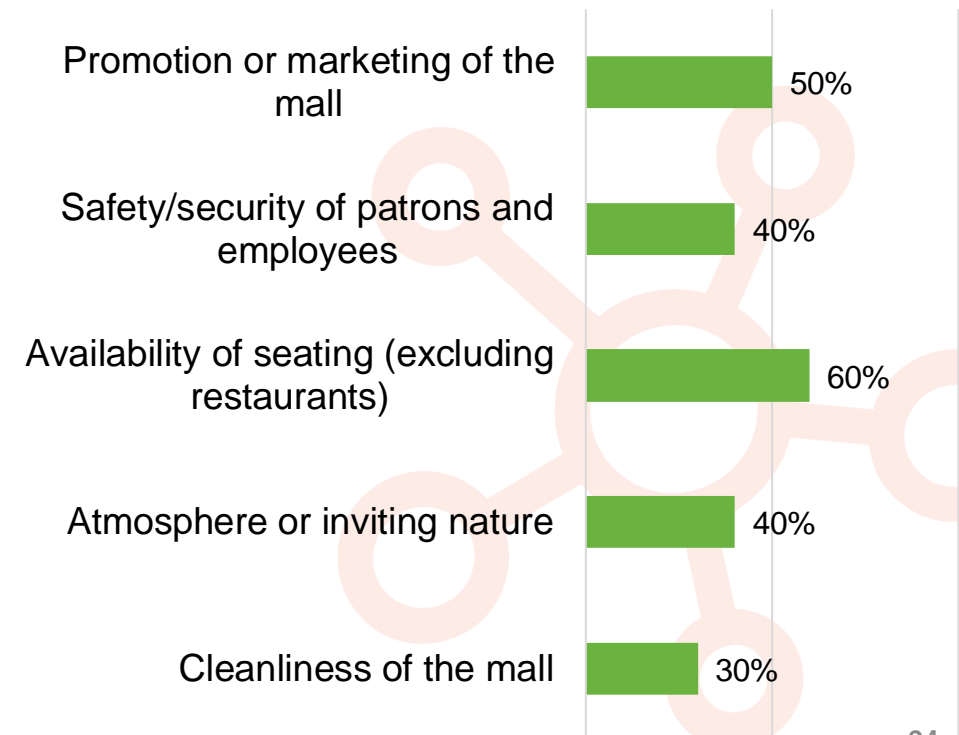
## How participants rated the Pedestrian Mall's various features

Percent rating the feature as  
**GOOD or EXCELLENT**

### Water St. (n=26)



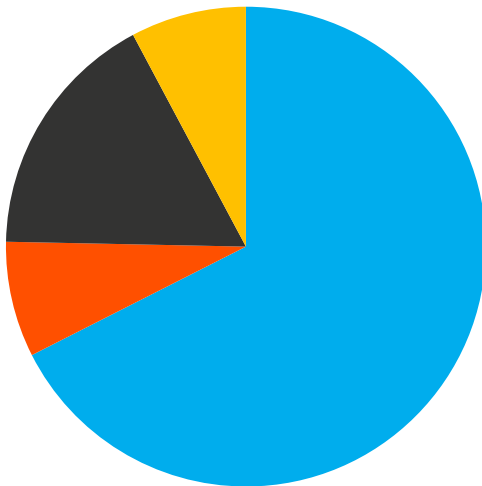
### Duckworth St. (n=10)



## Impact to Business - Comparison

### Water St.

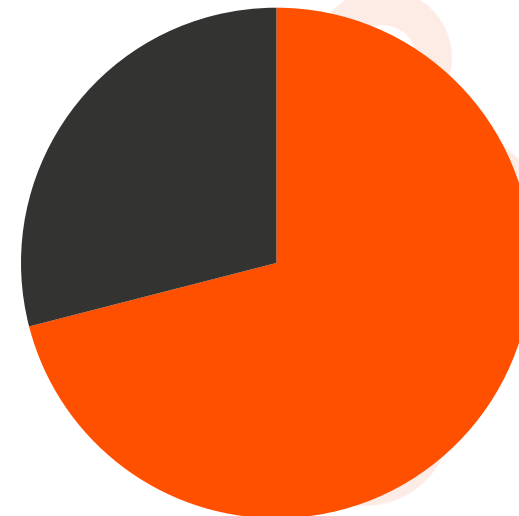
- Mostly Positive
- Mostly Negative
- Both positive and negative
- No impact



n = 16

### Duckworth St.

- Mostly negative
- Both positive and negative



n = 7



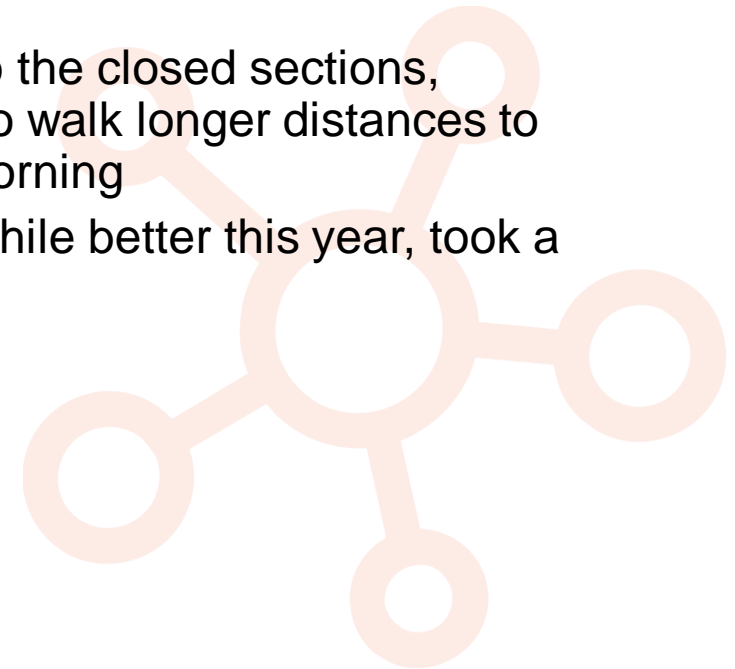
# What we heard from the transportation sector



Generally, they felt they were able to work with city staff to adjust where needed and were generally supportive of the mall.

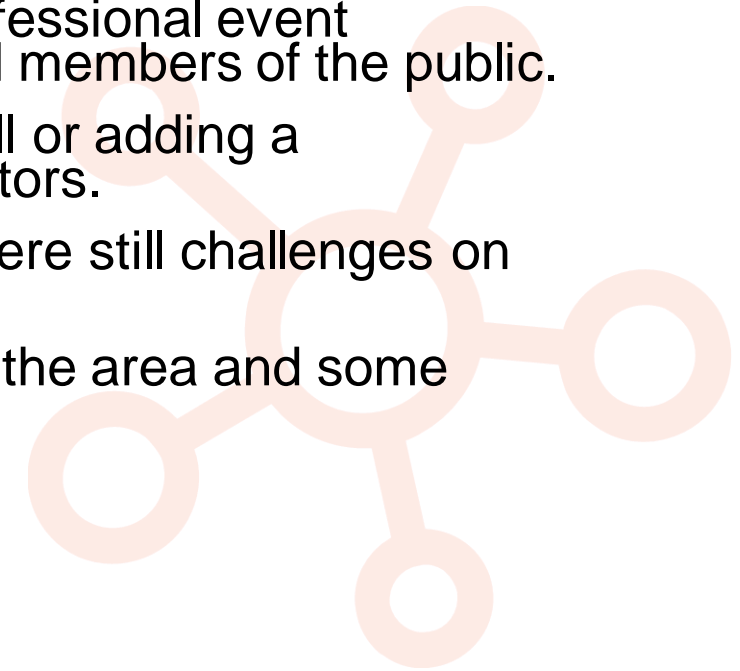
Areas for improvement:

- Consider implications for taxi layby for all taxi companies, i.e., George St. and Adelaide St.
- Consider safety and taxi access to the closed sections, especially for bar staff who need to walk longer distances to vehicles/taxis late at night/early morning
- GoBus pick up/drop off location, while better this year, took a few weeks to get sorted.



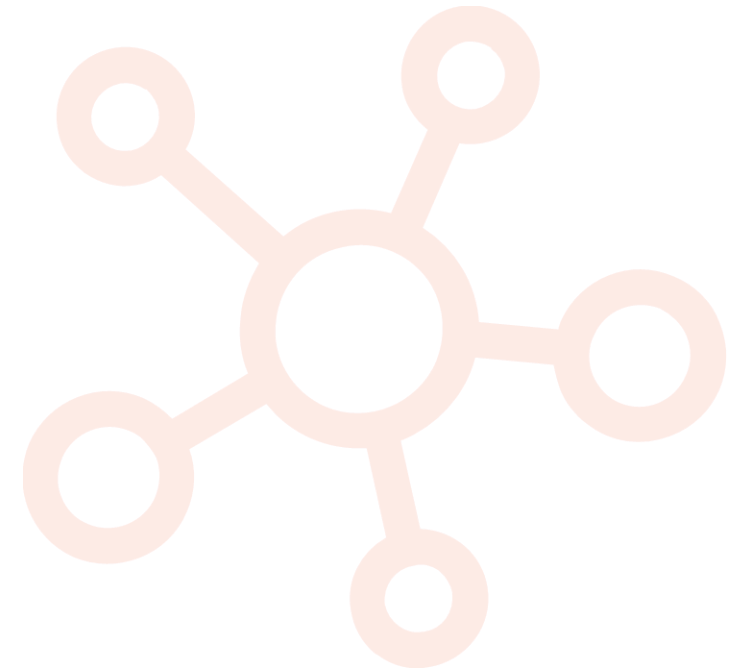
# Highlights of what we heard

- Generally, there is a view that the Downtown Pedestrian Mall is well liked and used by the public; this perspective differed, depending on which section of the mall was discussed.
- Both the businesses on Duckworth St. and users of the mall felt the Duckworth St. addition did not add significantly to the mall and many business owners felt it negatively impacted business on the street.
- While the animation added for 2021 was seen as a positive addition, some noted it was spotty and not always well promoted. Some suggested hiring professional event organizers. These comments were made by both businesses and members of the public.
- Many public people suggested increasing the timelines of the mall or adding a winter/holiday mall. This was also noted by some business operators.
- While improvements in accessibility were noted for 2021, there were still challenges on sidewalks where the 2m width was infringed upon.
- Many people noted the increase in the number of panhandlers in the area and some raised concerns about safety.



# More of what we heard

- To read more details of what was heard through the public surveys and the business survey, check out those documents.



# Next Steps



Share What was Heard with the public, business community and other stakeholders, staff, and Council



Complete the review and make recommendations for future pedestrian malls



Present a final report with recommendations to Council



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informed

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## Downtown Pedestrian Mall Pilot Project


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The City of St. John's opened the Downtown Pedestrian Mall on July 3. The purpose of the Mall was twofold:

1. to allow the business community to expand their space thereby stimulating the downtown economy, and
2. as a means to allow people to use public space while adhering to required public health physical distancing guidelines stemming for the Covid 19 pandemic.

**Public Survey**



**Downtown Business Survey**

