

Dunn Dowling Bridge Replacement Study

Public Consultation Report
July 2023



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Consultation Summary

Background

The City of Toronto is conducting a Bridge Replacement Feasibility Study for the Dunn Avenue and Dowling Avenue bridges. The study will identify a preferred type of bridge and alignment for these important connections to the city's waterfront and consider how the bridge replacements can provide a high-quality pedestrian and cycling experience.

As part of the Feasibility Study, the City is also proposing a new public space at the end of Dowling Avenue (north landing of the Dowling Avenue bridge). **The intention of this round of public consultation was to invite feedback for the new public space which took place from May 31 to June 14, 2023.** This report shares the feedback received from a drop-in event, an online feedback survey and general comments received by email and phone.

Engagement

The drop-in event was held on May 31 at the Toronto Community Housing Corporation (TCHC) building located at 75 Dowling Avenue. The intent of holding the event at this location was to receive feedback from residents directly adjacent to the Dowling Avenue bridge and future new public space. Over 30 conversations were recorded at the event in addition to 18 surveys completed on site.

During the round of consultation, 140 online feedback survey responses were received along with seven people providing comments by phone and email.

Communications to inform the public and stakeholders about the project and the opportunity to participate via the online survey included a project website, targeted emails to project stakeholder list and 8,731 flyers distributed by Canada Post throughout the project area (bounded by King Street West to the north, Gardiner Expressway to the south, Dufferin Street to the east and Dowling Avenue to the west).

Feedback

Feedback generally supported creating a new public space at the north landing of the Dowling Avenue Bridge with a range of preferences about which design elements to include in the space. During the drop-in event, residents provided input on landscaping and the need for regular maintenance (i.e., clean up of garbage and overgrown plants) with differences of opinion on the addition of seating (i.e., benches).

Top priorities among online survey participants were to add plantings and trees for shade, regular maintenance with waste receptacles, viewing area and to showcase Indigenous art and/or placemaking but taking care about any potential for vandalism. While seating areas were chosen as a design priority, some respondents also requested that seating not be provided. There is a high level of concern for any design that promotes people lingering in the area for extended periods of time, drug use and activities that don't encourage nearby residents to use the space.

The feedback gathered through this consultation will inform staff recommendations to City Council and further development of Dowling Avenue bridge design.

Another phase of consultation will take place to receive feedback on the designs for Dunn Avenue and Dowling Avenue bridge replacements. More information about the project can be found at toronto.ca/dunndowling

Project Overview

The City of Toronto is conducting a Bridge Replacement Feasibility Study for the Dunn Avenue and Dowling Avenue Bridges. These bridges are nearing the end of their service life and need to be replaced in the next two to three years.

As part of the feasibility study for the Dowling Avenue Bridge, the City reviewed four different alignments and explored the following changes to the bridge:

- Recommendation for a through-plate girder bridge for the span over the rail corridor and a truss bridge for the span over the Gardiner Expressway.
- Widening the bridge to 5.0 metres to accommodate pedestrians and cyclists only
- Adjusting the alignment to be a straight connection between Dowling Avenue and the pedestrian crossing at Lake Shore Blvd. West.
 - Shorter span over the railway and most direct path of travel
 - New intermediate pier and a longer span over the Gardiner Expressway to meet required clearance requirements.
- New public space at the Dowling Avenue Bridge which is the basis for this current round of community engagement and public consultation report.

Activities

Communication Activities

A variety of methods were used to notify people of the project and opportunities to participate in the design of the new public space:

- Project web page: toronto.ca/DunnDowling (228 unique visits between May 31 – June 28)
- Notice delivered through Canada Post (8,731 addresses in the project area)
- Email to stakeholders including residents' associations, community groups, organizations, institutions, and elected officials (30 contacts)

Consultation Activities

Public and stakeholder comment on the project was received through the following consultation and engagement activities:

Activity	Date	Participation
Drop-in/Pop-up Event	May 31, 2023	Over 30 attendees & conversations
Online Survey	May 31 – June 14, 2023	140 respondents 119 completed surveys
Email/Phone	May 31 – June 30, 2023	comments received from 7 individuals

Feedback Summary

- Suggestions for landscaping and more green space included native plantings, trees for shade as well as enthusiasm by some residents to help maintain new plantings.
- Reports of serious existing problem with garbage in the area and frequent dumping of large items over the fence adjacent to the Dowling Avenue Bridge making the area look uninviting and unkept.

- People need to feel safe and requests for lighting, cameras, suicide prevention for bridge design, drug prevention, discouraging people loitering and designing with site lines in mind.
- While providing seating ranks high among the priorities for a new public space in the feedback survey, people also expressed being fearful of the negative uses associated with seating areas including loitering, noisy gatherings and other disturbances.
- Requests for separation between people walking and cycling both on the bridge and access point to reduce conflicts between different bridge users.
- Comments that the bridge is well used and an important connector to Martin Goodman Trail and waterfront so worthy of a gateway design.
- The current temporary bridge is narrow, making it difficult to pass other bridge users and feels congested and unsafe.

Online Survey

The survey was available online and in print format and included background information on the project. The questions included multi-choice or multi-select responses, in addition to open ended comment boxes and optional demographic questions. Participation in the survey was anonymous. See Appendix for survey participant profile.

Responses received to each question are presented in this section. Demographic information from respondents is available in the Appendix.

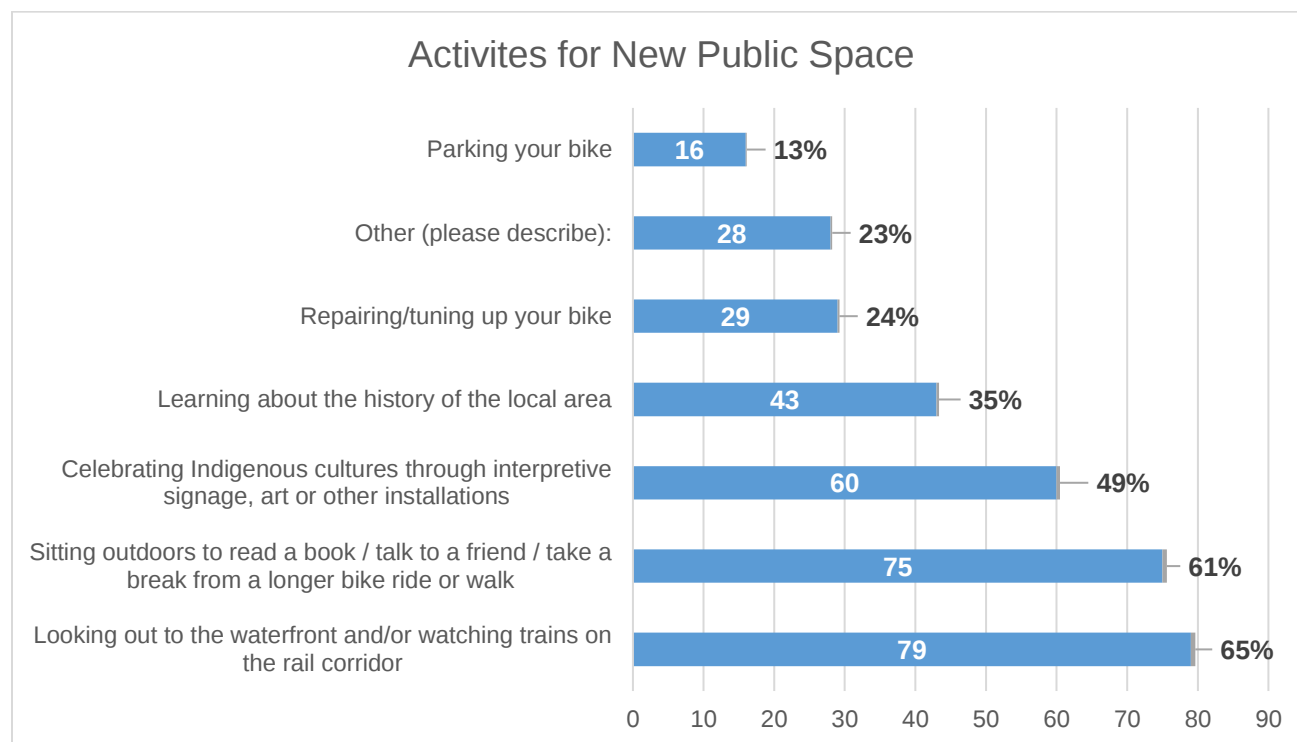
Question: What has your experience been in the current space north of the Dowling Avenue Bridge? Please provide any historical or community context the project team should consider as part of the public space design.

There were 78 responses to this question with the following popular topics:

Topic	Comment Summary
Current Dowling Avenue Bridge	- too narrow and feels congested - difficult for people to pass each other whether walking or cycling - awkward access for people biking with trailer - feels unstable and like a maze to navigate - people rush to get across because its not a place to hangout - needs to be a gateway connection between community and waterfront - emptying out to Dowling Avenue greeted by two ugly concrete barriers - convenient and favourite way to access water and bike paths
Maintenance	- serious problem with trash and drug paraphernalia in the area including large items being dumped over the fence into the ravine - lots of weeds and overgrown plants
Safety	- laneway beside apartment building adjacent to bridge does not feel safe and site lines compromised by trees - conflicts between pedestrians and cyclists on bridge - large gatherings at night with rowdy people and lots of noise - people hanging stuff on bridge and climbing
Other	- connection to waterfront offers good experience for residents with great views of water, train and festival watching - has become a great place to hangout - stories of ghosts roaming streets unceremoniously severed years ago

Question: What types of activities do you think we should prioritize for this new public space given its small size? (Check up to three)

There were 122 responses to this question, with the top three priorities including: looking out area, selecting a place to sit or take a break and choosing to celebrate Indigenous cultures through signage, art, or other installations.



Question: Describe any activities you think we should avoid in the design of the new public space at Dowling Avenue Bridge.

Topic	Comment Summary
Access	- gatherings or events like markets that could block access to bridge - no vehicles access - no steps or stairs
Aesthetics & View	- given better view on the south side of bridge, why bother with viewing area for the north side landing - concrete surfaces and barricades for cars - decorative or art items could be vandalized
Cycling	- bike repair station may take up space and create conflict with bridge users or vehicles using laneway - people are crossing bridge for waterfront access and do not need place to lock bikes - bike parking would be used for long-term and therefore be an eyesore - locked bikes would be targeted for theft
Maintenance	- avoid table or benches encouraging eating and garbage - do not attract pigeons
Safety & Disturbances	- avoid landscapes and structures that create blind and hiding spots - discourage people gathering, disturbance (noise), drug use and smoking - no skateboarding or dog off leash area
Seating	- will encourage sleeping, gathering, drug use, night drinking - too little seating does not create public space feel and function

Question: Which of the following other design elements do you think would create the most value in beautifying the area? (Choose up to two)

There were 111 responses to this question with:

- 85% (94 respondents) choosing planting and naturalized features
- 60% (67 respondents) choosing enhanced lighting
- 30% (33 respondents) choosing special paving as other design elements to beautify the area

Question: Please share any other comments, concerns or suggestions related to the design of the Dowling Avenue Bridge north landing.

Topic	Comment Summary
Comments	- ensure accessibility and safety - will miss current feeling of a more private access - not convinced people will stop to sit or take in the view from the north side looking over the highway
Concerns	- speed of cyclists crossing bridge and user conflicts with pedestrians - duration of construction - ensure no lighting will shine through people's windows - safety concerns for people sleeping overnight and criminal activity - <i>Quote: My family uses this bridge regularly and we have lived 106 meters from it for twenty years. The entire strip from the bottom of Dowling through Springhurst to Jameson is a magnet for trash. Part of it is environmental with winds blowing litter to the fence, but part of it is the almost constant accumulation of detritus from people chucking old belongings over the fence toward the tracks burning items along the footpath or in the parking lot people scattering the contents of an apartment along the bridge after a breakup, and on and on. These are more the consequences of socioeconomic issues than anything and I'm not expecting a bridge or public space to fix that. But whatever can be done to beautify the area, or at least not have it act as a trash magnet, I welcome.</i>
Suggestions	Public Art - engage local Parkdale artists - panel that describes the Indigenous, settler, and/or geological history of the area Access - position social space to the side of the bridge entrance at the landing - reopen bridge to cars as originally planned to go west on Lakeshore Blvd. and access Gardiner at Windermere Ave., and to come home by east access from Lakeshore Blvd. after turning left from left turn lane built onto Jameson Ave bridge after exiting Gardiner Bikes - dedicated access area for people cycling so they don't have to dismount - connection to the bike network on Dowling St. - transition from street to bridge with curb cut indicating where cyclists can enter/exit the bridge Dowling Avenue Bridge - move crosswalk (Lakeshore Blvd. W.) to better align with south landing - better signal coordination south landing to cross Lakeshore Blvd W. - consider look out point in the middle of bridge - design for classy looking bridge (50s look) - recommend steel girder bridge Landscaping - add lots of greenery to help provide shade and cooling

Topic	Comment Summary
	- community garden/plant space and partnership with non profit groups Lighting - add motion centred lighting to help address light pollution - avoid white LED street lighting as it reduces night vision and less safe Maintenance - start by cleaning up today's garbage and overgrown weeds - signs for people to clean up after dogs and no smoking - <i>Quote: To improve the area would be best to clean the ravine area by the bridge, cut the hedging, getting rid of invasive species, and getting rid of trees that have died. General housekeeping, putting in a dog poop station and looking after the green space would be a huge improvement, while keeping the same bridge aspect would do more for the area than putting in any public space.</i> Pavers (paving stone) - permeable paving to allow rainfall to flow between gaps and beneath surface Safety - surveillance cameras (e.g., propose blue light stations and well-lit public areas and CCTV) Other - bioswale (channels designed to concentrate and convey stormwater runoff while removing debris and pollution) at the bottom of a slope - water fountain

Drop-in Event

The drop-in event held at 75 Dowling Avenue Building on May 31, 2023, included display panels and staff members who engaged residents about the project. Attendees were able to view information panels about the project, speak with members of the project team and fill out printed surveys. Participant comments from conversations with staff are summarized below:

Topic	Comment Summary
Bridge	- existing not comfortable to walk across and does not feel stable - many student groups use bridge for field trips
Cycling	- ensure no dismounting required through space or on bridge - bike parking might attract theft and vandalism - some interest in bike repair station
Landscaping	- more plantings and trees to help with providing shade - consider shade structure - some residents keen to assist maintain
Maintenance	- serious trash and garbage dumping problem including litter making its way across to railway tracks - worried about attracting pigeons and people not cleaning up after pets
Safety	- security needed for people around bridge (e.g., cameras, crime prevention, suicide prevention, laneway blind spots) - worried about increased drug use activity
Seating	- mixed reactions with some people welcoming the opportunity to sit (rest and/or have conversations) and other people with strong concerns that seating wouldn't be used by residents and instead for gatherings, sleeping, drug use, smoking etc. - Ensure any seating is cleaned from bird poo
View	- support for viewing area - doubt that people would stop to take the view in from north side
Other	- concern about ponding at base of bridge north side - desire to keep access point/space private

Additional Feedback

The comments received through phone and email are summarized by theme below:

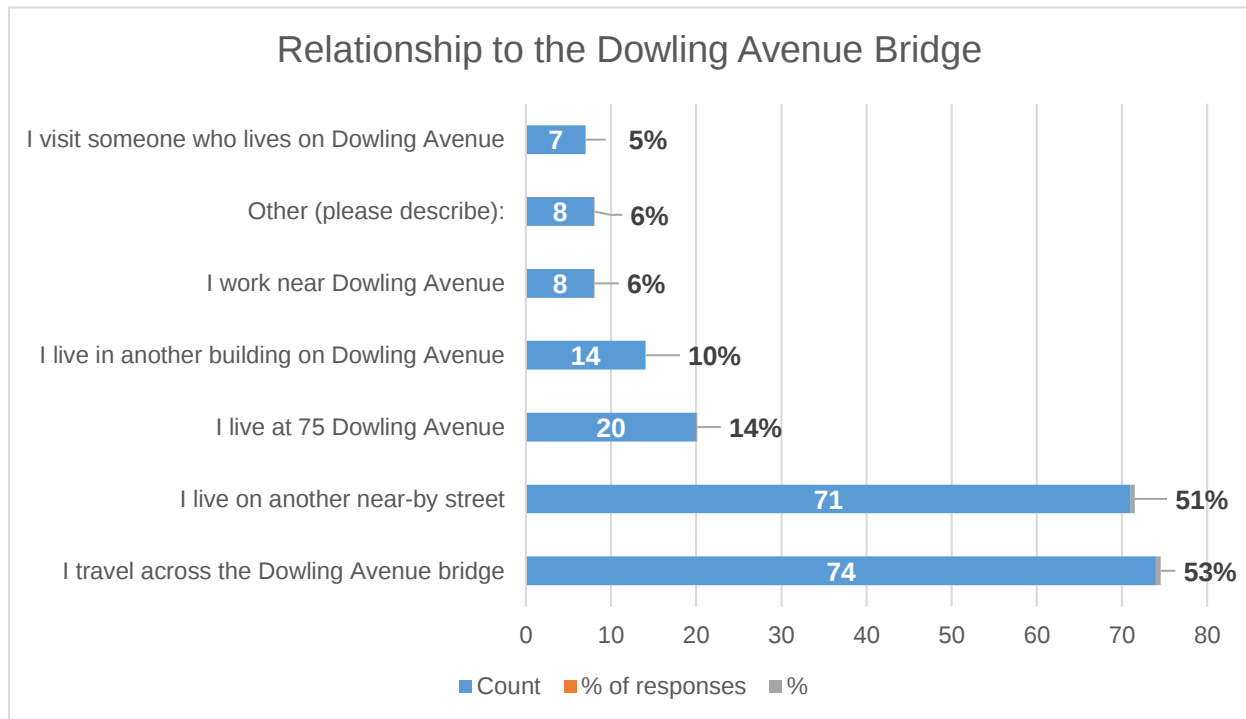
Theme	Comments
Access	- car access on bridge needed to reduce congestion on near by main streets - connection to waterfront trail critical for community during construction and keep non-car - do not add stairs
Bridge Design	- some people keen to talk about bridge design and following the look of other new bridges close to waterways
Landscaping	- plantings, Native, PollinateTO partnerships
New Public Space Design	- prioritize seating and plantings in the context of quiet moments - caution noisy activities

Appendix: Survey Participant Profile

About You

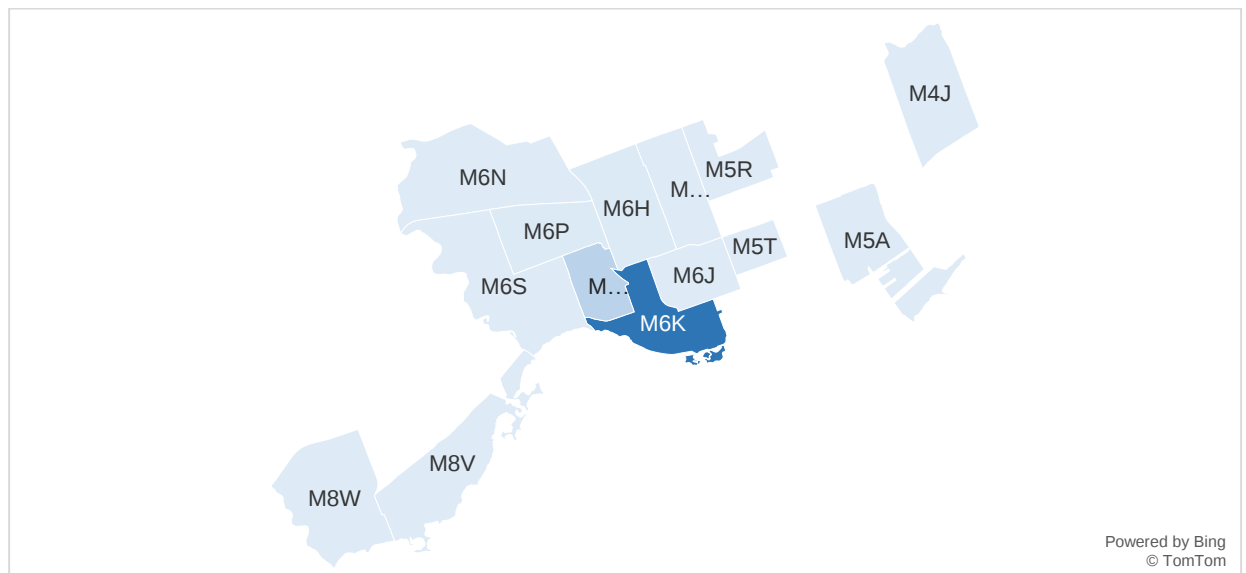
Which statements describe your relationship to the Dowling Avenue bridge north landing area?

Respondents were able to select all that apply. There were 140 responses to this question. The majority selected travel across the Dowling Avenue Bridge and live on another near-by street as their relationship to the bridge.



What are the first 3 digits of your postal code?

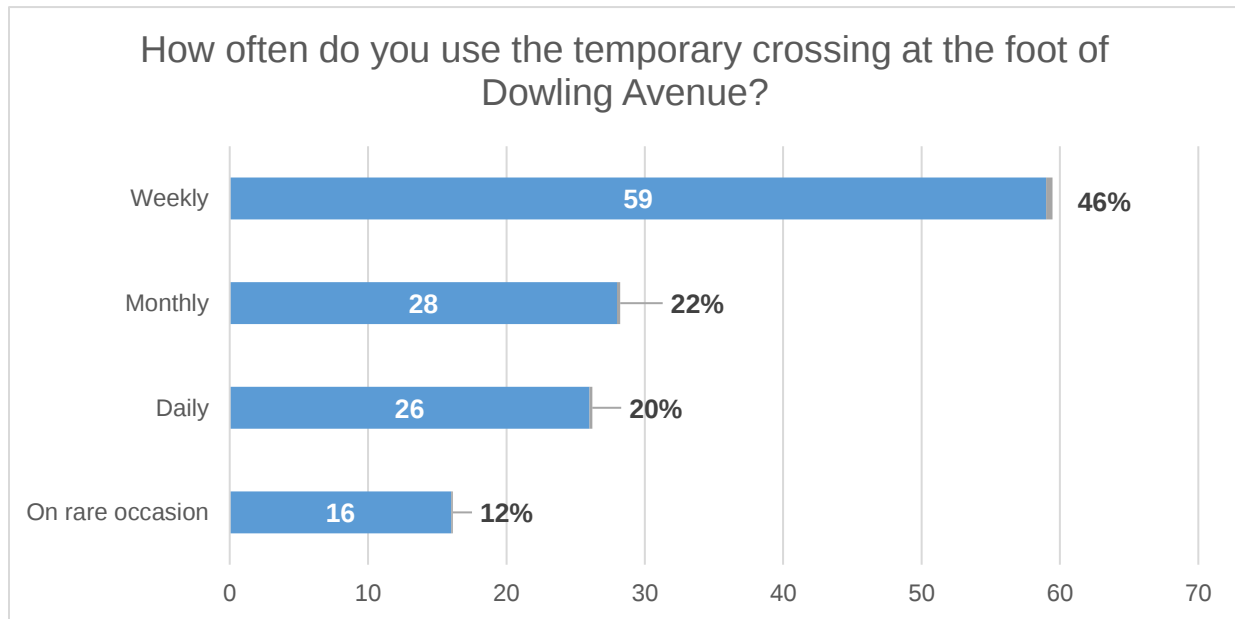
There were 132 responses to this question with the bulk of 66% (95 respondents) living in the immediate area of M6K in the Parkdale neighbourhood followed by 16% (20 respondents) in nearby M6R in the Parkdale/Roncesvalles neighbourhood.



Your Experience

How often do you currently use the temporary crossing at the foot of Dowling Avenue?

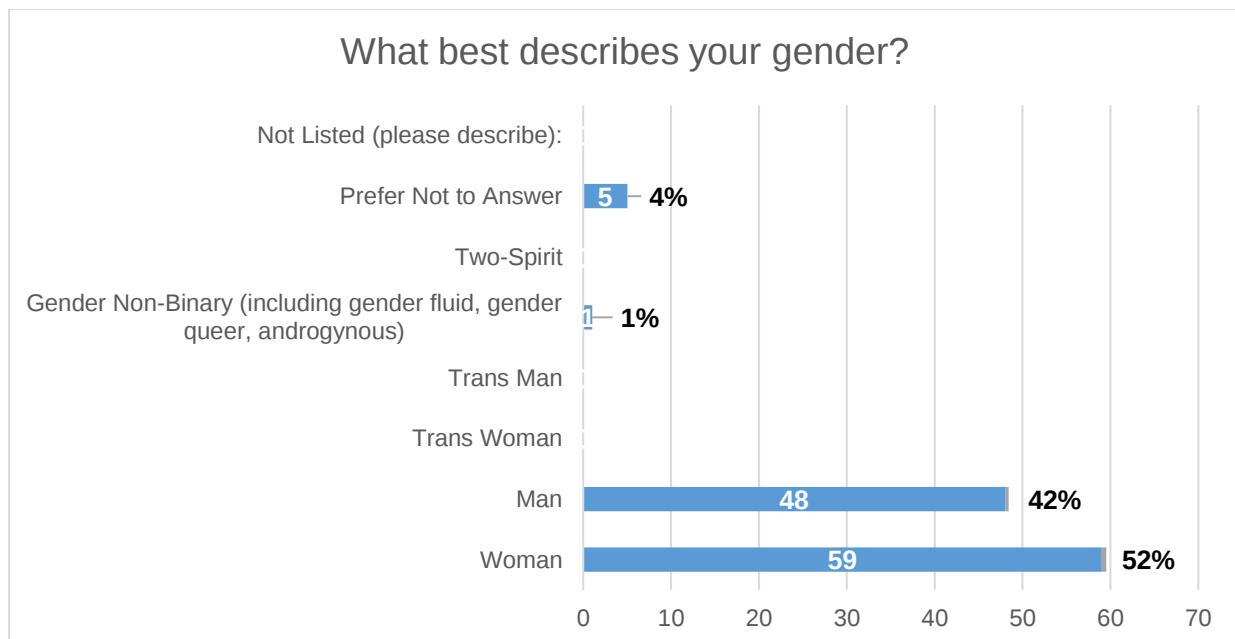
There were 129 responses to this question with many people crossing weekly, followed by monthly and daily crossings.



Demographics

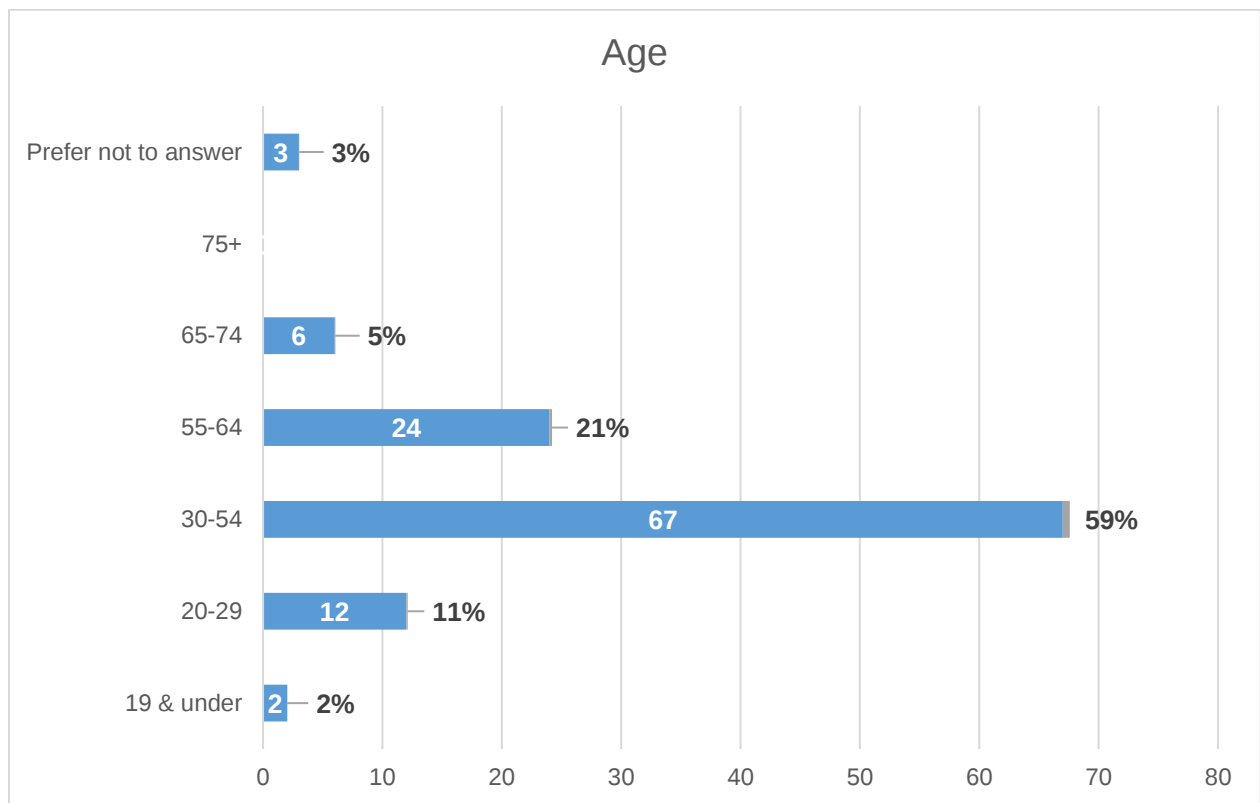
What best describes your Gender?

There were 113 responses to this question.



What is your age?

There were 114 responses to this question.



How did you hear about this project?

There were 109 responses to this question with a range of results for how people were notified.

