



Mid Humber Gap

Municipal Class Environmental Assessment

Public Consultation Summary

July 2021

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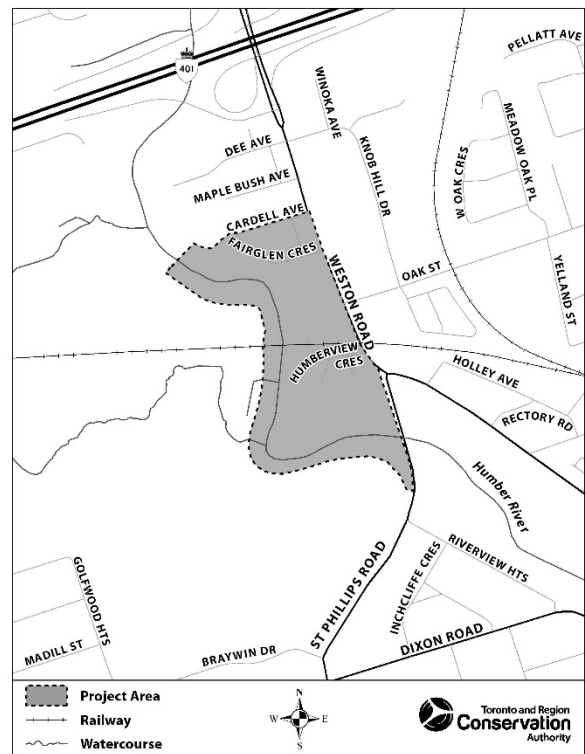
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The City of Toronto, in partnership with Toronto and Region Conservation Authority (TRCA), is conducting a Municipal Class Environmental Assessment (MCEA) to identify the preferred multi-use trail alignment for the gap in the Humber River Trail (HRT) just south of Mallaby Park at St. Phillips Rd. and the southern entrance to Crawford-Jones Memorial Park off Cardell Ave.

Potential trail alignments have been identified and members of the public were engaged to provide feedback and have their questions answered. A variety of public engagement opportunities were provided including:

- formation of a Stakeholder Advisory Group (SAG) (community and organizational representatives listed in Appendix #1)
- individual stakeholder meetings
- virtual public meeting #1
- online feedback form
- tracking of both phone and email correspondence

This report summarizes the public communications sent out and feedback received leading up to and after the virtual public meeting. The feedback received will be used to inform the next phase of the study and a second virtual public meeting will take place in late 2021.



What We Heard Overview

Overall, public response was very supportive of connecting the Mid Humber Gap and forming a continuous multi-use trail. The 1A in-valley option received the most support overall from Stakeholder Advisory Group members, through public meeting comments, online feedback form results, email and phone correspondence. Property owners within the project area also raised their concerns with potential impacts associated with the in-ravine alignment including: trail user safety, wildlife habitat, sustainability of the trail, flooding, trespassing, and vandalism. Popular feedback topics also included:

- Importance of accessibility (e.g., moderate trail slope, easy access points, and accommodating all abilities and ages)
- Value of a user experience that supports access along the iconic Humber River and increased exposure to this beautiful and natural setting
- Inquiries about impacts to the natural environment (e.g., flood risk and slope stability)
- Acknowledgment of the long-term community benefits of a continuous multi-use trail (e.g., recreation, mental health, safety) and serving both local and area residents as well as broader trail users
- Concern about road safety for pedestrians and cyclists on Weston Road given traffic volumes and speed.

Notification and Communications

Public communications were used to promote awareness of the consultation process, collect broad perspectives, and engage stakeholders and the public on the potential trail alignments to complete this gap in the Humber River Trail:

- 10,041 flyers delivered by Canada Post (May 25, 2021) for the virtual public meeting to the project study area bounded by: Highway 401 (north); Lawrence Avenue (south); Islington Avenue (west); and Elm Street/Langside Avenue (east)
- Email invitation to SAG members, stakeholder list, and local Councillors, MPP and MPs
- Indigenous engagement with the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation, Six Nations of the Grand River (Both Six Nations Elected Council and Haudenosaunee Confederacy Chiefs Council), and Huron-Wendat Nation
- Paid advertisement in Etobicoke Guardian (May 27, June 3)
- Project webpage: toronto.ca/midhumbergap

Activities

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, consultation activities were adapted to ensure the health and safety of all community members and to align with public health recommendations. Face-to-face engagement activities were substituted with online and telephone interactions.

Public communications to promote the first Public Information Centre included flyers delivered to addresses within the study area, email invitations to local councilors and stakeholders.

Specific activities included:

- 12 participants at SAG meeting #1
- four individual stakeholder meetings (i.e., property owners)
- 77 attendees for a virtual public meeting
- 56 completed online feedback forms
- over 50 emails and phone calls received and logged

Stakeholder Advisory Group, May 5, 2021

The meeting included a presentation on the SAG Terms of Reference, project background, Municipal Class Environmental Assessment process, planning context, preliminary screen matrix, and project timeline. The team listened to concerns and answered questions.

Table 1: SAG Questions/Comments and Staff Responses

Questions and Comments	Responses
Can private landowners veto alignment options that are proposed on their property?	TRCA and the City have met with several private landowners and will continue to do so throughout the MCEA process. The City can negotiate with landowners regarding any potential impacts to their property as it relates to the preferred alignment. Further discussions will be held with groups as the project moves into the detailed evaluation phase.
The trail should accommodate all users and avoid conflict where possible (e.g., avoiding steep slopes and ensuring adequate width).	Once the preferred alignment has been selected, conceptual details on trail configuration and characteristics will be identified. There are constraints to widening the trail; however, during the detailed design process, the project team will look at opportunities to widen where possible.
Pedestrian safety along a very busy Weston Road was raised as a concern.	Option 3A is an on-road alignment with dedicated cycling facilities along Weston Rd. The project team will be investigating the feasibility of this option and the modifications and impacts required to implement a safe route along Weston Rd. (e.g., potential lane reductions, shifting of existing utilities, etc.).
Concerns around the proposed trail slope at Mallaby Park for Options 2A and 3A. Steep slopes will be problematic for children and users with mobility issues.	The preliminary preferred alignments (Options 1A, 2A, and 3A) are still at the conceptual stage and will be further refined to better characterize their configuration, including a better assessment of slopes based on existing topography, as the project progresses into the detailed evaluation phase.
Flooding and erosion concerns – what kind of studies will be undertaken to ensure any trail that is built is safe and built to last?	Several studies will look at flood patterns at a range of different storm types. The final Environmental Study Report will include all the studies undertaken and related information to provide a rational

Questions and Comments	Responses
	for the preferred trail design and alignment.
How soon can the trail be built?	The commencement of construction will depend on the completion of the MCEA and detailed design phase, acquisition of permits and approvals, and available budget.
Several SAG members voiced their preference for Option 1A (the in-ravine alignment) over Option 2A and 3A as the proposed trail alignment.	Recorded.

Virtual Public Meeting June 10, 2021

Introduction and Presentation

Participants were welcomed to the first Mid Humber Gap Public Information Centre (PIC) meeting. Councillor Frances Nunziata provided introductory remarks followed by introductions to the project team representing TRCA, City of Toronto, and R.J. Burnside & Associates Ltd. Consultants (meeting panelists listed in Appendix #2).

The presentation covered:

- Overview of Project, MCEA Process and Baseline Inventory (Corey Wells)
- Preliminary Screening and Preferred Alignments: in-ravine (1A); hybrid in-ravine and on-road (2A) and on-road (3A) (Trisha Radburn)

Question and Comment Highlights

Following the presentation, participants had the opportunity to provide their comments and/or questions via the WebEx question panel function or raise their hand virtually to speak, whereby the project team panelists provided answers. See Appendix #3 for meeting minutes.

Alternative 1A: in-ravine

- Most preferred by cyclists and frequent Humber Recreational Trail users as an in-valley approach providing the best trail user experience.
- Most preferred as it keeps users in-valley and avoids steep slopes making the trail more accessible and safe to all trail users (e.g., children, strollers, the elderly, etc.).
- Councillor Nunziata's efforts appreciated as improvements for cyclists are being seen in her ward, specifically on Scarlett Road.
- Although Option 1A seems favourable, it can have a significant impact on trail user safety, wildlife habitat, sustainability of the trail, flooding and vandalism on the golf course.
- Would bring a lot of people to the area which should be considered when assessing impacts to the study area.
- North end of the golf course should also be closely looked at since holes in the fence have been observed. The elevated wetlands at Taylor Creek have a bridge that hangs off the

roadway and is suspended over water. This bridge structure can be considered for the east bank of the Humber River.

Alternative 2A: hybrid in-ravine and on-road

- Inquiry if possible to construct the trail on the east bank of the river.
- While Option 2 and 2A are listed as in-valley alternatives and because part of the proposed alignment extends along Weston Road, the title should be renamed as an on-road option or as a hybrid option.
- In Option 2A there is a cross-section of the cantilever boardwalk and it seems to be only 5-6 ft. wide. Having cyclists and pedestrians share this boardwalk may pose safety issues.

Alternative 3A: on-road

- Least preferred choice due to potential traffic and safety issues on Weston Road.
- Of the three preferred trail alignments, is one more favourable in terms of trail-use, and in the interim is there a wayfinding strategy to redirect users on the north end of the gap to the south and vice versa?
- Inquiry if practical to limit Weston Road southbound to one (1) lane.
- Question if for Option 3A, cyclists and pedestrians share the same walkway.
- TRCA and City staff should meet with residents on Cardell Avenue and Fairglen Crescent if Option 3A is the preferred alignment and impacts to properties are anticipated (i.e., sidewalks).

Fill Remaining Gap

- The Mid Humber Gap proves to be an important project as it will fill a significant trail gap along the iconic Humber River and will benefit many residents and trail users within the city. Efforts of the project team including the City, TRCA and Councillor Nunziata are greatly appreciated.
- Inquiry if there are other environmental assessments being initiated for other gaps in the Loop Trail, such as the section south of Duncan Mill Road to Lawrence Avenue East along the Don River.

Private Property

- Inquiry if the Weston Golf and Country Club signaled any intention to cooperate in this project and response by staff that WGCC have been extremely cooperative in allowing the project team to conduct several studies on their property as part of the MCEA process and TRCA's broader biological and terrestrial inventory.
- The historical decision of allowing private property so close to the Humber River is a significant problem, and this project could provide an opportunity to fix that.

Existing Conditions and Evaluation Criteria

- As a resident of Cardell Avenue, the last house on Fairglen Crescent was demolished by the City because it was noted to be collapsing into the Humber River. The slope stability along this end (east side of Humber River) needs to be closely examined.

- Inquiry if a study been done to determine how many people use the trail prior to Covid and during and response that background data for the MCEA will include pedestrian and cyclist counts within the area and Parks, Forestry & Recreation is potentially looking at a park and trail user study.
- Interest in how screening criteria weighed (i.e., did some factors take precedence over others) and how will they be used moving forward for each of the preferred alignments.

Construction

- Inquiry about timing for construction and when can people expect trail connection be open for users with response that the commencement of construction will depend on the completion of the MCEA and detailed design phase, acquisition of permits and approvals, and available budget.

Feedback Form Results

An online feedback form was made available between May 28 and June 21, 2021, and completed by **59 participants**. Participants were asked to indicate their level of agreement for each of the three preliminary preferred trail alignments. Key points and observations included:

Alternative 1A: in-ravine

- 58 Respondents strongly support.
- Requests to keep trail in valley and maintain a continuous trail with more wilderness, natural experience and beauty
- Suggestion to commemorate Wadsworth family that once owned Mill on the west bank and had a large impact on Weston community.
- Seen as the long term viable solution of a complete trail along the Humber, crossing over to the golf course and back.
- Safe public enjoyment and mental health benefit outweigh the cost
- Construction would have less impact on Weston Road.
- Would only require a minimal shortening of Weston Golf & Country Club Hole # 2, to ensure safety for trail users and Hole number 2 already has a shortened. 'Ladies/Seniors' Green compare to the Men's Green which is close to the river's edge
- Toronto ravines should be enjoyed by everyone where joy increases exponentially.
- Only option designated as meeting the problem statement.

Alternative 2A: hybrid in-ravine and on-road

- Mixed results from Respondents with: two strongly support; 14 somewhat support; nine neutral; 10 somewhat do not support; and 20 strongly do not support.
- 2A and 3A need to consider gentler slopes.
- Mixed/modified on-road options are better than doing nothing but in the long run do not address physical accessibility issues and socially inclusivity i.e. hard time getting out and back on bike trail and confusion for first timers or folks who are new to outdoor activities.
- Stairs currently provide bottleneck and crowding as many users are coming up and down the valley.

Alternative 3A: on-road

- Two respondents somewhat support; four Respondents somewhat do not support and 38 Respondents strongly do not support.
- Riding on Weston Road scares even the most confident cyclists in terms of traffic.
- Traffic congestion around rail bridge (St. Phillips/Weston Rd.) sited as dangerous, unpleasant and concern for both pedestrians and cyclists.
- Weston Road feels unsafe and stressful.
- Would not be as bad if the slope down the boardwalk was gentler (<7%) and the path was wider and important to consider infrastructure for allowing cyclists to access businesses and roads in the area from multi-use trail (e.g. protected left turns/bike boxes, etc.) with consideration of trips with cargo from purchases.

Do Nothing Option (used as a baseline of comparison in all EAs): No new multi-use trail

- 54 Respondents do not support.

Other Topics and Suggestions

- Comments that Humber River is a favourite place in the city.
- Concerns about flooding and methods to inform trail users in advance of any risk.
- Trail connections provide benefit to both local residents and connectedness for other trail users and area communities.
- Assurances of accessibility needed:
 - o Address challenges faced by people with disabilities and able-bodied people who are currently not able to overcome extreme barriers like the St. Phillips steps (e.g., parent with stroller, senior person having to carry bike up and navigate stairs).
 - o Minimal slopes for people of all ages and including people who use mobile scooter in order to be inclusive
- Bridging this gap not only addresses one of the major shortcomings of the Humber River Trail — it also helps bring to fruition the Pan Am Path multi-use trail legacy project of the 2015 Pan American Games to connect 80 kilometers of trail from Brampton to the Rouge Valley.
- Evaluation Criteria comprehensive:
 - o Interest in the weighting given to each criteria given that sometimes higher weighting for financial factors and impacts to private property and traffic, thereby resulting in a middle ground option that serves no one, and wastes time, effort, and money
 - o Impacts to private property should not be ranked in the Social Environment area because this trail is a classic example of a public good and any private property in the way of the preferred alignment, should be expropriated to better serve the citizens of this city
 - o While trail accessibility is a criteria, broader consideration needed of trail experience for *any and all* users
 - o Accessibility, connectivity, and safety need to be given more weight relative to the other criteria
- Trail connection should have been built alongside UP Express when built.
- Requests to address signage, lighting (i.e. personal safety) and public art.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Stakeholder Advisory Group (SAG) Representatives

Joanne Acri, Weston Road Runners
Dave Bennett, Weston Village Residents Association
Johnny Dib, Walk and Cycle York South-Weston, Cycle Toronto
Jason Doolan, Weston Village Residents Association
Cheryl Gosling, Humberview Crescent Resident (Private Land Trust)
Antonietta Grossi, Principal, St. John the Evangelist
Alison Menary, Green Neighbours Network
Tamara Nahal, Cycle Toronto
Jason Paine, Humberview Crescent Resident (Private Land Trust)
Neil Park, Etobicoke Historical Society
Krishnan Rajasooriar, Superintendent Planning and Development Services, Toronto District Catholic School Board
Kristin Schwartz, CultureLink Settlement and Community Services
Matt Zuniga, TRCA Youth Council

Appendix 2: PIC #1 June 10th: Project Staff/ Panelists

Councillor Frances Nunziata
Jessica Bringham, Councillor Nunziata's Office
Trent Jennett, Councillor Ford's Office
Lisa Turnbull, TRCA (Toronto and Region Conservation Authority)
Corey Wells, TRCA
Celene Mariano, TRCA
Konain (Neena) Sajid, TRCA
Jennifer Hyland, CoT (City of Toronto)
Maogosha Pyjor, CoT
Mark Lowe, CoT
Mark De Miglio, CoT
Jonathan Lam, CoT
Cassidy Ritz, CoT
Jason Bragg, CoT
Trent Jennett, CoT
Robyn Shyllit, CoT
Ray Bacquie, R.J. Burnside & Associated Ltd.
Tricia Radburn, R.J. Burnside & Associated Ltd.

Appendix 3: PIC #1 June 10th: Question/Comment and Answer Period

Meeting participants provided their questions and comments with the following project team responses where applicable.

Q: Question

C: Comment

A: Answer

Alternative 1A: in-ravine

- **C:** As a frequent Humber Recreational Trail user, an in-valley approach is most preferred as it provides the best trail user experience. Option 3A would be the least preferred choice due to potential traffic issues on Weston Road.
 - o **A:** The project team is sensitive to the safety concerns of all users including pedestrians, cyclists, and drivers on Weston Road. If Option 3A is determined as the preferred alignment, it would most likely entail the realignment of several lanes on Weston Road. There would be a reduction of one north-bound lane between Oak St. and Cardell Ave. to accommodate for the planned bi-directional cycle track. The traffic and safety implications will be further investigated through the MCEA process.
- **C:** Option 1A is the most preferred as it keeps users in-valley and avoids steep slopes making the trail more accessible to all trail users (e.g., children, strollers, the elderly, etc.).
- **C:** As a frequent cyclist who uses the Humber Recreational Trail, more elderly folks are biking, especially since the start of the pandemic. The biggest safety concern should be traffic on Weston Road for Option 3A and elderly cyclists. To encourage use and safety, the best preferred trail alignment would be Option 1A.
- **C:** Councillor Nunziata's efforts are appreciated as improvements for cyclists are being seen in her ward, specifically on Scarlett Road. Option 1A is most preferred for bike users.
- **C:** As a cyclist who uses the Humber Recreational Trail, Option 1A is most preferred.
- **Q:** Although Option 1A seems favourable, it can have a significant impact on trail user safety, wildlife habitat, sustainability of the trail, and vandalism on the golf course. If the proposed alignment is within 3 metres of an active golf hole, golf balls can fly and hit trail users. The proposed alignment would also cause significant habitat fragmentation. There has been notable flooding along the proposed alignment, so the sustainability of the multi-use trail would also be in question.
 - o **A:** The trail alignments are highly conceptual at this stage and specifics such as distance from the green will most likely be redefined to mitigate issues as much as possible. Netting or fencing structures can be explored that can withstand cutters. As part of the EA process the environmental impacts are always considered and the alignment is refined to mitigate impacts to existing habitats and vegetation. In addition, the project team will be undertaking a detailed vegetation compensation plan as part of construction and modeling is currently underway to help design infrastructure to withstand high storms and flooding.

- **C:** Option 1A would bring a lot of people to the area which should be considered when assessing impacts to the study area. The north end of the golf course should also be closely looked at since holes in the fence have been observed. The elevated wetlands at Taylor Creek have a bridge that hangs off the roadway and is suspended over water. This bridge structure can be considered for the east bank of the Humber River.
- **C:** Option 1A is most preferred because it stays within the valley and is accessible for everyone.

Alternative 2A: hybrid in-ravine and on-road

- **Q:** Is it possible to construct the trail on the east bank of the river?
 - o **A:** A trail system along the east bank is being explored through Option 2A. North of the existing railway embankment, the eastern slope is quite steep, with exposed bedrock throughout most of its length. A number of studies will be undertaken to explore the feasibility of this route.
 - o **A:** During high water events, the bend of the river is what absorbs most of the impact, which is contributing to the current conditions of the east bank of the river. From a construction perspective this would be one of the most challenging locations to place trail infrastructure.
- **C:** Option 2 and 2A are listed as in-valley alternatives, but part of the proposed alignment extends along Weston Road. The title should be renamed as an on-road option or as a hybrid option.
 - o **A:** Correct, Options 2 and 2A have been considered as hybrid options and will be updated accordingly.
- **Q:** In Option 2A there is a cross-section of the cantilever boardwalk and it seems to be only 5-6 ft wide. Having cyclists and pedestrians share this boardwalk may pose safety issues.
 - o **A:** The images used in the presentation are highly conceptual. The image for the cantilever boardwalk is a generic image and does not specify the requirements needed for this project. If Option 2A were selected as the preferred, parameters and dimensions of the infrastructure would be closely examined. To keep the multi-use trail alignment as consistent as possible, the project team aims to maintain the width of the trail throughout the trail system including the boardwalk.

Alternative 3A: on-road

- **Q:** Of the three preferred trail alignments, is one more favourable in terms of trail-use, and in the interim is there a wayfinding strategy to redirect users on the north end of the gap to the south and vice versa?
 - o **A:** In some of the preferred alignments the slope and grade might be challenging for some trail users. Note, the bi-directional cycle track for Option 3A on Weston Road would technically be by-lawed for cyclists – however may get used by other trail users such as roller blading

- o **A:** Within the detail evaluation matrix, public safety factors are considered. The different trail alignments have different safety concerns and this is shown through the evaluation to date. The road alternative (Option 3A) scores slightly less in terms of some public safety factors.
 - o **A:** There are existing painted sharrow markings along Weston Road and Fairglen Crescent directing users around the trail gap; however, as an interim solution the project team will review adding signage and/or maps at the trail entrances at Mallaby Park and Crawford-Jones Park to also help users navigate the gap.
- **Q:** Is it practical to limit Weston Road southbound to one (1) lane?
 - o **A:** The potential to narrow Weston Road to one southbound lane may not be feasible due to existing traffic volumes and the challenging operational and safety issues this may pose during peak hours. The concept being considered for Option 3A is a lane reduction of only the third northbound lane (north of Oak Street) and a shifting of the roadway to accommodate more space for the proposed cycle track on the west side of Weston Road.
- **Q:** Under the rail structure for Option 3A, do cyclists and pedestrians share the same walkway?
 - o **A:** Yes, as part of the proposed option 3A, the walkway under the existing rail structure would need to be shared by all trail users. Its current width is approximately 4 metres with little possibility to widen. However, safety features would be considered during detailed design (such as railings) to protect users from vehicles under the narrow underpass.
- **C:** TRCA and City staff should meet with residents on Cardell Avenue and Fairglen Crescent if Option 3A is the preferred alignment and impacts to properties are anticipated (i.e., sidewalks).

Fill Remaining Gap

- **C:** The Mid Humber Gap proves to be an important project as it will fill a significant trail gap along the iconic Humber River and will benefit many residents and trail users within the city. Efforts of the project team including the City, TRCA and Councillor Nunziata are greatly appreciated.
- **Q:** Are there MCEAs being initiated for other gaps in the Loop Trail, such as the section south of Duncan Mill Road to Lawrence Avenue East along the Don River?
 - o **A:** This is the only active MCEA underway for the Loop Trail. There are several other gaps recognized in the Loop Trail, some of which may need a MCEA. Alignment of the Loop Trail along the Don is still under consideration by the project team.

Private Property

- **Q:** Has the Weston Golf and Country Club signaled any intention to cooperate in this project?

- o **A:** The City and TRCA have been engaging directly with private landowners, including the Weston Golf and Country Club, on the preliminary preferred options, their potential impacts, and mitigation measures. These discussions will continue as we get closer to identifying the preferred option to fill the gap.
- o **A:** The Weston Golf and Country Club have been extremely cooperative in allowing the project team to conduct several studies on their property as part of the MCEA process and TRCA's broader biological and terrestrial inventory.
- **C:** The historical decision of allowing private property so close to the Humber River is a significant problem, and this project could provide an opportunity to fix that.
 - o **A:** The project team does acknowledge that Option 1A passes through private property. In proceeding with the MCEA process, the project team will be working closely with private property owners.

Existing Conditions and Evaluation Criteria

- **C:** As a resident of Cardell Avenue, the last house on Fairglen Crescent was demolished by the City because it was noted to be collapsing into the Humber River. The slope stability along this end (east side of Humber River) needs to be closely examined.
 - o **A:** Slopes in this area can be significant. The composition of the east side of the Humber River predominantly consists of decomposing shale which limits design options from an engineering perspective. Further investigations and field studies are required to determine feasible solutions.
- **Q:** Has a study been done to determine how many people use the trail prior to Covid and during Covid?
 - o **A:** Transportation Services have conducted trail counts along the Humber River in the past. During the pandemic, trail counts were primarily recorded along ActiveTO routes and trails adjacent to those corridors (Don Trail and Waterfront Trail). Parks, Forestry & Recreation is potentially looking at a park and trail user study. Our background data for the MCEA will include pedestrian and cyclist counts within the area.
- **Q:** How were the screening criteria weighed (i.e., did some factors take precedence over others) and how will they be used moving forward for each of the preferred alignments?
 - o **A:** Screening criteria were evenly weighed during the preliminary evaluation of all proposed alignments. Moving forward, the same criteria and sub-criteria, (found on slide 35) will be investigated further through several upcoming studies.

Construction

- **Q:** How long after the notice of completion will construction begin, and the trail connection be open for users?
 - o **A:** The commencement of construction will depend on the completion of the MCEA and detailed design phase, acquisition of permits and approvals, and available budget.

Closing Remarks & Next Steps

Councillor Nunziata thanked all participants for attending. Maogosha Pyjor closed off the meeting by noting additional comments and/or questions can be submitted via the Feedback Form found on the project webpage, where participants can review the presentation. The last day to submit the Feedback Form is June 21, 2021. A meeting summary will be uploaded on the project webpage and shared with participants via email. The next PIC will likely occur in the fall.