

Ontario Line East Segment Noise and Retaining Wall Consultation Summary of Feedback

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Metrolinx

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Executive Summary

The Ontario Line is a subway expansion being built in Toronto to help ease congestion on existing transit lines throughout the city and bring transit to underserved neighbourhoods. In the East Segment of the Ontario Line that runs through Riverside and Leslieville, trains will run in the existing GO rail corridor, which Metrolinx already owns. Building the Ontario Line within Metrolinx property will cut down on construction timelines and impacts to the surrounding neighbourhoods.

As part of this work, Metrolinx will be installing new noise and retaining walls along the rail corridor between Eastern Avenue and Pape Avenue. Noise walls will ensure noise levels are the same or lower than they are today in most areas, and the new retaining walls that support them will create more green spaces in neighbouring parks.

From September 23 to October 24, 2021, Metrolinx conducted a consultation through a digital engagement to gather community input on specific design elements for the proposed noise and retaining walls along the East Segment of the Ontario Line. In total, 162 individuals participated in the consultation by voting and sharing comments on an online questionnaire. Participants were asked to provide feedback on design considerations for noise and retaining wall materials and finishes, landscaping and planting, and additional design features and concepts.

Overall Feedback

- Participants consistently expressed a preference for the Ontario Line East Segment to be built underground.
- Participants consistently suggested that the line can be encased by an at-grade tunnel if building the line underground is not possible.
- Participants emphasized that the existing tree canopy height should be maintained and expressed desire for as many new trees and vegetation to be planted as possible.
- Participants consistently indicated that the design features should deter graffiti.

Design Objectives

- Participants indicated that the priorities for the project should be reducing background noise levels, protecting existing trees, introducing new trees and plants, and minimizing the visual and physical impacts of passing trains and the expanded rail corridor.
- Participants discussed that more noise mitigations are needed to reduce continuous background noise from the high frequency of passing trains
- Participants were concerned about the safety risks posed by increased train frequency.
- Participants suggested that an encased rail corridor would better address community concerns about noise, safety, and preserving green space than the proposed walls.

Noise Wall

- Participants indicated that their preference for noise wall transparency would be based on whichever material is most noise-reducing.
- Participants supported trees and vegetation being planted in front of the noise wall, regardless of transparency level.
- Participants indicated that the level of transparency should vary depending on location, with residential areas having lower to zero transparency, and green space and activity areas having higher transparency.

Retaining Wall

- Participants indicated a desire for additional pattern options to be considered, and information on the non-visual qualities of the pattern options.
- Participants expressed desire for the concrete to be concealed by greenery and artwork.
- Participants discussed that the concrete pattern should be simple, deter graffiti, be easy to maintain, and support vine and vegetation growth.

Activity Features for Open Green Space

- Participants expressed a desire for multi-use trails that include designated bike lanes and connect with existing pedestrian and cycling pathways.
- Participants emphasized that seating and activity features should be accessible to all users.
- Participants indicated that activity spaces and trails should be designed to deter vandalism and graffiti.

Vegetation Types

- Participants emphasized selecting a mix of plants to provide colour in all seasons.
- Participants indicated a preference for native and pollinator plants.
- Participants suggested using vines, trees, and tall grasses to conceal the retaining wall.

Landscaping and Planting Features

- Participants indicated that a mix of landscaping and planting features be used to tailor to the surrounding neighbourhood's character.
- Participants indicated that landscaping and planting features should be designed to limit maintenance needs, deter graffiti, and conceal the retaining wall.

Trees

- Participants indicated that a mix of deciduous and coniferous trees should be planted.
- Participants recommended that faster growing tree species be selected to quickly restore removed canopy.
- Participants suggested that tree species that are better at blocking noise and concealing the retaining wall be prioritized.

Seating

- Participants emphasized that seating should be inviting and accessible to all.
- Participants suggested that seating be made resilient to potential skateboard activity.

Underpass Design

- Participants opposed the wall pattern options proposed and suggested the wall pattern should be simple and allow for the inclusion of public art murals.
- Participants indicated that the underpass design should prioritize deterring graffiti and creating a bright environment with no unlit corners.

Neighbourhood Identity

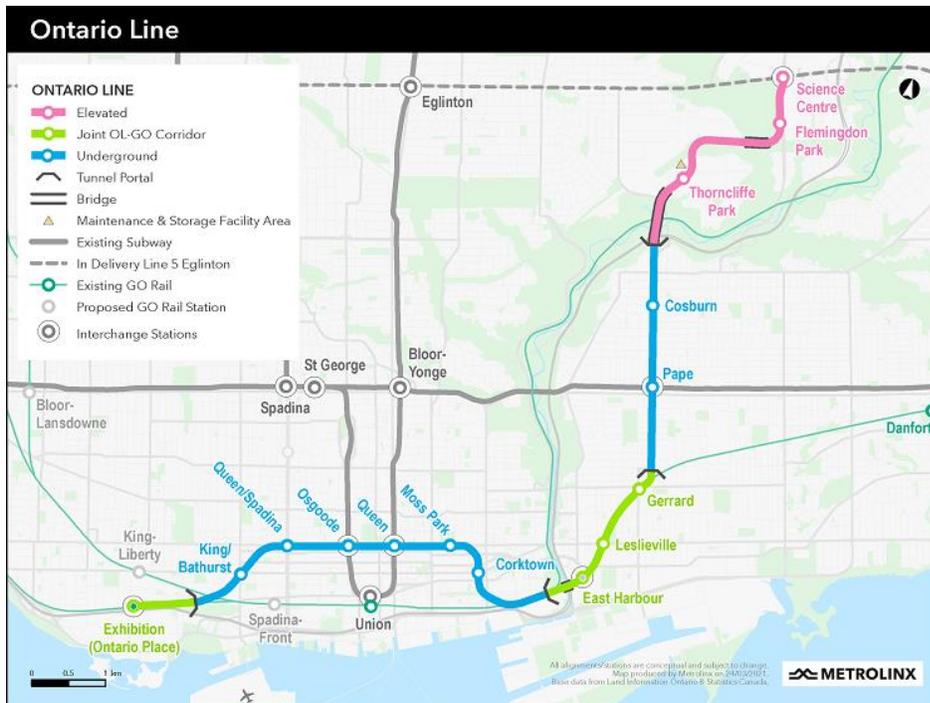
- Participants identified their neighbourhood as being quiet, family-friendly, walkable, vibrant, a friendly close-knit community, and has lots of history, heritage, and trees.

Section 1: Context

The Ontario Line will be the largest subway expansion in Toronto's history, helping to ease congestion on existing transit lines throughout the city and bringing transit to underserved neighbourhoods.

In the East Segment of the Ontario Line that runs through Riverside and Leslieville, trains will run in the existing GO rail corridor, which Metrolinx already owns. Building the Ontario Line within Metrolinx property will cut down on construction timelines and impacts to the surrounding neighbourhoods. Metrolinx will streamline this work with upgrades that were planned for the rail corridor to support expanded and electrified GO train services.

As part of this work, Metrolinx will be installing new noise and retaining walls along the rail corridor between Eastern Avenue and Pape Avenue. Noise walls will ensure noise levels are the same or lower than they are today in most areas, and the new retaining walls that support them will create more green spaces in neighbouring parks.



Engagement Purpose and Objectives

This round of community consultation was conducted through a digital engagement tool that intended to gather input from residents on how they feel about specific design elements for the proposed noise and retaining walls along the East Segment of the Ontario Line that runs through Riverside and Leslieville. The questionnaire was open from September 23 to October 24, 2021. Through this digital engagement, Metrolinx aimed to understand:

- Community priorities and concerns to inform the design objectives for the proposed retaining and noise wall finishes.
- Level of support for the design features being considered for the proposed retaining walls and noise walls and the landscaping features that surround them.
- Any additional thoughts, concerns, suggestions and ideas people had to offer Metrolinx.

Report Contents

This consultation summary report documents the results of the feedback received through the online questionnaire that comprised the digital engagement process. It includes an analysis of the feedback received and highlights the engagement methods used to gather community input. The key messages from the feedback, as described in this report, will be reviewed and considered by the project team and will inform a final design concept that will be shared with the community and stakeholders.

All feedback collected through the questionnaire has been reviewed and compiled by LURA Consulting into this summary report.

Report Methodology

All comments received through the online questionnaire have undergone a thematic analysis. This involves summarizing and categorizing qualitative data so that important concepts within the dataset are captured. Once the thematic analysis was completed for each question, the collection of themes was used to formulate the descriptive text in this report. It is important to note that comments received were wide-ranging. A summary of participant feedback can be found in **Appendix A** of this report.

Section 2: What We Heard

The following subsections provide an overview of key messages heard throughout the consultation on the design elements being considered for the East Segment of the Ontario Line. These design features include:

- Design objectives that will influence the finishes of the proposed retaining walls and noise walls;
- Noise walls, barrier materials and finishes;
- Retaining wall materials and finishes;
- Landscaping and planting (vegetation); and
- Additional design features such as trees and seating.

Participants had the opportunity to share comments and vote on their level of support for each of the design considerations through the online questionnaire. For a fulsome review of participant responses to the questionnaire, please refer to **Appendix A** for participant voting results and **Appendix B** for participant demographics.

Overall Key Messages

Feedback specific to each design element is presented further below. Across all feedback, several recurring key messages emerged. These overall key messages are as follows:

- Throughout all sections of the online questionnaire, many participants consistently expressed a preference for the Ontario Line East Segment to be built underground.
- Many participants expressed desire for the line to be encased by an at-grade tunnel if building the line underground is not possible.
- Many participants expressed concern about the loss of mature trees. Participants consistently expressed desire for as many new trees and vegetation to be planted as possible, and that fast-growing tree species be selected so that the tree canopy height is quickly restored.

- Participants consistently indicated that landscaping and planting features should be designed to conceal the new walls as much as possible.

Design Objectives

Metrolinx is considering the following objectives that will influence the finishes of the proposed retaining walls and noise walls:

- Enhancing community and rail safety
- Protecting existing trees and planting new trees
- Minimizing visual and physical impacts
- Enhancing the unique character of the neighbourhood
- Reducing noise levels from passing trains
- Introducing new trees and plants in front of the walls

Participants were asked to vote and indicate their relative support of the Design Objectives.

The following summarizes the feedback received:

- The design objectives that are most important to participants are reducing noise levels from passing trains (90% approval), protecting existing trees and planting new trees (87% approval), introducing new trees and plants in front of the wall (84% approval), and minimizing visual and physical impacts (84% approval).
- It was suggested that more sound-reducing materials and processes be incorporated into the design, such as reducing vibration from the tracks and limiting announcements on platforms and bridges, to address continuous background noise.
- Some participants expressed concern about the risk to community safety from the increased frequency of trains.
- It was indicated that an encased rail corridor would address the community's noise and safety concerns better than the noise and retaining walls, and that open green space and vegetation can be built over it to create a unique public realm.

Noise Walls

Participants were asked what level of transparency that they preferred for the noise walls:

- High transparency – permits lots of light and ability to see through
- Moderate transparency – permits some light and ability to see through
- Low transparency – permits little light and ability to see through

The following summarizes the feedback received:

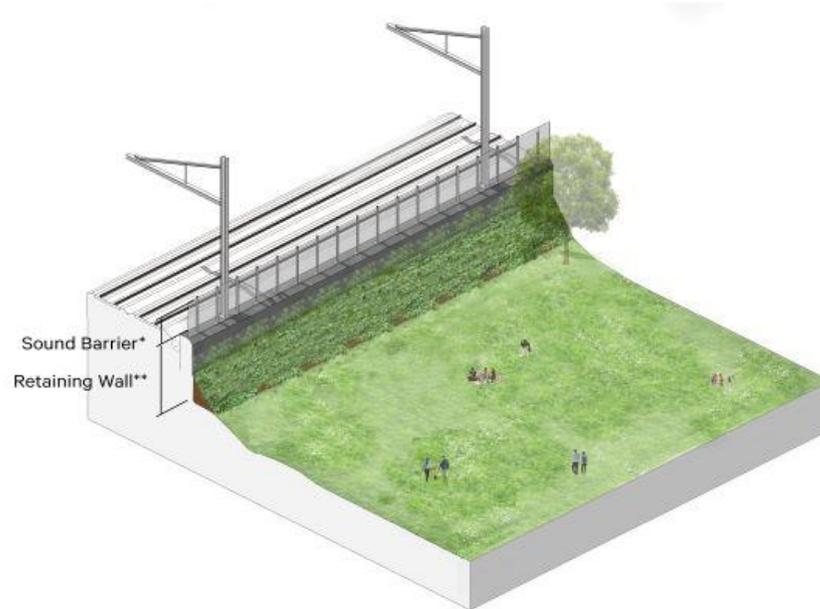
- Participants preferred noise walls with moderate transparency (40% approval) or low transparency (38% approval).
- Participants expressed concern that noise walls with high transparency may be less noise-reducing. Many participants indicated that their preference for level of transparency would depend on whichever material is most noise-reducing.
 - Participants indicated they need more information on how different transparency levels compare in noise reduction to meaningfully evaluate a preference.
- Some participants expressed support for low to zero transparency due to concerns about the visual impact of numerous passing trains, especially near homes.

- Some participants expressed support for high transparency, indicating that they would like to see passing trains. Participants also supported high transparency so that less park space is under shadow from the wall.
- Many participants expressed support for trees and vegetation to be planted in front of the noise wall, regardless of the transparency level.
- Participants noted that the level of transparency can vary depending on location, with residential areas having low or zero transparency.

Retaining Wall

Retaining walls are needed to stabilize the ground near the corridor, to keep soil and structures in place, and to enhance community safety by creating a physical barrier that prevents unauthorized access to the rail corridor. Since they will be closer to the tracks than the current fence that separates the rail corridor from the various parks throughout Riverside and Leslieville, they will have the added benefit of opening more green space for the community to enjoy.

The retaining walls will be made of durable, precast concrete, which is robust and quicker to install. Retaining walls will be built from within the rail corridor minimizing impacts on nearby parks and property.



Metrolinx is considering different patterns of textured concrete for the retaining walls. Participants were asked to provide their preference between:

- a high-relief wood like pattern;
- stacked vertical stripe pattern; and,
- simple vertical stripe pattern.

The following summarizes the feedback received:

- Of the patterns presented of textured concrete for the retaining walls, majority of participants preferred the high-relief wood-like pattern (58% approval).

- Many participants indicated desire for additional pattern options to be considered, and desire for more information on the pattern options.
 - Participants requested information on the non-visual qualities of pattern options, such as resistance to graffiti, ease of cleaning and maintenance, durability, and ability to support to vine and vegetation growth.
- Many participants expressed desire for the concrete to be concealed by greenery and artwork. It was suggested that the concrete can have inset angled planters to allow for planting that can be updated over time. It was also suggested that a public competition can be held for mural designs.
- It was discussed that texturing concrete to appear like wood or shingle may look inauthentic, and that presenting concrete simply may look more attractive and be easier to maintain.
- Participants suggested brick or stone paneling as alternative options for the design.

Landscaping and Open Green Space

Overview

Metrolinx is also exploring different types of landscaping treatments that could be introduced around the new walls in consultation with the City of Toronto. We would like community input on landscaping options to help inform these discussions with the City.

Along the retaining wall, participants were asked if they would rather see vegetation planting, landscaping features, or more open green space in neighbourhood parks.



Participants were asked for their level of support for:

- extending green space;
- new plants and trees;
- landscaping features; and,
- additional comments or ideas.

The following summarizes the feedback received:

- Majority of participants supported extending green space to increase the activity space within community parks (73% approval).
- Majority of participants supported adding new plants and trees to create a visual screen in front of the retaining and noise walls (90% approval).
- Majority of participants supported adding landscaping features to enhance existing community spaces (87% approval).
- Some participants expressed desire for the rail corridor to be encased by an at-grade tunnel, so that green space and vegetation is added above it, if burying the line is not possible.
- Participants consistently expressed desire for features that hide the retaining walls.
- Some participants requested clarity on how new green space will be created and were concerned that local homes may be expropriated for this purpose.
- Participants consistently expressed desire for existing trees to be protected, and for as many new trees and plants to be added as possible.

Activity Features for Open Green Space

- Many participants expressed desire for multi-use trails that include designated bike lanes on either side of the rail corridor. It was suggested that these trails connect with existing public right of way pathways to enhance overall connectivity for pedestrians and cyclists.
- Many participants expressed desire for seating areas such as linear benches and picnic tables.
- Participants indicated interest in activity features such as a climbing wall, children's playground and sandbox, chess tables, outdoor gym, dog-friendly area, and open square area being incorporated into the design.
- Participants emphasized that the seating and activity features should be accessible to all users and offer shade.
- Participants expressed desire for new trails and activity features to incorporate as much new trees and vegetation as possible.
- Some participants discussed Grange Park as a good model for a multi-use urban park
- Some participants noted that activity spaces and trails should be designed to deter vandalism and graffiti, and to deter users crossing onto private property.

Vegetation Types

- Many participants recommended including evergreen and perennial plants so that there is colour from vegetation in all seasons.
- Many participants expressed a preference for native and pollinator plants that are low maintenance and support local biodiversity.
- Participants suggested vines, trees, and tall grasses be used to conceal the retaining wall. Participants emphasized that vegetation should hide the concrete as much as possible.

Landscaping and Planting Features

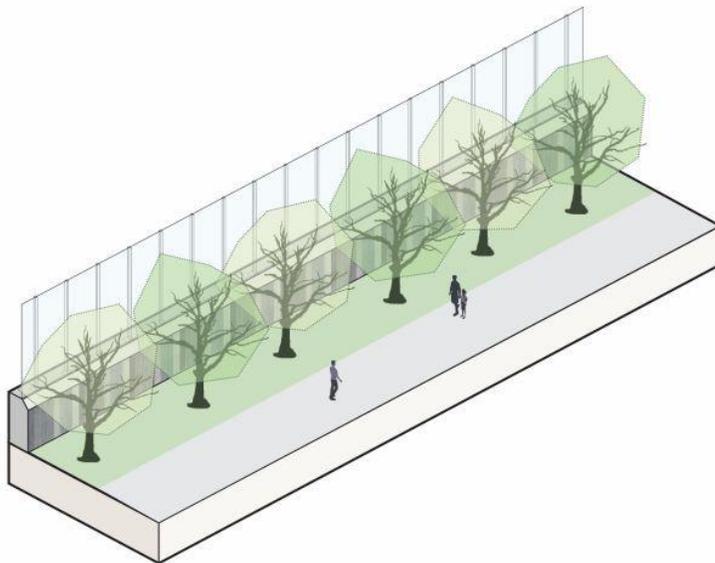
- Embankment with vegetation (84% approval) and vertical wall with vegetation (82% approval) were the most supported landscaping features.

- Concern was expressed that terraced landscape features (63% approval) may take up space and reduce utility of green space.
- It was indicated that a mix of landscape features can be used, depending on the grade and proximity to houses and parks.
 - It was recommended that landscaping features compliment the character of adjoining neighbourhoods, and that seating is integrated where possible.
- Some participants expressed concern about the maintenance of landscaping features and indicated that graffiti should be deterred. It was emphasized that planting features be selected that are low maintenance and help to hide the retaining wall.
- It was suggested that the landscape features take inspiration from Corktown Common with respect to including native and pollinator plants that support local biodiversity.

Additional Design Features

Metrolinx is discussing some additional design features that could enhance the areas around the new walls with the City of Toronto; and asked for community input on design options to help inform these discussions.

Trees



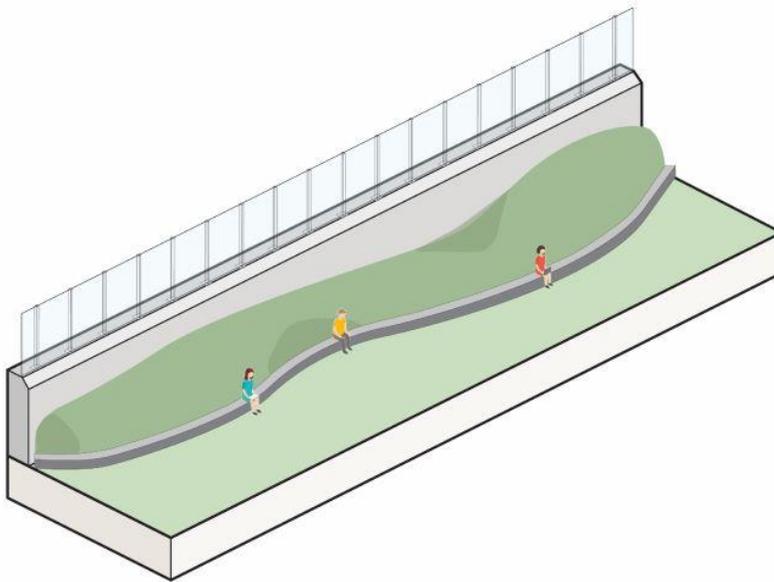
Participants were asked for their preference about what kind of tree layering that they would like to see:

- Coniferous screen;
- Deciduous row;
- Columnar tree hedge; and,
- Additional comments and ideas.

The following summarizes the feedback received:

- Participants preferred deciduous row (76% approval) and coniferous screen (72% approval) over columnar tree hedge (54% approval) as options for tree layering.
- Participants consistently expressed that they would prefer a diverse mix of deciduous and coniferous trees, as opposed to rows of a single species. It was noted that this would create a healthier ecosystem while providing greenery all year.
- It was recommended that tree species that are faster growing should be selected to replace the canopy that will be removed.
- Some participants indicated that trees species that are better at blocking noise and concealing the retaining wall should be prioritized. A preference for tree species that require less maintenance was also expressed.
- It was suggested that the layout of new trees be designed to avoid shading over open green space and activity features such as trails.

Seating



Participants were asked for their preference about what kind of seating that they would like to see:

- Continuous bench;
- Localized seat wall; and,
- Additional comments and ideas.

The following summarizes the feedback received:

- Participants supported both the continuous bench (66% approval) and localized seat wall (63% approval) options for integrated seating.
- Some participants emphasized that seating should be inviting and accessible to all users. It was requested that the seating design avoid using hostile architecture.
- Some participants expressed concern that the seating may be prone to damage by skateboarding.

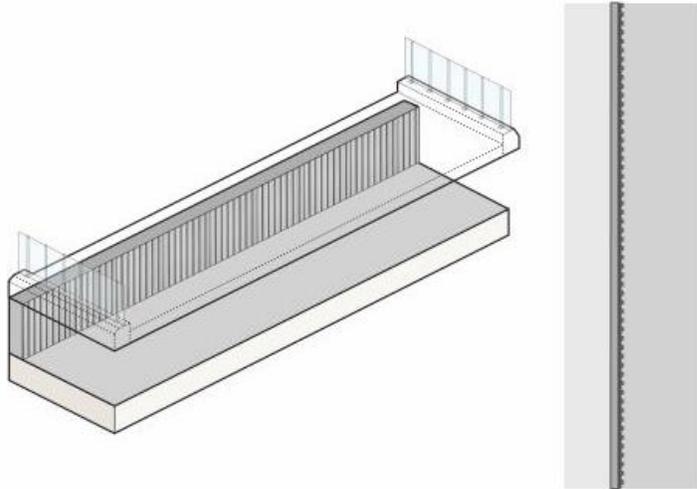
- To address this without the use of hostile architecture, it was suggested that seating be made resilient to skateboard activity and that attractive skateboarding furnishings be included in nearby activity space.
- Some participants expressed desire for no seating due to concerns about graffiti, drainage issues, and need to repair seating infrastructure from damage.

Underpass Design

Metrolinx is considering design features underneath the four bridges in this area: Eastern, Queen, Logan, and Dundas. As part of bridge replacement work, concrete walls for the underpass can be designed with patterns and textures to create visual interest.

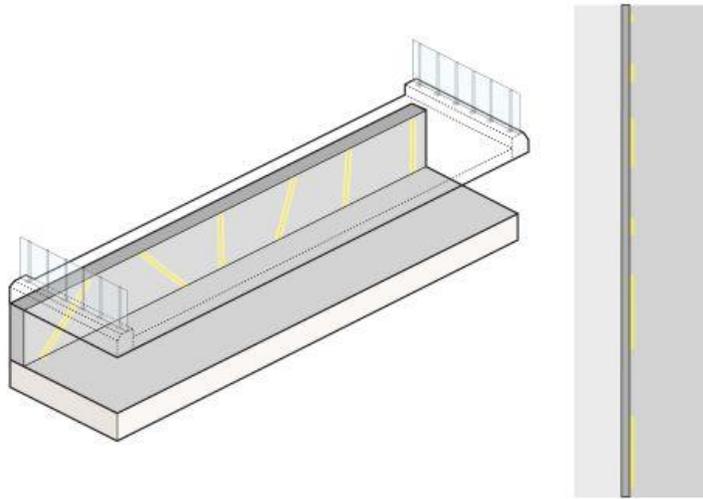
Participants were asked which kind of pattern type do you prefer for the walls under the bridges:

- Underpass Wall - Stacked Vertical Stripe Pattern;
- Underpass Wall - High Relief Wood Pattern; and
- Underpass Wall – Simple Vertical Stripe Pattern.



Participants were also asked, what they thought about some early concepts for lighting under the bridges:

- Lighting integrated into wall;
- Lighting integrated into artwork; and
- Colour integrated into lighting.



The following summarizes the feedback received:

- Majority of participants opposed the wall pattern options proposed for the underpass. The highest level of support was for the high-relief wood-like pattern (47% approval).
- Participants supported all three lighting options that were presented. The highest level of support was for lighting integrated into wall (73% approval).
- Participants indicated that the underpass design should prioritize deterring graffiti and ensuring there are no unlit corners so that pedestrians can feel safe.
- Some participants expressed that the proposed wall pattern and lighting designs do not reflect the neighbourhood character. It was suggested that the underpass design should be simple, bright, and allow for the inclusion of public art murals.

Neighbourhood Identity

Participants were asked how they would you describe the identity of their neighbourhood.

The following summarizes the feedback received:

- A jewel in the City of Toronto.
- The most common words used by participants to describe the neighbourhood identity are quiet, family, walkable, vibrant, community, historic, safe, inclusive, friendly and green.
- Participants indicated that they are concerned about the community being divided into two by the expanded rail corridor, about the loss of mature trees, about modern design features that do not fit with the old, Victorian Toronto character, and about retaining a quiet and family-friendly neighbourhood identity.

Section 3: How We Engaged

This section provides an overview of the digital engagement method used for this consultation and the communication methods used to promote the consultation.

Digital Engagement Method

Public feedback was gathered through an online questionnaire hosted on a digital engagement platform. This platform enabled transparency of community feedback and comments and facilitated community discussion through public discussion threads on each topic area.

The online questionnaire was made available from September 23 to October 24, 2021. The questionnaire had a total of 848 visitors with 162 total respondents, 106 respondents that left comments, and 749 total comments. **Appendix A** provides a summary of the questionnaire results. A summary of participant demographics can be found in **Appendix B**.

Communication Methods

The communication methods used to promote this consultation with the community and stakeholders included:

- Two virtual open house meetings;
- The Metrolinx Ontario Line [project website](#);
- A Metrolinx News [blog post](#);
- Metrolinx social media accounts; and
- Community outreach.

Communication methods are explained in further detail below.

Virtual open house meetings

On September 23 and October 5, 2021, Metrolinx held virtual open house meetings that were livestreamed on the Metrolinx Engage platform. Each virtual open house meeting began with a presentation from Metrolinx staff and Ontario Line project team members, followed by a facilitated question and answer period. Metrolinx provided a phone-in option that allowed participants to listen and ask questions by phone through Zoom. Approximately 350 participants attended the two virtual open house meetings in total. A copy of the presentation slide deck can be found in **Appendix C**.

Ontario Line project website

The Metrolinx Ontario Line [project website](#) serves as the project's online community engagement hub. This website hosts all information on the project including background information on the Ontario Line, a dedicated section for each segment, information on how to participate in the public consultations, previous consultation materials, and various options to ask questions or book a meeting with the project's community relations team.

Metrolinx News webpage

Metrolinx News is Metrolinx's official news channel, providing stories, photos, and updates on Metrolinx's activities and projects across the region. On September 23, 2021, a [blog post](#) announcing the East Segment consultation and release of a [report on early works in the area](#) was published.

Social media

The project team used social media to share information about this consultation through the Metrolinx Facebook page and Twitter account. Four Facebook posts and Tweets were shared.

Email list outreach

The project team sent four emails to the Metrolinx email list to inform subscribers about the consultation and remind them to complete the online questionnaire.

Community outreach

The project team conducted the following community outreach activities:

- Sent a mailer promoting the Sept. 23, 2021 virtual open house and consultation launch.
- Advertised the consultation through the East Segment community office in the Riverside neighbourhood at 770 Queen St East and at several community pop-up events.

Section 4: Next Steps

The feedback received during this consultation process will be reviewed by the project team and technical consultants to inform design concepts. The design package will continue to be refined based on stakeholder feedback. The project team will also share the feedback received with the City of Toronto, to inform discussions with the City on the different landscaping and design features being considered.

Stay involved with the Ontario Line

To contact the Ontario Line Community Relations team :

Email us at ontarioline@metrolinx.com

Call us at 416-202-5100

Visit our website : www.metrolinx.com/ontarioline

Book a virtual appointment at the Community Office:

<https://www.metrolinxengage.com/en/content/book-meeting-community-relations>

Subscribe to receive project updates: www.metrolinx.com/subscribe

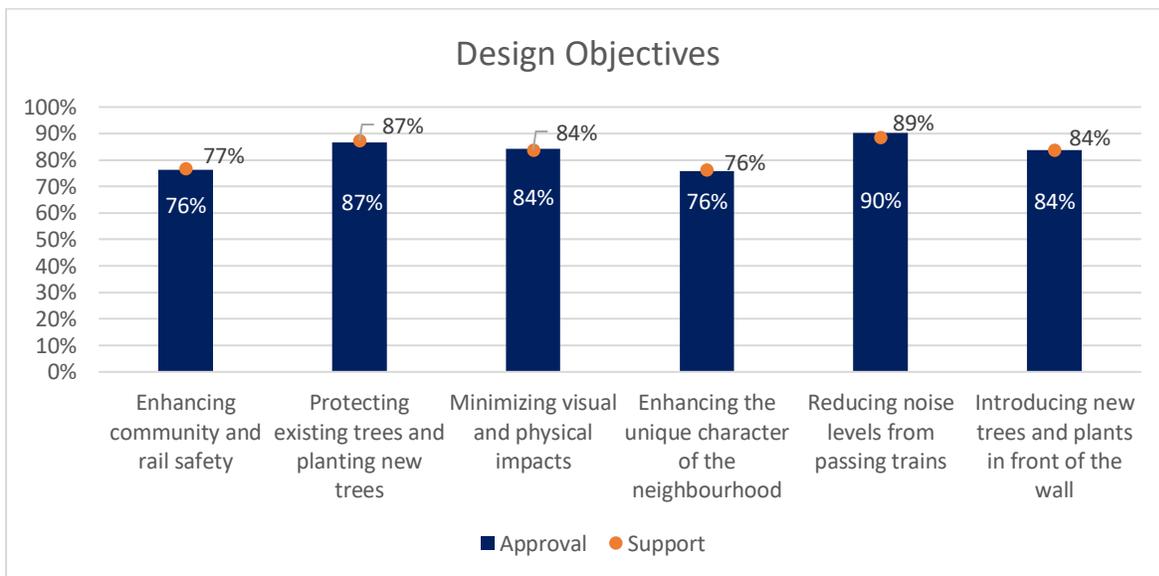
Appendix A: Online Questionnaire Voting Results

The following is a summary of the online questionnaire voting results received on the digital engagement platform used to gather feedback during the consultation. The questionnaire opened on September 23, 2021 and closed on October 24, 2021. In total, 162 people participated. Voting results on the design objectives and design considerations is provided below.

Approval is the percentage of participants who gave a positive vote rather than a neutral or negative vote, and support is the average value of the responses.

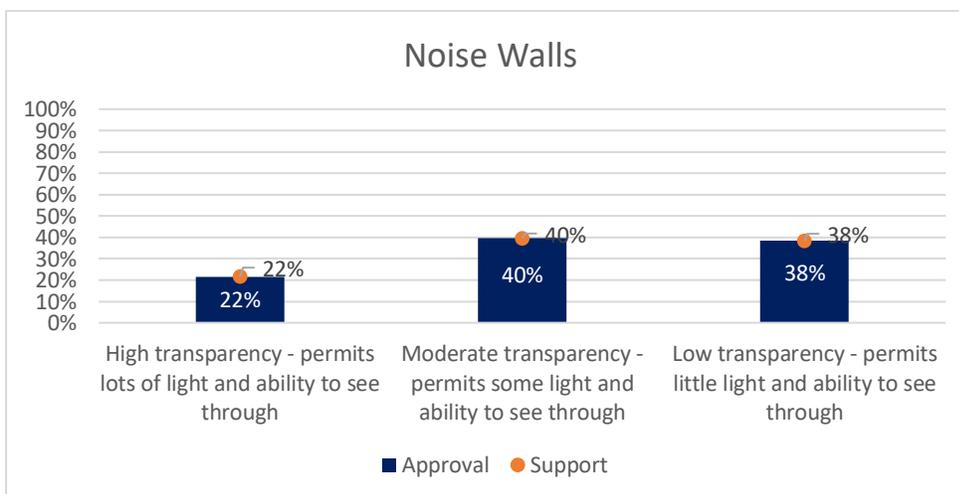
Design Objectives

Below is the level of approval and support indicated by participants for the design objectives Metrolinx is considering for the retaining walls and noise walls finishes.



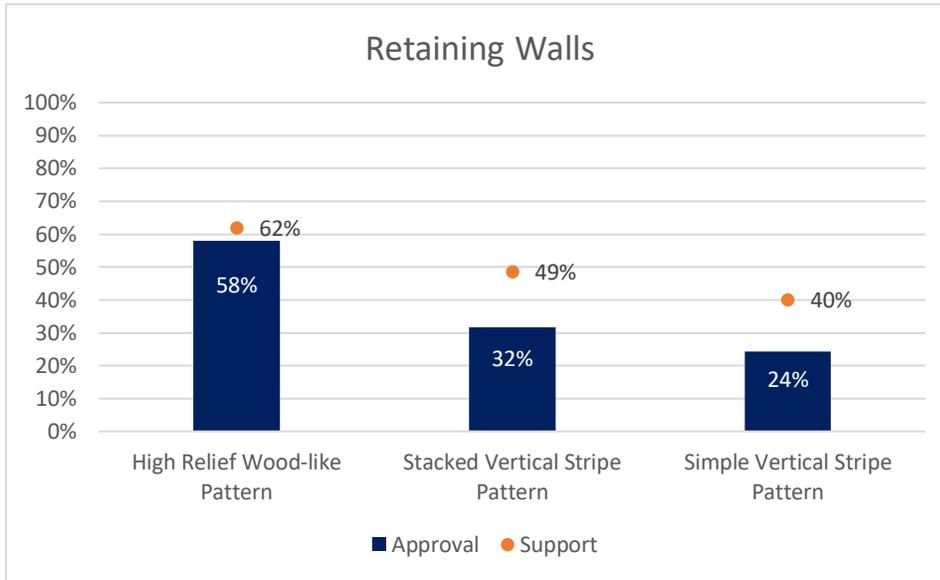
Noise Walls

Below is the level of approval and support indicated by participants for the different levels of transparency Metrolinx is considering for noise walls.



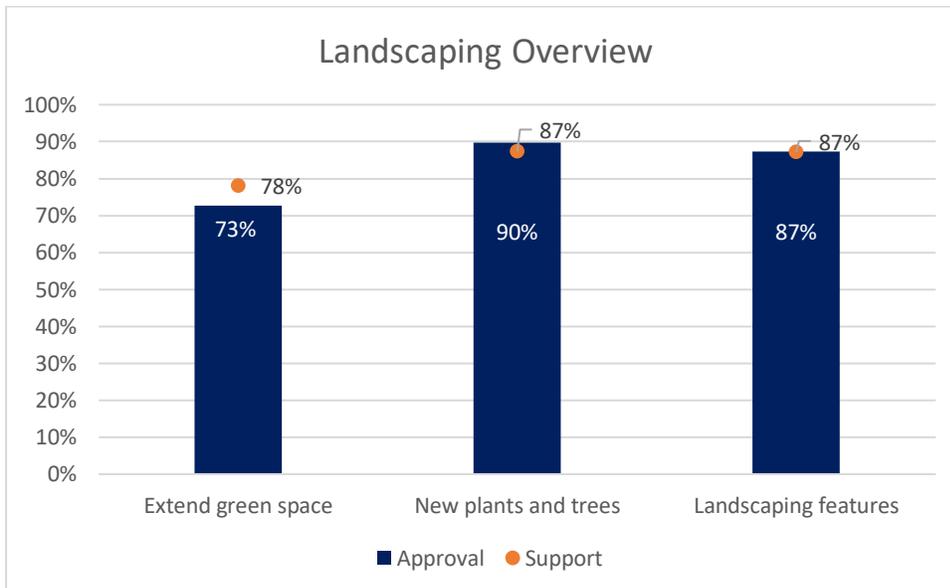
Retaining Walls

Below is the level of approval and support indicated by participants for the different patterns of textured concrete Metrolinx is considering for the retaining walls.



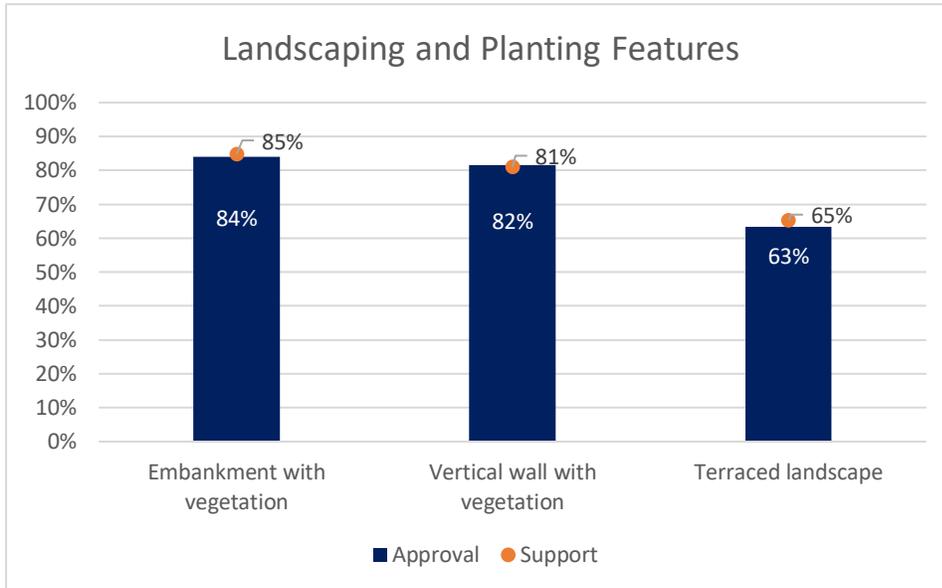
Landscaping Overview

Below is the level of approval and support indicated by participants for extending green space in neighbourhood parks, adding new plants and trees, and adding landscaping features.



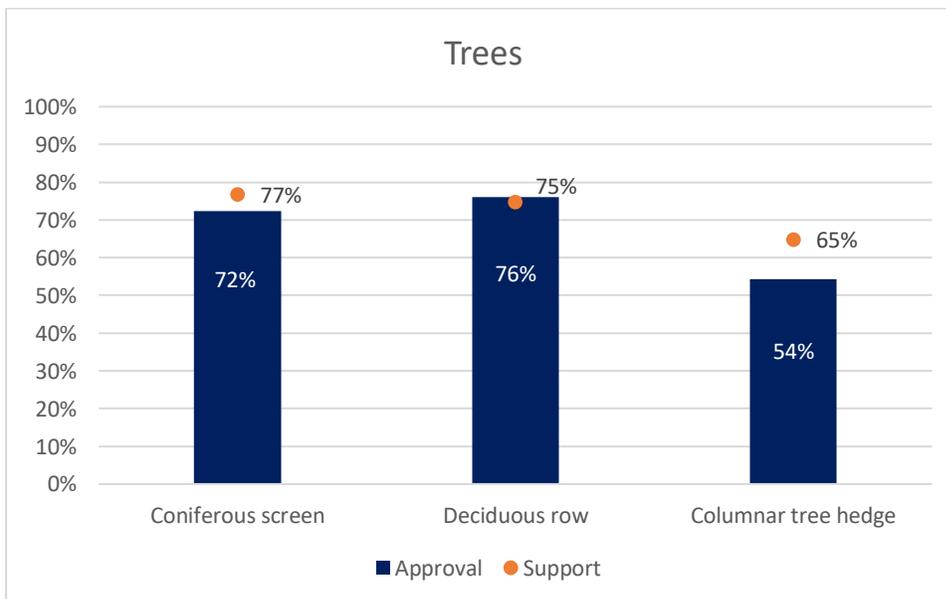
Landscaping and Planting Features

Below is the level of approval and support indicated by participants for different types of landscaping and planting features that could be added in front of the new walls.



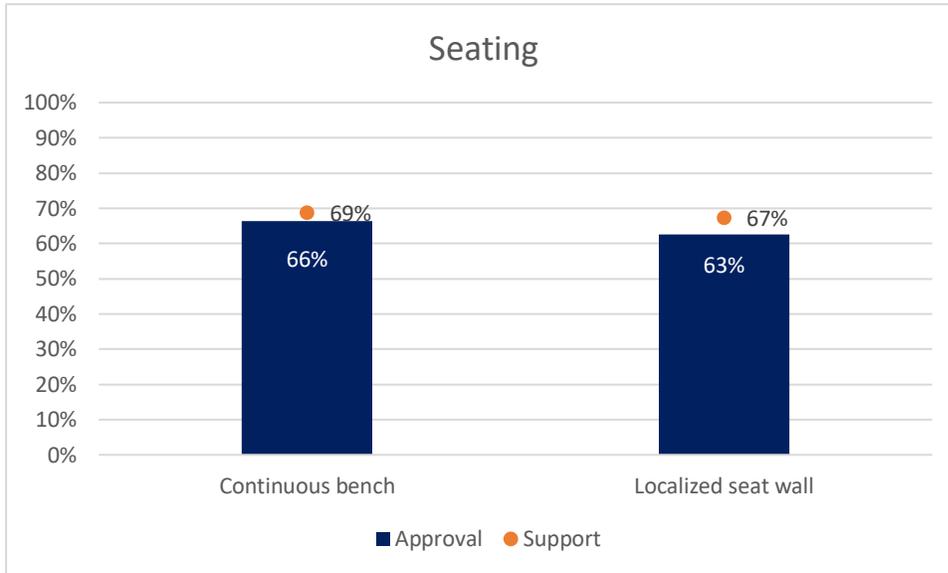
Trees

Below is the level of approval and support indicated by participants for different kinds of tree layering that may be planted next to the new walls.



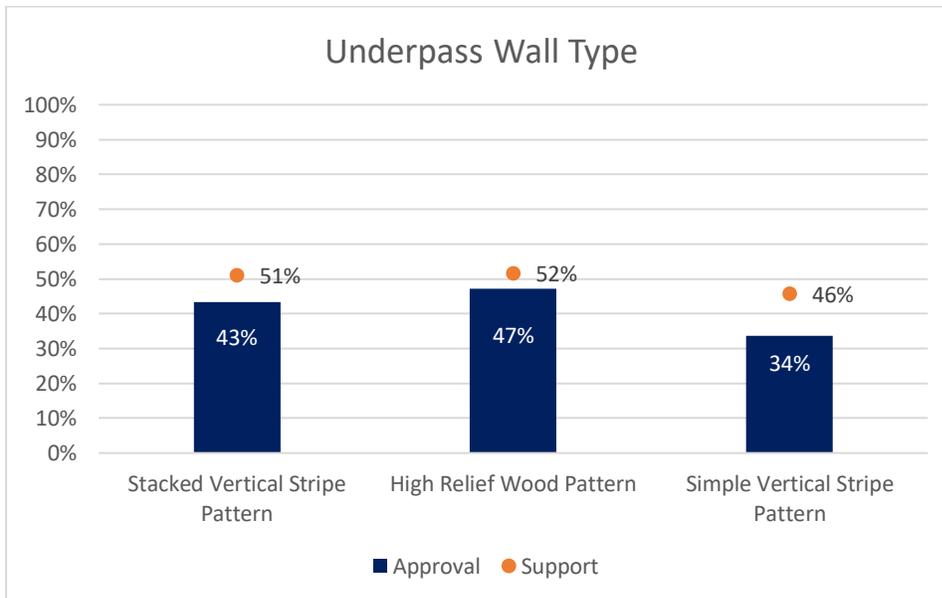
Seating

Below is the level of approval and support indicated by participants for different kinds of seating that may be integrated next to the retaining walls.



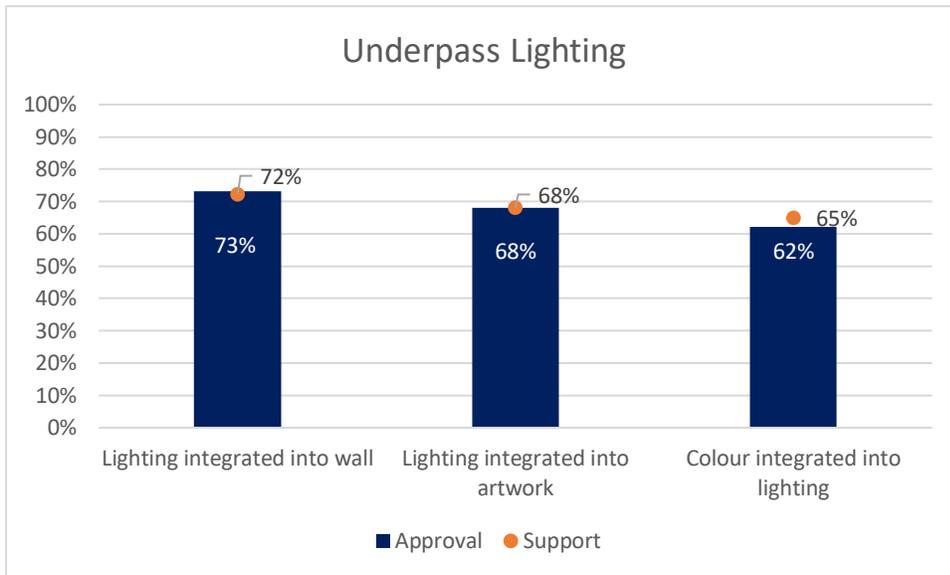
Underpass Wall Type

Below is the level of approval and support indicated by participants for different patterns of textured concrete that may be used for walls under bridges in the area.



Underpass Lighting

Below is the level of approval and support indicated by participants for early concepts of lighting that may be used under bridges in the area.

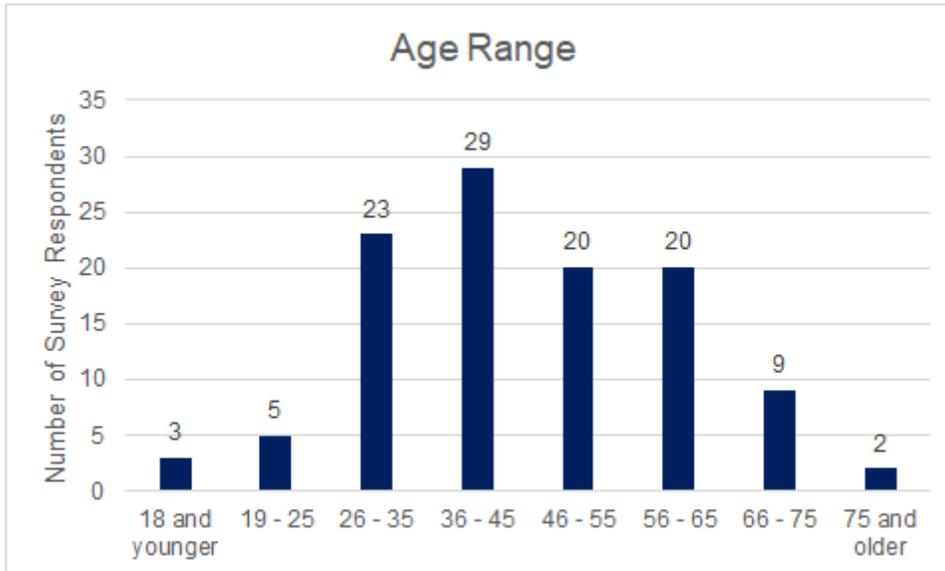


Appendix B: Online Questionnaire Participant Demographics

The following is a summary of participant demographic information collected in the digital engagement. At the end of the online questionnaire, participants were asked to answer the following demographic survey questions:

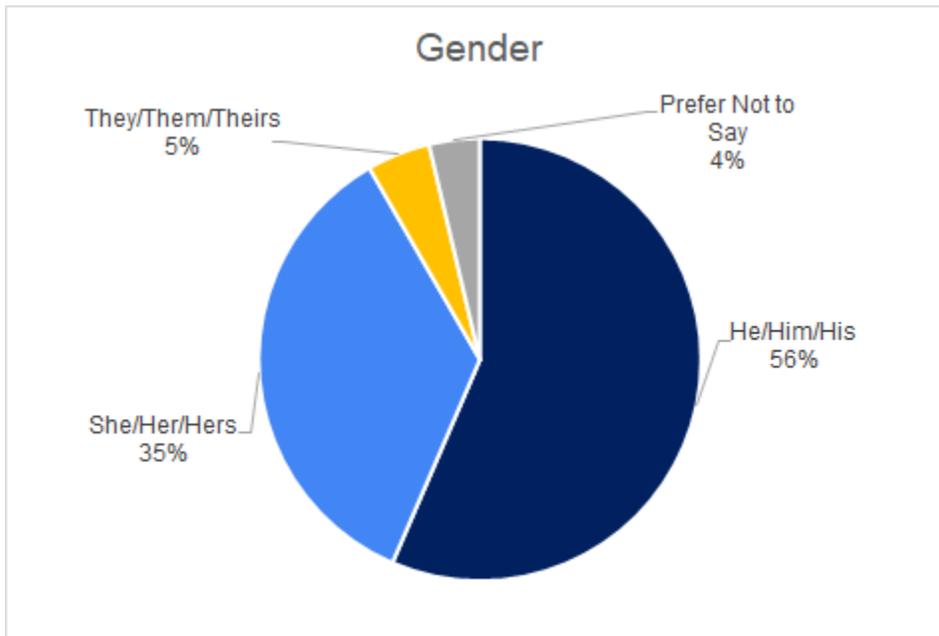
Age Range

Number of respondents: 111



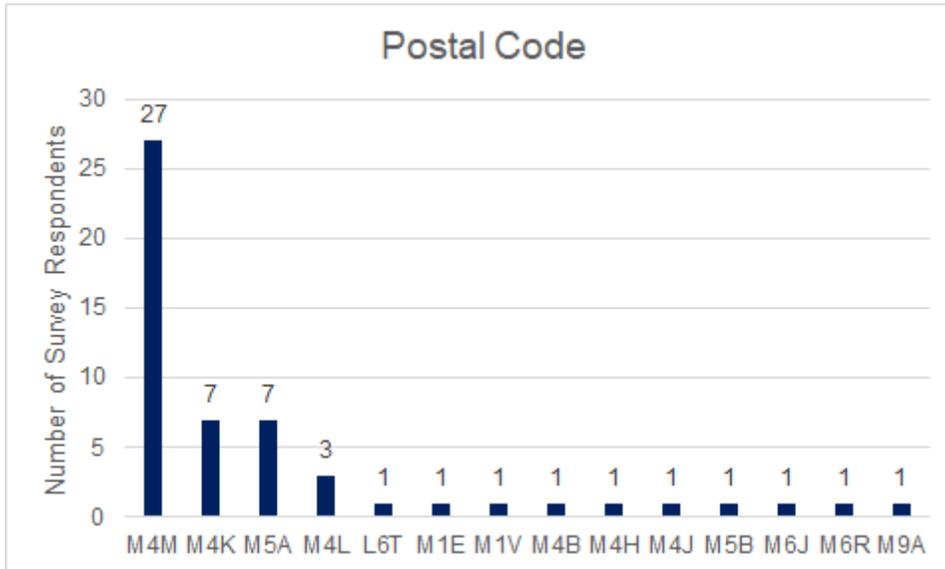
Gender

Number of respondents: 108



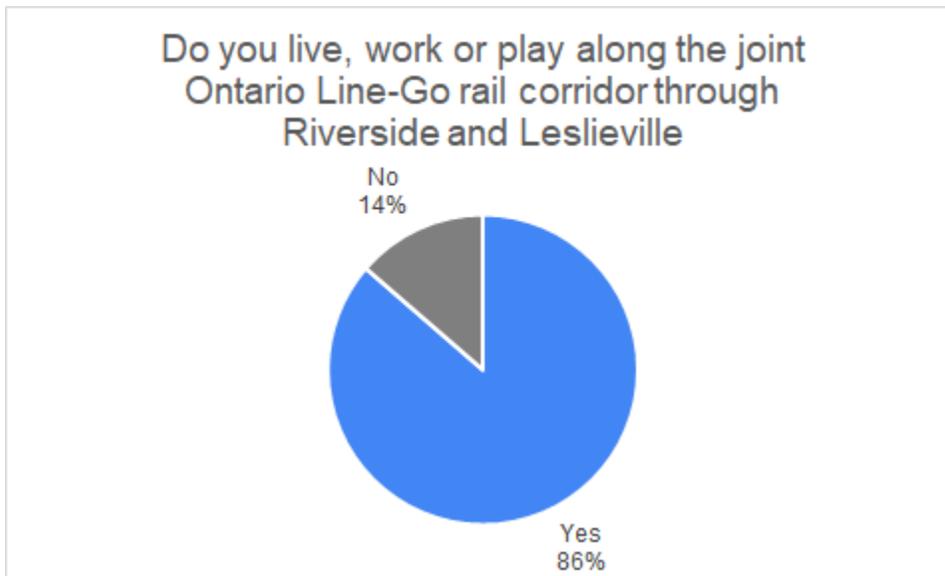
Postal Code (first three digits)

Number of respondents: 108



Do you live, work or play along the joint Ontario Line-Go rail corridor through Riverside and Leslieville

Number of respondents: 110



Appendix C: Ontario Line East Segment Virtual Open House – Noise and Retaining Wall Presentation Slides

This appendix includes the presentation slides from the September 23, 2021 [Virtual Open House](#), pertaining to the Noise and Retaining Wall design process.