



The Corporation of the City of Courtenay

Staff Report

To: Council

File No.: 5640-07

From: Kyle Shaw, Director of Operational Services

Date: April 15, 2026

Subject: Strategic Transportation Plan – Progress Update

PURPOSE: The purpose of this report is to provide Council with a progress update on the Strategic Transportation Plan at the completion of the Preparing, Discovering, and Visioning phases.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

The City of Courtenay is undertaking a Strategic Transportation Plan to guide the long-term evolution of the transportation system as the community continues to grow and change. The plan builds on the 2019 *Connecting Courtenay Transportation Master Plan* and aligns with the Official Community Plan, the Downtown Courtenay Vitalization Local Area Plan, and emerging provincial housing and transportation policy. It addresses all modes of travel and is intended to support coordinated, long-range infrastructure and policy decisions that respond to changing community needs. Completion of the Strategic Transportation Plan is targeted for 2027.

This report represents a mid-process milestone, marking the transition from early-stage analysis and engagement into plan development. Work completed through the Preparing, Discovering, and Visioning phases has established a clear understanding of existing conditions, system constraints, and community priorities. Technical analysis and public engagement confirm that Courtenay's transportation challenges are systemic in nature and shaped by geography, jurisdictional responsibility, historic development patterns, and growing travel demand. Road safety has emerged as the community's highest priority, alongside concerns related to congestion and limited transportation choice. While driving remains the most reliable mode for many trips, there is strong interest in viable alternatives if safety, reliability, and connectivity can be improved.

Based on the work completed to date, three foundational pillars have emerged and will guide the Strategic Transportation Plan moving forward. These pillars are:

1. Prioritizing **road safety** across all modes,
2. Improving **travel time and reliability** on key corridors,
3. Supporting a **mode shift** from private vehicle use toward active transportation and transit.

The remainder of this report provides detail on how these findings were developed and how they will inform the next phase of work.

BACKGROUND:

The Strategic Transportation Plan is a long-range planning initiative intended to guide transportation infrastructure and policy decisions in Courtenay over the coming decades. While the City has undertaken transportation planning in the past, the Strategic Transportation Plan responds to a materially different

Strategic Transportation Plan – Progress Update

planning context. Updated growth projections, increasing development pressure, evolving provincial housing and transportation policy, rising construction costs, and heightened community expectations related to safety, accessibility, and transportation choice all point to the need for a more integrated and forward-looking approach to transportation planning.

The plan addresses all components of the transportation system, including streets and roads, sidewalks and pathways, cycling facilities, and public transit, and is being developed in alignment with the Official Community Plan, the Downtown Courtenay Vitalization Local Area Plan, and relevant provincial legislation. This alignment is intended to ensure that transportation planning supports broader land-use, climate, and growth management objectives rather than functioning as a stand-alone exercise.

Staff initiated the Strategic Transportation Plan process in the summer of 2025, and Urban Systems was retained in the fall of 2025 to support the City through a phased planning process. The initial phases were intentionally structured to establish a strong evidence base and to capture community values before advancing into plan development and implementation planning. This approach reflects the complexity of Courtenay’s transportation system and the importance of understanding both technical conditions and lived experience before identifying long-term solutions. The Strategic Transportation Plan is anticipated to be completed in 2027.



DISCUSSION:

The Preparing and Discovering phases established a detailed and evidence-based understanding of how Courtenay’s transportation system currently functions. This work examined population and employment patterns, land-use distribution, travel behaviour, transportation networks, safety performance, and jurisdictional responsibility, and is documented in the *Transportation Today Background Report*. Together, these elements form the technical foundation for the Strategic Transportation Plan and provide critical context for interpreting both system performance and community feedback.

Strategic Transportation Plan – Progress Update

The analysis confirms that Courtenay's transportation challenges are largely structural rather than localized. River crossings over the Courtenay and Puntledge Rivers remain significant constraints on east-west connectivity and continue to shape congestion patterns, travel reliability, and overall network resilience. These constraints influence travel behaviour across the city and cannot be meaningfully addressed through isolated improvements. Safety analysis further identifies elevated risk along high-volume and high-speed corridors, particularly where people walking and cycling interact with vehicle traffic. Network gaps, limited physical separation between modes, and corridor designs that prioritize vehicle movement contribute to these safety concerns, indicating that improved outcomes will require coordinated changes to network design, speed management, and connectivity rather than stand-alone interventions.

Jurisdictional responsibility also plays a critical role in shaping system performance. Several corridors that significantly influence congestion, safety, and regional travel patterns, including Highway 19A, Ryan Road, and the Comox Valley Parkway, are provincial highways. While these corridors directly affect mobility within Courtenay, the City does not have sole authority over their design or operation. As a result, long-term improvements will depend on sustained collaboration with the Ministry of Transportation and Transit and regional partners, and the Strategic Transportation Plan must clearly distinguish between actions within municipal control and those that require partnership.

The analysis also highlights pressures associated with population growth, increasing density, and potential future boundary expansion, all occurring within a context of rising construction costs and competing infrastructure priorities. This reinforces the importance of a strategic and long-range approach to transportation planning that guides investment decisions across all modes and avoids reactive or incremental responses to emerging issues.

Engagement Findings and Community Perspectives

The Visioning phase built on this technical foundation by focusing on how residents and stakeholders experience the transportation system in their day-to-day lives and on identifying the outcomes that matter most to the community. Engagement activities included agency one-on-one meetings, interest holder focus groups, an in-person open house, and a community-wide online survey, and were informed by related City initiatives such as the Downtown Courtenay Vitalization Local Area Plan and the Safe and Active Schools Program.

Engagement findings consistently indicate that Courtenay remains a car-oriented community, with driving perceived as the most reliable and efficient way to meet daily travel needs. At the same time, residents expressed growing frustration with congestion, particularly during peak periods and at river crossings, and raised concerns about driver behaviour, including speeding, failure to yield, and red-light running. These concerns were expressed alongside a strong desire for safer streets and better transportation options.

There is clear interest in alternatives to driving, provided those alternatives are safe, reliable, and well connected. Transit is viewed as having significant potential, but current service levels are perceived as infrequent, indirect, and unreliable. Cycling is valued for its efficiency and ability to avoid congestion, but safety concerns and gaps in the cycling network, particularly the lack of physical separation from vehicle traffic, limit broader uptake. Walking is widely used for short trips and recreation, especially in greenways

Strategic Transportation Plan – Progress Update

and downtown. Still, sidewalk gaps, crossing challenges, lighting, and maintenance issues reduce comfort and safety in other parts of the city.

Across all engagement activities and modes of travel, road safety emerged as the most important outcome. Participants emphasized the need for safer streets for all users, including children, seniors, and people with mobility challenges, and raised broader concerns related to accessibility and personal security in public spaces.

What We Have Learned to Date

Taken together, the work completed through the Preparing, Discovering, and Visioning phases confirms that Courtenay's transportation challenges are interconnected and systemic. Congestion, safety concerns, and limited transportation choice are the result of geography, jurisdictional context, historic development patterns, and increasing travel demand, and cannot be addressed through isolated projects or single-mode solutions. Road safety has clearly emerged as the community's highest priority and a defining theme for the Strategic Transportation Plan, encompassing infrastructure design, speed management, driver behaviour, and the interaction between vehicles and vulnerable road users.

While driving remains the most reliable mode for many trips, increasing congestion at key locations is affecting overall system performance and reinforcing interest in viable alternatives. The findings also indicate that mode shift is achievable, but conditional. Interest in transit, cycling, and walking is strong, but uptake will depend on meaningful improvements to safety, reliability, and connectivity. These insights confirm the importance of advancing into plan development with a focus on realistic, phased actions supported by clear priorities and measurable outcomes.

First Engagement Round

Community engagement is a key part of the STP update, with public input helping shape the plan's direction and outcomes. Engagement activities are most intensive in the Visioning phase, while Phases 4–5 (Planning and Moving Forward) focus on refining actions, conducting additional engagement, and developing the implementation plan.

The engagement approach offered community members and partner agencies several ways to participate and share their perspectives. This included in-person focus groups and open houses, online surveys and maps, and one-on-one conversations to ensure broad and inclusive participation.

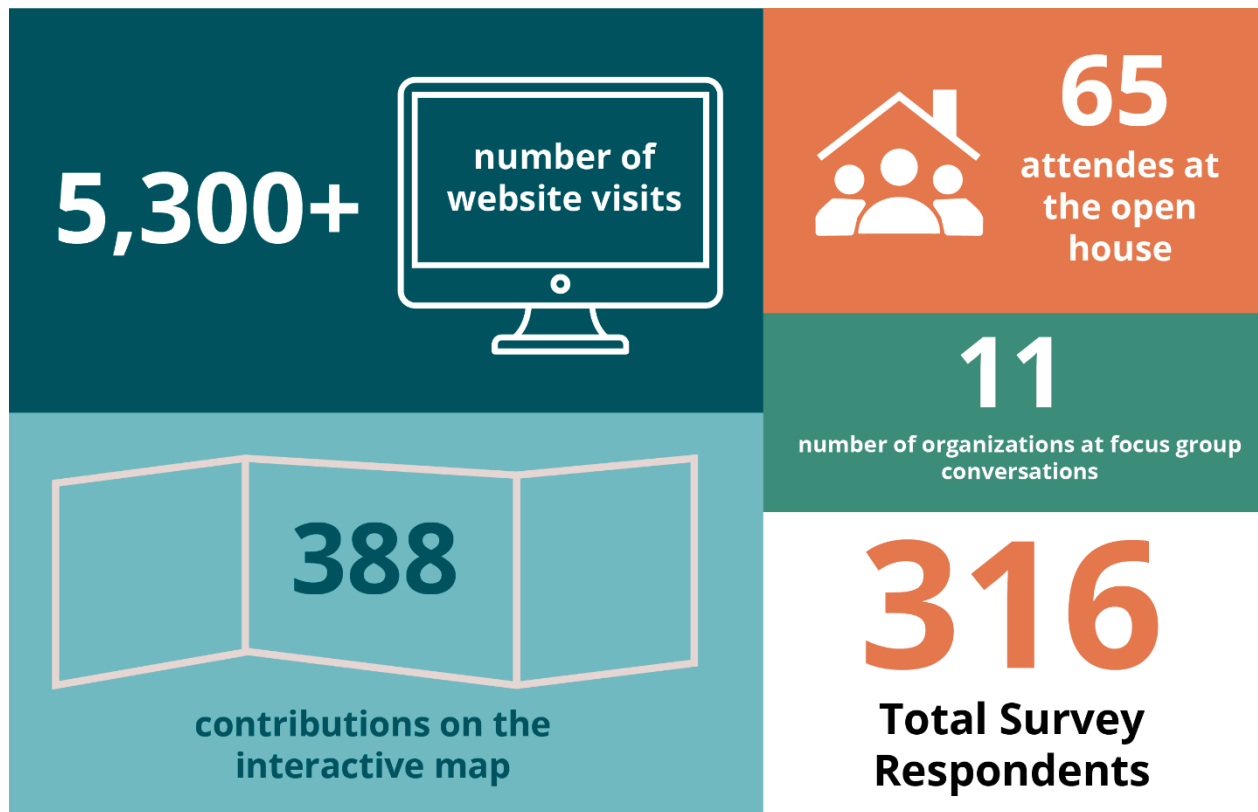
Agency One-to-Ones	9	Targeted discussions with external agencies to understand technical needs, partnership considerations, and shared priorities.
Interest Holder Focus Groups	3	Small group discussions that allowed for deeper conversations on key topics.
Open House	1	An in-person event where residents could learn about the project, ask questions, and share feedback.

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Online Survey	1	A community-wide survey that gathered input on barriers, opportunities
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Alongside the STP update, the City has been working on several other initiatives with engagement components. Feedback from these initiatives complements the STP engagement and provides additional insights to inform the plan. Most notably, the Downtown Vitalization Local Area Plan (DVLAP) and the Safe and Active Schools Program link directly to transportation and how members of the community move around the City.

Engagement Participation



Key Engagement Themes – Big Picture

Engagement confirms that Courtenay’s transportation system remains strongly car-oriented, shaping how most trips are made across the community. While driving is currently perceived as the most reliable option, residents are actively seeking reasonable and practical alternatives. When asked to rank transportation priorities, participants consistently placed walking first, followed by transit, cycling, and driving. Feedback also emphasized that improving driving conditions is closely tied to improving alternatives, as expanded travel options reduce pressure on the road network and improve access to key destinations both within Courtenay and in neighbouring communities.

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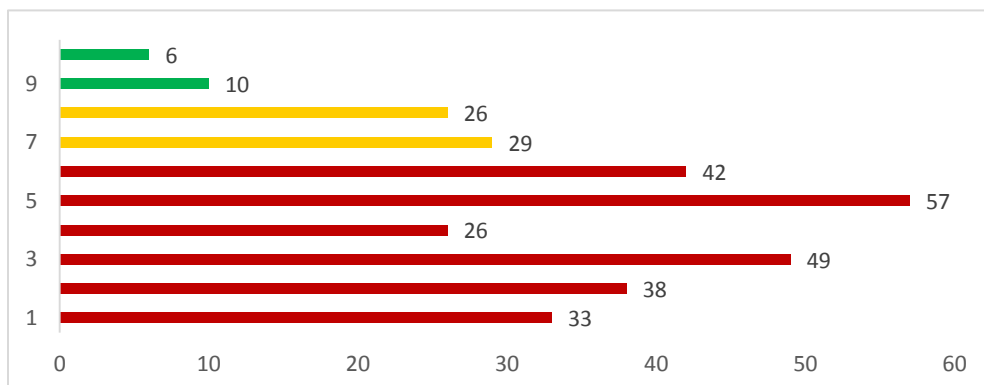
- From a **Driving** perspective, participants generally view the system as functioning better than other modes but expressed growing frustration with congestion and driver behaviour. Concerns related to speeding, compliance, and safety were common, and respondents noted that opportunities for improvement are constrained by jurisdictional overlaps on several key corridors.
- **Transit** emerged as a mode with low current satisfaction but high future potential. Residents identified infrequent service, indirect routing, and reliability issues as key barriers, while noting that meaningful improvements to frequency, efficiency, and service coverage could significantly change travel behaviour.
- **Cycling** is valued for its efficiency and ability to bypass congestion; however, safety concerns remain a major barrier to broader uptake. Feedback consistently highlighted the lack of physical separation from vehicle traffic and gaps in the cycling network, reinforcing the desire for a safe, connected, and city-wide cycling system.
- **Walking** is widely used for short trips and recreation, supported by strong pathways in certain areas, particularly greenways and the downtown. At the same time, participants identified sidewalk gaps, trail discontinuities, and limited pedestrian connectivity in other areas as constraints on walking for daily travel.

Across all modes, Road Safety clearly emerged as the top community priority. When asked to identify the most important transportation outcome, road safety ranked first by a wide margin. Residents expressed a strong desire to address safety challenges through integrated, multi-modal solutions that improve conditions for all users, particularly vulnerable road users.

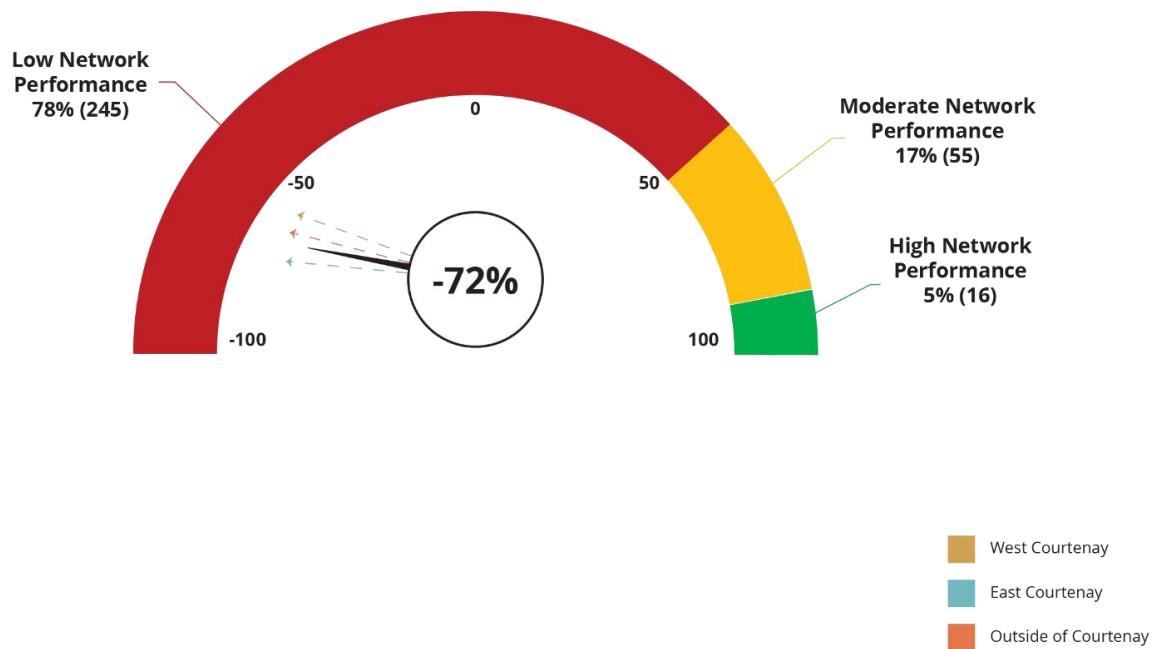
Survey Results

The following section highlights some of the key survey results from Round 1 of engagement, including the four Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for the transportation systems: satisfaction, reliability, efficiency, and safety. Detailed survey results are available in the attached What We Learned Report (Appendix II).

1. Overall, how satisfied are you with our transportation network's performance? (Rating 1-10) (n=316)



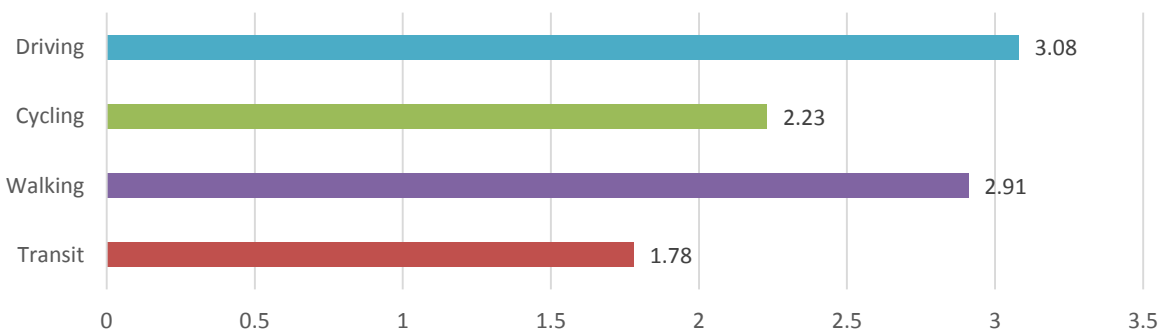
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78% or nearly 4 out of 5 respondents ranked the transportation network’s overall performance a score of 6 or less, while only 5% ranked the overall performance greater than 9. This resulted in a -72% Net Promotor Score. The average ranking for overall satisfaction with the transportation network was 4.61.

To understand whether satisfaction with performance varies by location, survey respondents were grouped into three areas: East Courtenay (including Sandwick), West Courtenay (including Downtown, Puntledge, and South Courtenay), and Outside Courtenay (Comox, Cumberland, and the Comox Valley Regional District). Results show that respondents in East Courtenay rated overall performance below average, while those in West Courtenay reported higher overall satisfaction.

Which form of transportation are you most **satisfied** with? (Ranking¹ 1-4) (n=316)



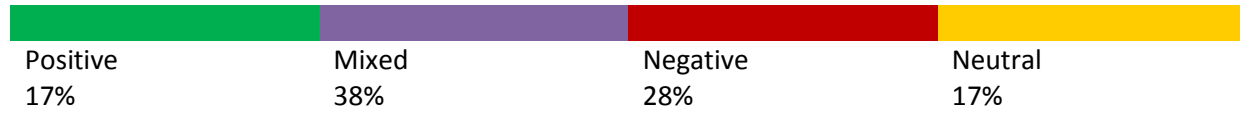
¹ Ranked results calculated using weighted averages

Strategic Transportation Plan – Progress Update

Driving and walking emerged as the top transportation choices with which respondents are most satisfied. Driving was ranked first by 49% of respondents, while 38% selected walking as their second most satisfied mode of transport.

2. Please explain why you ranked these forms of transportation the way you have. (Open Answer)

- (n=282)



When asked to explain why respondents ranked the forms of transportation the way they did, the following themes emerged:

Driving (Rank 1):

- Driving is the “easy” choice as distances between destinations are far, parking is generally available and the road network is manageable.
- Traffic is worsening, and respondents are experiencing congestion at peak times at bridge crossings and major arterials.

Walking (Rank 2):

- Respondents indicated that walking is positive through greenways, river pathways, and downtown.
- Concerns regarding walking included sidewalks that end unexpectedly, limited crossing opportunities and safety throughout parts of the city.

Cycling (Rank 3):

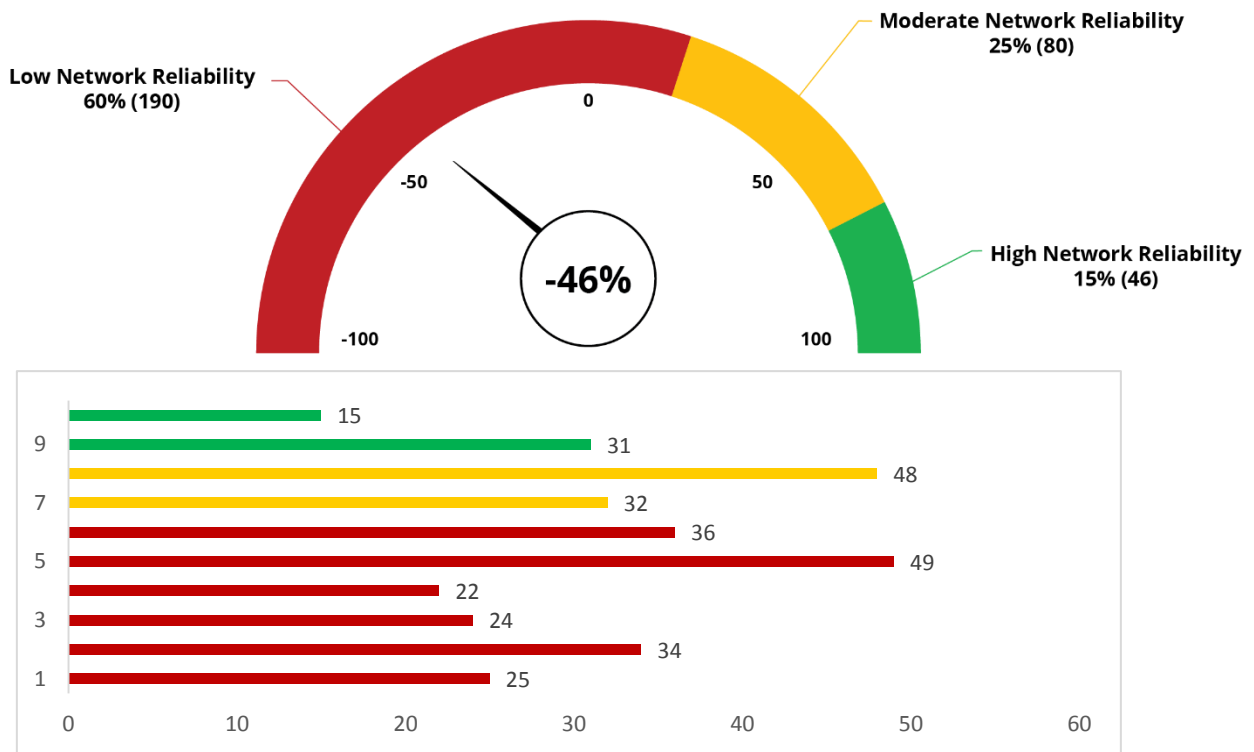
- Respondents reflected a mix of appreciation and concern. Respondents acknowledged the positive investments but highlighted safety and connectivity gaps.

Transit (Rank 4):

- Respondents described transit as infrequent, indirect, and unreliable.
- Limited service on early mornings, evenings, and Sundays and long travel times deter respondents from using transit

Strategic Transportation Plan – Progress Update

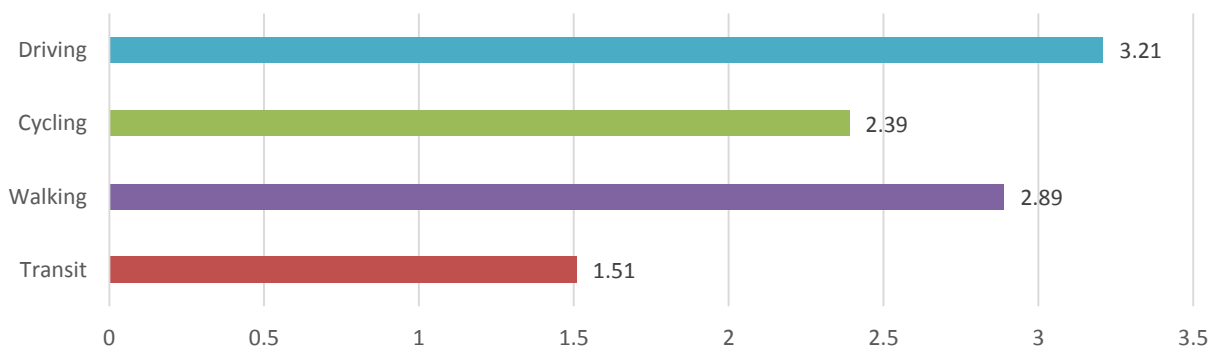
3. Overall, how reliable is the current transportation network? (Rating 1-10) (n=316)



Compared to overall network performance, reliability was rated higher, resulting in a Net Promoter Score of -46%. Approximately 1 in 7 respondents rated the reliability of the current transportation network as 9 or 10. The overall average ranking for reliability was 5.54.

4. Which form of transportation do you feel is the most reliable? (Ranking 1-4)

• (n=316)

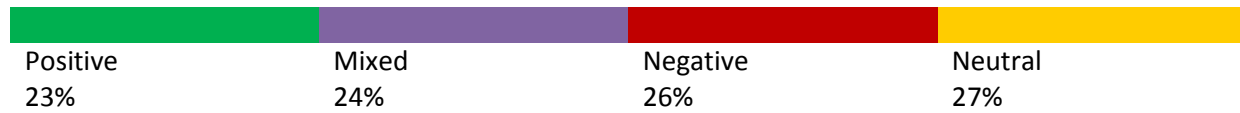


Driving and walking were ranked highest by respondents. 55% of respondents ranked driving as the most reliable form of transportation.

Strategic Transportation Plan – Progress Update

5. Please explain why you ranked these forms of transportation the way you have. (Open Answer)

- (n=241)



Driving (Rank 1):

- Respondents described “reliable” as the aspect of transportation most within their control, which is most true with driving.
- Respondents also indicated that the community is perceived as car-oriented and driving is necessary for accessing daily needs.

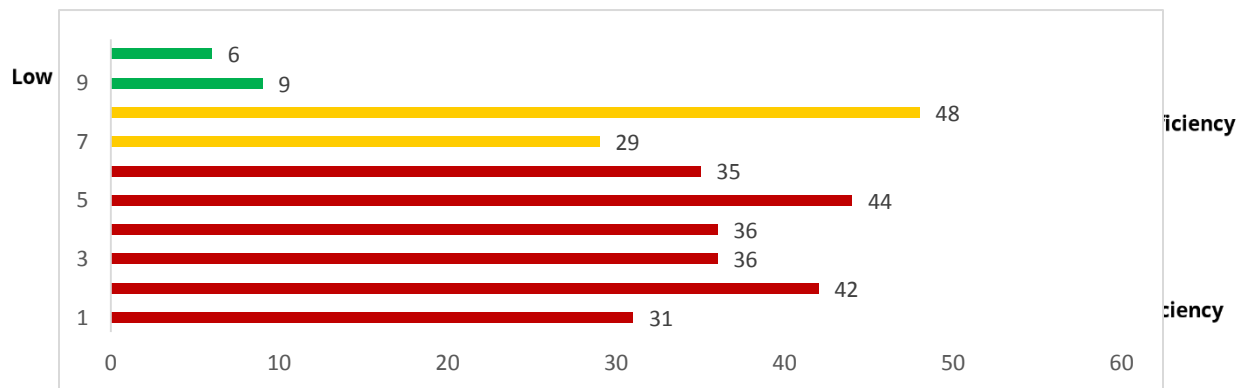
Walking (Rank 2):

- Walking was described as “reliable” for short distances, but concerns exist around personal safety, sidewalk and network gaps, and maintenance of pedestrian facilities, especially in the winter.
- Cycling (Rank 3):
- Respondents shared that cycling is generally consistent in travel time and can be faster than driving during peak times of congestion.
- Respondents also shared that concerns exist with connectivity and safety along main roads and arterials.

Transit (Rank 4):

- Many respondents said transit is unreliable due to infrequent service, limited coverage, frequent delays, and inconvenient stop locations.
- Respondents also noted that factors such as accessibility, disability, and equity influence their own or others' ability to select a mode of transportation.

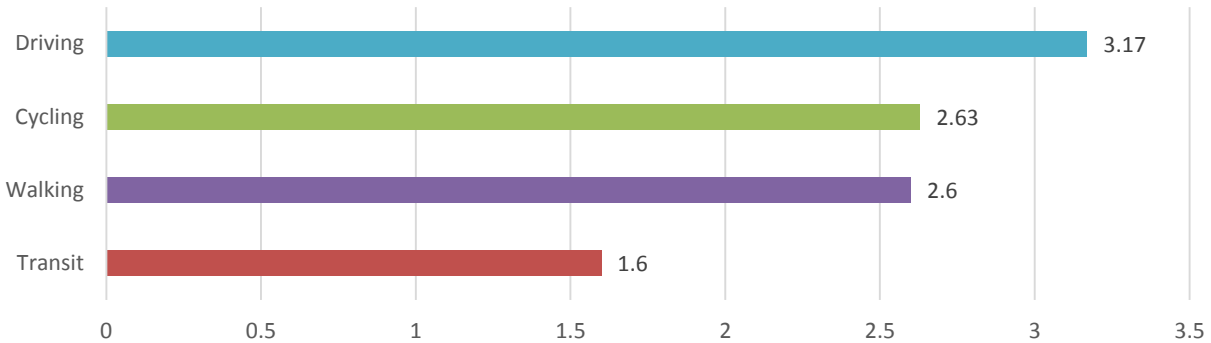
6. Overall, how efficient is the current transportation network? (Rating 1-10) (n=316)



Strategic Transportation Plan – Progress Update

95% of respondents ranked network efficiency as low or moderate. Resulting in an NPS score of -66% and an average rating of 4.83.

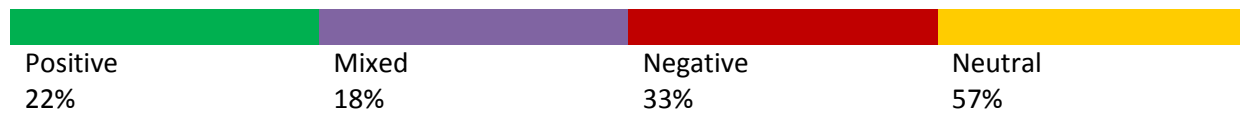
Which form of transportation do you feel is the most **efficient**? (Ranking 1-4) (n=316)



53% of respondents ranked driving as number 1, and 61% ranked transit as number 4.

7. Please explain why you ranked these forms of transportation the way you have. (Open Answer)

- (n=214)



Driving (Rank 1):

- Many respondents interpreted efficiency as getting to go to any destination quickly and stated that driving is the most efficient in this way because it is direct and flexible.
- Respondents also indicated that inefficiencies do exist around bridges and main corridors at peak times and that efficiency is context-specific.

Cycling (Rank 2):

- Some comments from respondents describe cycling as efficient at times, as it can bypass queues and congestion.
- Respondents shared that safety and route continuity are concerns and impact efficiency.

Walking (Rank 3):

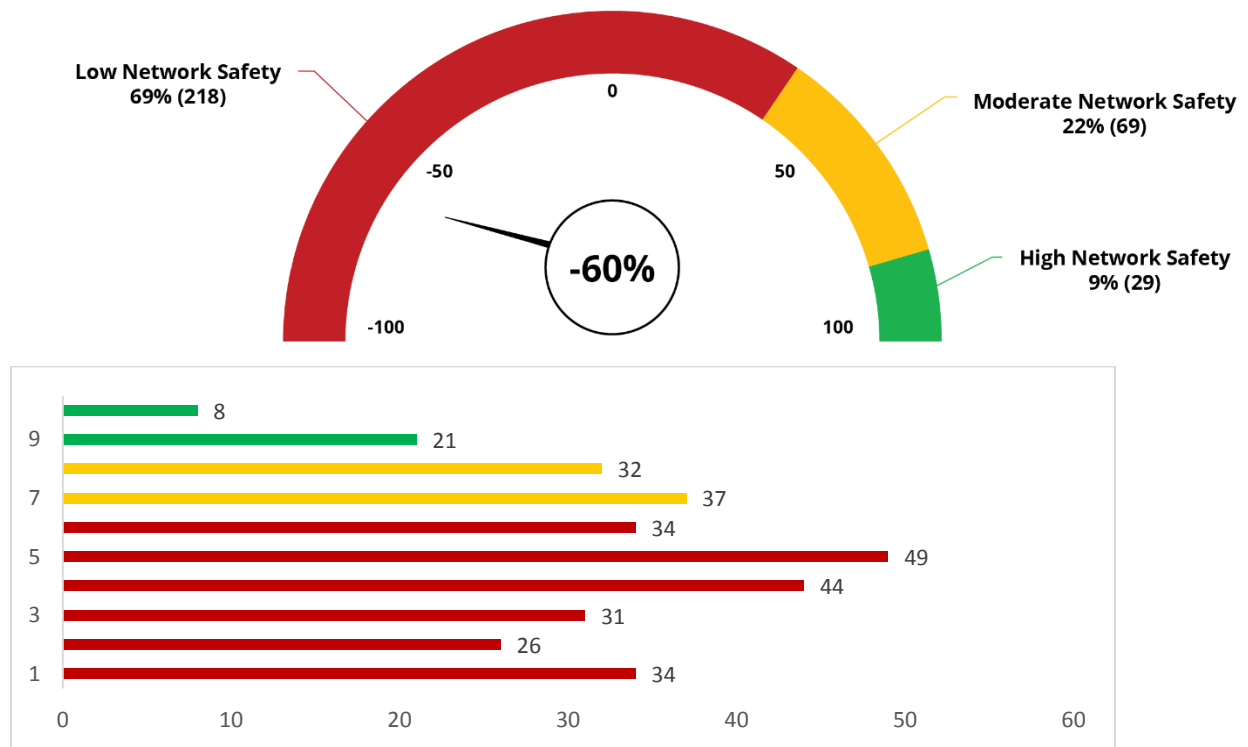
- Walking and cycling are highlighted as efficient, as they are lower cost, healthier and are better for the environment.
- Proximity of neighbourhoods to daily needs and geography play a role in efficiency when it comes to walking.

Transit (Rank 4):

Strategic Transportation Plan – Progress Update

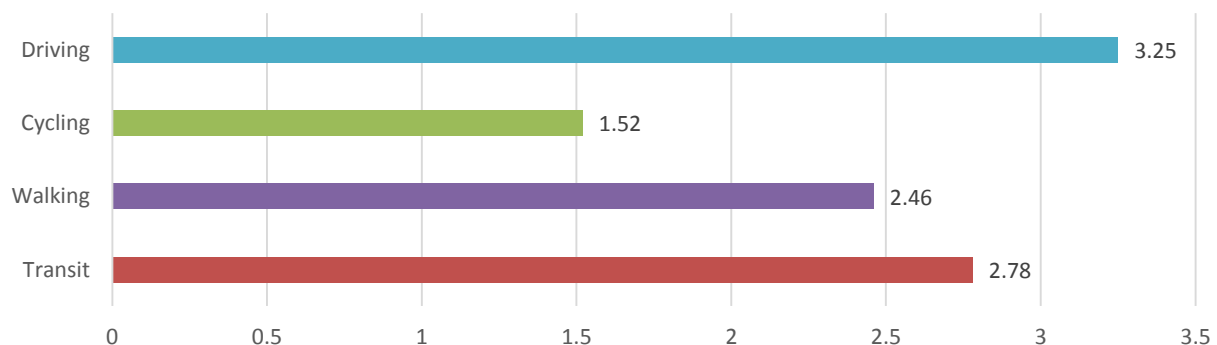
- Similar to the questions regarding network performance and reliability, transit is viewed by respondents as inefficient due to infrequent service, limited coverage, frequent delays, and inconvenient stop locations.

8. Overall, how safe is the current transportation network? (Rating 1-10) (n=316)



91% of respondents rated network safety as low or moderate, which resulted in an NPS score of -60% and with an average ranking of 5.03.

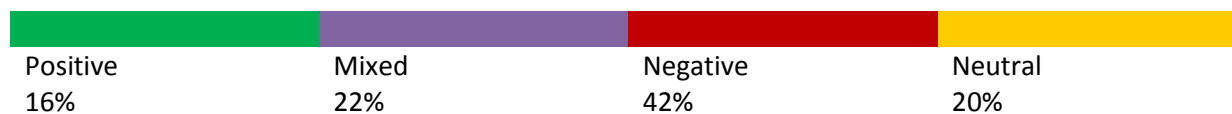
1. Which form of transportation do you feel is the safest? (Ranking 1-4) (n=316)



54% of respondents rated driving as safest and 36% rated transit as number two. 65% of respondents ranked cycling as the form of transportation that is the least safe.

Strategic Transportation Plan – Progress Update

2. Please explain why you ranked these forms of transportation the way you have. (Open Answer) (n=230)



Driving (Rank 1):

- Many respondents feel safest in vehicles (car/bus) due to physical protection, cycling feels most vulnerable.
- Driver behaviour (speeding, red-light running, failure to yield) is a leading safety concern.

Transit (Rank 2):

- Transit my respondents was often viewed as safe when on-board a transit vehicle, with concerns concentrated at stops (lighting, waits, and comfort).

Walking (Rank 3):

- Walking concerns focus on crossing safety, sidewalk gaps, lighting, and winter maintenance.

Cycling (Rank 4):

- Cycling safety concerns focus on gaps in the network and lack of physically separated routes.
- Broadly across all modes, respondents' comments underscored concerns regarding personal security in public spaces, as well as the challenges faced by individuals with accessibility needs and members of vulnerable population groups.

Next Steps

Courtenay has experienced, and is expected to continue to experience, significant growth over the long term, and a safe, efficient, reliable, and multimodal transportation system will be essential to supporting and managing this growth. Engagement undertaken as part of the Strategic Transportation Plan confirms that the current transportation network is not fully meeting community expectations, particularly with respect to safety, congestion, and travel choice.

In response, staff and Urban Systems reviewed technical analysis, public input, and feedback from interest holders to identify priorities for moving forward. This work confirmed three foundational pillars for the Strategic Transportation Plan: prioritizing road safety across all modes of travel, improving travel time and reliability on key corridors, and supporting a shift from private vehicle use toward active transportation and transit. The next phase of work will focus on translating these priorities into the core components of the Strategic Transportation Plan, including a clear framework of vision, goals, and targets; long-term network plans for streets, sidewalks, cycling facilities, and transit; and supporting actions to guide infrastructure investment, policy and regulatory changes, new programs and services, and collaborative initiatives with partner agencies.

Strategic Transportation Plan – Progress Update

The project webpage will be updated with a summary of Phase 1 engagement. Following development of the draft Strategic Transportation Plan and confirmation with staff and Council, Phase 2 engagement will be undertaken to test the proposed direction and refine priorities prior to finalization.

POLICY ANALYSIS:

The Strategic Transportation Plan is being developed within the policy direction already established by Council and the Official Community Plan. The work completed to date aligns with Council's Strategic Plan and Strategic Priorities by advancing understanding of road safety challenges, accessibility, infrastructure prioritization, and partnership-based governance. The emphasis on safety, congestion management, and system performance supports Council's focus on safer streets and improved transportation outcomes. The long-range and evidence-based approach to planning also aligns with Council's emphasis on financial sustainability and strategic investment.

The findings also align with the cardinal pillars of the Official Community Plan. The focus on safety, accessibility, and connected networks supports the OCP's objective of creating a complete, inclusive, and livable community. Interest in mode shift and improved transportation choice supports environmental and climate-related objectives, while the integration of transportation planning with land-use patterns reinforces the OCP's direction to focus growth near services, transit, and active transportation corridors. Collectively, the work completed to date demonstrates that the Strategic Transportation Plan is advancing as an implementation-focused extension of existing Council and OCP direction.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:

The Strategic Transportation Plan is being delivered within the existing 2026 Financial Plan. Any additional capital improvements identified through the program will be brought forward to Council for consideration and approval prior to implementation.

ADMINISTRATIVE IMPLICATIONS:

Program delivery is being managed within existing staff and consultant work plans. No additional administrative resources are required at this time to complete the current phase of work.

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES REFERENCE:

The Strategic Transportation Plan supports Council's priorities by advancing improvements to transportation infrastructure, strengthening accessibility across the community, and improving road safety.

This initiative addresses the following strategic priorities:

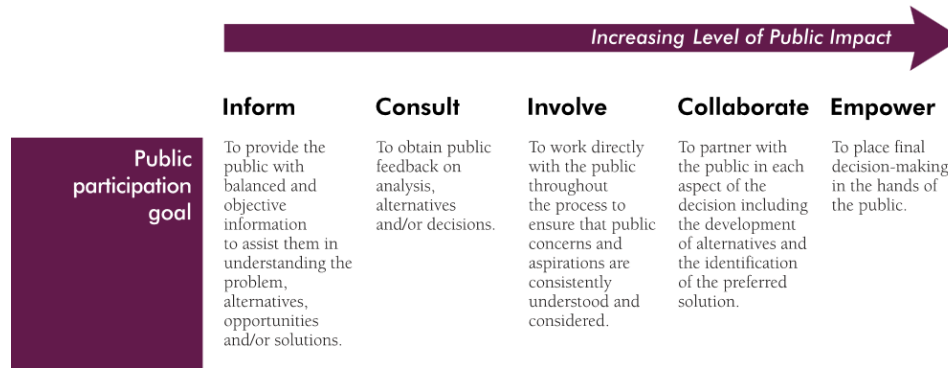
- Streets and Transportation - Develop traffic calming plans, related policies, and specific implementation when and where, speed limits, school zones, cycling education/awareness
- Municipal Infrastructure - Continued regional collaboration: Regional Growth Strategy, Liquid Waste Management Plan, South Sewer Conveyance, organics/solid waste, air quality, and regional parks
- Financial Sustainability - Ensure capacity to accommodate big change
- Organizational Well-Being and Sustainability - Ensure capacity to accommodate big change resulting from direct and indirect impacts to our community

Strategic Transportation Plan – Progress Update

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT:

Public engagement to date has included open houses, surveys, and interest holder meetings. The next phase of engagement will include a public open house and recommendation survey to seek feedback on proposed actions prior to finalization.

Staff would involve the public based on the IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation:



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OPTIONS:

1. THAT Council endorse this progress update of the Strategic Transportation Plan and direct staff to continue to advance to planning phase.
2. THAT Council provide alternative direction to staff.

ATTACHMENTS:

1. Appendix I - Transportation Today Background Report
2. Appendix II - What We Learned Report.

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Concurrence: Geoff Garbutt, M.PI., MCIP, RPP, City Manager (CAO)