



Parks Canada  
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# WHAT WE HEARD

Proposed Bow Valley Parkway Cycling Experience

Banff National Park



## Executive Summary

On July 29, 2021, Parks Canada launched a six-week public engagement process on a proposed cycling experience involving a vehicle access restriction to a 17 km section of the Bow Valley Parkway in Banff National Park. Parks Canada asked for feedback on two proposed options to provide a vehicle-free cycling experience on the parkway. Option 1 was spring and fall 7 days a week and Option 2 was spring and fall, weekends only.

Parks Canada heard from a range of Canadians and stakeholder groups. Over 2000 submissions were received from recreationists, tourism industry, local community members, environmental organizations, and interested Canadians. Parks Canada heard that the majority of respondents support an enhanced cycling experience on the Bow Valley Parkway. These comments along with other relevant information, will be considered by the Superintendent in making a final decision regarding an enhanced cycling experience along the Bow Valley Parkway.

Parks Canada is grateful to everyone who took the time to share their feedback and concerns. Your input is greatly appreciated and valued. Input received will help guide continued planning, monitoring, and improvements to the cycling experience on the Bow Valley Parkway in Banff National Park.

## Overview of the Engagement

Parks Canada is committed to transparent and meaningful engagement that integrates the knowledge and expertise of Indigenous Nations, key stakeholders, environmental groups and the general public to advance Parks Canada priorities. Public engagement on the proposed cycling experience provided Parks Canada with diverse perspectives for consideration in the review and development of the Bow Valley Parkway cycling experience.

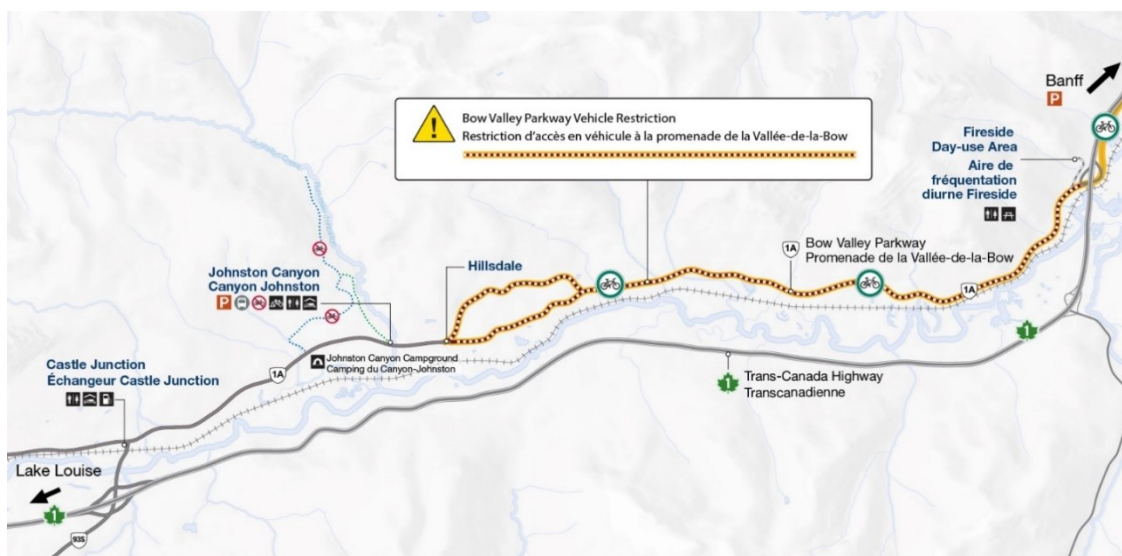
The public was invited to visit Banff National Park’s website between July 29 and September 9, 2021 to review information on the proposed cycling opportunity and to share their comments by email or letter. Targeted meetings were also held with numerous stakeholder groups.

The engagement process resulted in more than 2 000 submissions, including responses from national and regional organizations, as well as from individuals. Some feedback was submitted collectively on behalf of multiple organizations, while others were shared on behalf of several hundreds of individuals or members. Parks Canada received input from the tourism industry, environmental groups, community organizations, tourism and recreational users and groups, local community members and interested Canadians.

## What We Proposed

Parks Canada proposed to restrict vehicle access to a 17 km section of the parkway, annually in the spring and fall to provide a cycling opportunity (see Figure 1). This proposal built on the success of a cycling opportunity that arose on the Bow Valley Parkway during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 and 2021. The proposal also responded to extensive public comments that an enhanced cycling experience should be considered in future years.

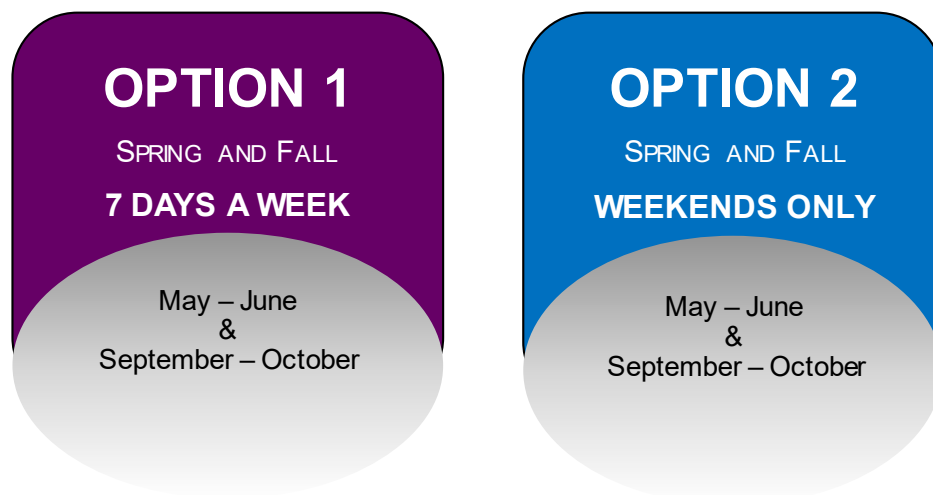
**Figure 1.** Proposed Bow Valley Parkway Vehicle Access Restriction





Participants were asked to provide feedback on two options (see Figure 2) for a proposed cycling experience on the Bow Valley Parkway.

**Figure 2.** Proposed Bow Valley Parkway Cycling Experience Options



Under both of the proposed options, vehicle access to the popular Johnston Canyon day use area and campground would remain open year round, and the full parkway would be open to all, vehicles and cyclists alike, during the summer months.

## Who We Heard From

### Public

- 2237 individual comments by email or letter.
- Audiences ranged from seniors and families to those with diverse abilities.
- Heard from local residents, recreationists, and interested Canadians at large.
- Petition with 298 Canadian citizen signatures in support of the cycling experience.

### Organizations

- Range of organizations by email, letter or in meetings.
- Organizations representing user groups, tourism and travel, environmental organizations, businesses, local governments.

Parks Canada reached out to Indigenous groups and did not receive comments during the engagement period.



## What We Heard Overall

Respondents were extremely supportive of enhancing cycling opportunities along the Bow Valley Parkway. A significant majority of respondents, from both the public and organizations, indicated a strong preference for Option 1, a cycling experience that is implemented 7 days a week in Spring and Fall. A large number of respondents indicated a preference for more vehicle-free days during the summer and for some, there was a desire for year-round vehicle-free opportunities. We also heard that a vehicle-free parkway would be appreciated by not only cyclists, but also by people looking for a place to walk, run, roller-blade, and roller-skate.

Others raised concerns over the negative impacts of vehicle restrictions, such as to fair access for people with disabilities, lack of convenient access to day use areas within the restricted area, especially for those transporting equipment (such as climbing ropes), and congestion related to parking or vehicles diverted elsewhere.

The following provides an overview of results based on respondent's preference towards Option 1 and 2. In addition to Option 1 and 2, two additional preference categories emerged and were added including 'Supportive of Cycling, but No Preference for Either Option' and 'Not Supportive of Either Option'.

Supportive Option 1	Supportive Option 2	Supportive, No Preference	Not Supportive
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The majority of respondents indicated a preference for Option 1.</li> <li>Many request that Parks Canada considered adding summer days.</li> <li>Top reasons for supporting Option 1:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ overall visitor experience</li> <li>✓ environmental benefits</li> <li>✓ cyclist safety</li> <li>✓ reduces visitor congestion on parkway</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A smaller number of respondents preferred Option 2.</li> <li>Many cited this option as providing access for a variety of user groups</li> <li>Proposed variations from this group include different combination of days, for example on some weekday and weekend days, as well as the addition of summer days.</li> <li>Top reasons for supporting Option 2:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ more fair</li> <li>✓ enables better visitor access</li> <li>✓ overall visitor experience</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Another group of respondents were supportive of a cycling, but did not indicate a preference for either option presented by Parks Canada.</li> <li>Top reasons for general support:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ meets a demand</li> <li>✓ environmental benefits</li> <li>✓ health and wellbeing</li> <li>✓ overall visitor experience</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A small number of respondents were not supportive of a cycling experience.</li> <li>Top reasons for not supporting either option:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ unfair</li> <li>✓ restricts access</li> <li>✓ discriminates vehicle users</li> </ul> </li> </ul>



## What We Heard from Organizations

Parks Canada heard from 17 organizations. Organizations included tourism businesses and associations, environmental groups, recreation associations and clubs. The majority of organizations were supportive of a car-free cycling experience. Most were in favour of Option 1 and several supported further vehicle restrictions. The main reasons for supporting the cycling experience spanned from:

- promoting tourism;
- supporting the local and regional economy;
- promoting a healthy and exceptional visitor experience, and;
- being good for the environment.

Several tourism businesses raised concerns about negative impacts to their operations. For example, lack of access for scenic driving tours and transporting guided clients to sites within the vehicle-restricted area. It was also a concern that the restriction may reduce tourists' draw to businesses in the area.

## What We Heard on Social Media

Parks Canada also monitored social media activity related to the proposed Bow Valley Parkway cycling experience. Information about the proposed cycling opportunity was shared on Park Canada's Facebook and Twitter accounts. Over 5000 engagements were recorded on the two social media platforms. Comments from social media reflect and confirm the results we heard and analyzed through Park Canada's six-week public engagement process on the same topic.



## What We Heard Key Themes

Several overarching themes emerged as reasons and considerations for respondents' preferences. These included the following **7 key themes**.

### Theme 1: Visitor Experience

The majority of respondents indicated that the vehicle restriction greatly and positively contributes towards their experience. Respondents noted how it creates a safer and therefore much more enjoyable cycling experience. Others commented on how the vehicle free experience is like no other and the highlight of their visit to the park.

A small group of respondents noted how scenic driving is a quintessential part of their visit to Banff. For other visitors, such as hikers and climbers, access to valued places are reduced by the restriction (Fireside, Corey Pass, and Guides Rock). For these individuals, the vehicle restriction has an overall negative impact on their experience and enjoyment of Banff National Park.

### Theme 2: Environmental Impacts

Environmental impacts came up regularly in the public and organizational comments.

Many people felt the vehicle restrictions would be better for the environment, particularly for wildlife. To this group, fewer vehicles would be safer for wildlife, support better wildlife movement, as well as result in less air and noise pollution.

Some felt, a steady stream of cyclists on the parkway would be more disruptive to wildlife than regular vehicle traffic. Concern was raised over the potential for close, potentially dangerous encounters between wildlife and cyclists, posing an increased safety risk to humans and wildlife.

There was worry about potential changes to the seasonal wildlife closure of the Bow Valley Parkway and the importance of maintaining this closure to support wildlife.



### Theme 3: Contribution to Local Economy

Both the public and organizations commented on economic impacts of the proposed Bow Valley Parkway cycling experience.

The public typically sees the proposed cycling experience benefitting the local and regional economy by drawing visitors. Sentiments from local businesses were mixed with perceived positive and negative impacts on the local economy.

Some worry the proposed cycling experience will result in fewer customers and a loss of tourism revenues. Other local businesses told us they expect to see positive economic impacts resulting from the proposed cycling experience. They predict it will attract visitors who will contribute to the local economy, particularly in the shoulder seasons of spring and fall.

### Theme 4: Contribution to Health and Well-being

Health and well-being came up frequently in what we heard. It was clear that travel on the parkway, whether by vehicle or by self-propelled means, contributes positively to many people's sense of wellness: physical, spiritual, and mental.

Many respondents said that cycling the vehicle-free parkway brought them joy, gave them an opportunity to be active, and contributed to their physical and mental well-being. These comments came in from a range of people including cycling enthusiasts, old and young individuals, multi-generational families looking for opportunities to be active together, and friends seeking a social, healthy activity to share. The safety of a vehicle-free parkway was key to enabling many to partake in these activities.

On the other hand, we heard from individuals for whom being able to take a leisurely drive contributes to their well-being. These included people with limited mobility, the elderly, or people without the means to cycle. For this group, the parkway provides a unique immersive driving experience that is hard to find elsewhere. This unique experience gives them a sense of enjoyment that contributes to their well-being.





## Theme 5: Accessibility and Fairness

This theme examined whether the cycling options were reasonable, balanced, and equitable with regards to people's ability to access their places of interest.

While a minority, those that felt the proposed experience was unfair held strong views on the matter. We heard that vehicle restrictions are discriminatory against people with mobility challenges, the elderly, and people with special interests such as photographers, rock climbers, guides, and birders. Some shared the belief that vehicle restrictions would infringe on their right to access a public roadway. Others pointed out that it would be inconvenient. While others noted that they perceive that cyclists are a minority group that have many other options in the park and to reserve the parkway for cycling was not an equitable approach.

Others felt that the proposed cycling experience would increase fairness and accessibility by being an experience that a broad range of people can participate in. People told us there are not many places where people feel safe cycling. Allowing cyclists to enjoy a portion of the parkway without vehicles seemed to them a fair compromise when they consider how many scenic roads drivers have access to. These sentiments were shared by a range of people that include the elderly, those with young children, people with high levels of cycling experience and those with very little experience, and people with mobility challenges.

## Theme 6: Visitor Demand

Based on comments, we heard a high interest and demand for a variety of experiences along the Bow Valley Parkway.

Many respondents see cycling as a popular activity and note the high visitor demand for safe, inclusive cycling opportunities. For them, the proposed cycling experience makes sense because it meets this growth in demand and popularity of cycling. In fact, numerous people indicated a preference for additional cycling days throughout the summer, whole year or even for additional locations to be added.

A commonly expressed view from those that objected to the proposed cycling experience was that people are looking to drive to their destinations. This includes visitors who enjoy scenic drives, those with mobility challenges, and people wanting to partake in activities with equipment such as climbing. Ultimately, there continues to be demand for scenic drives and vehicular access to day use areas along the parkway.

We noted that some people believed the proposed cycling experience would restrict vehicular access to the Johnston Canyon, which they found problematic due to demand for access to this special place. It is clear that Parks Canada needs to better highlight that vehicle access to Johnston Canyon will not be restricted by either option presented.

## Theme 7: Planning and Implementation

The planning and implementation of the proposed cycling experience was another theme that came out in the comments.

We heard many suggestions including that Parks Canada should find ways for vehicles and cyclists to share the roadway, add a dedicated cycling lane, or find another location for a cycling experience. Respondents also suggested that Parks Canada could improve the cycling experience by adding a clear



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connector route to Banff, parking, toilets, garbage, and protocols for cycling, sharing the road, and for wildlife encounters.

Environmental non-governmental organizations and some businesses suggested that the plans for the cycling experience need to take into consideration broader issues such as transit, visitation patterns, congestions. There were also calls to ensure the experience is developed systematically, considering the scientific information available.

Finally, we heard the need for clear communications about the cycling experience so that people can plan ahead and enjoy their visit.

## Conclusion

This *What We Heard* reflects comments and perspectives shared during the six-week engagement period on the proposed Bow Valley Parkway cycling experience. These comments along with other relevant information, will be considered by Parks Canada in making a final decision regarding an enhanced cycling experience along the Bow Valley Parkway.