

Report on Link Pathway

General Research and Phase 1 Public Consultations

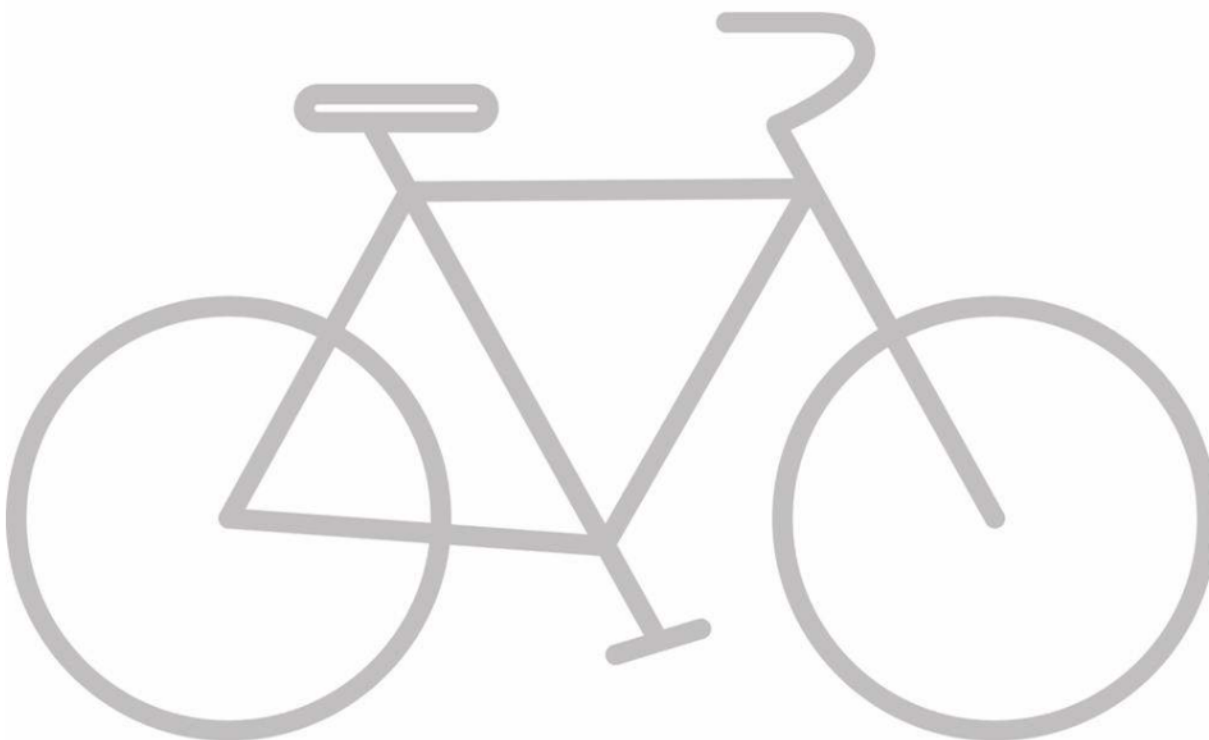
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Project Overview

The development of the LINK Pathway has been ongoing for approximately 8 years, driven forward by a not-for-profit, charitable organization known as the Link Pathway Committee. The proposed project seeks to establish an approximately 14 km asphalt bike trail from the **City of Lethbridge** to the **Town of Coaldale**, passing through **Lethbridge County** lands to create a regional tourism and recreation asset. The project, to date, has seen wide community support with robust fundraising but has so far struggled to define a route that can be brought forward for consideration and approval by Lethbridge County.

The obstacles to progress as they were defined to Progressive West Consulting in the spring of 2021 were:

- a. Assumptions were made that the path would be widely recognized as an asset to the region and individual landowner opposition to the project was unexpected.
- b. As volunteer committee members worked to define a workable route, maps were published for the proposed route before engagement or conversation with residents had been pursued because of (a.)
- c. The need to eventually cross the CP rail line near the City of Lethbridge posed a significant fiscal obstacle with quoted prices for controlled crossings estimated at around \$500,000.

The Link Pathway Committee engaged Progressive West Consulting to address these issues by undertaking the following:

- a. Provide the project with a **robust public engagement program** and present the feedback gathered to the Committee and to elected Councillors in the region for guiding decisions.
- b. Evaluate the route and work with regional stakeholders to **identify the 'least objectionable path' through the region.**
- c. Draft recommendations for **accommodating the concerns of residents** based on collected feedback and present a recommendation for pathway alignment to the Committee.
- d. Assist in presenting this information to Lethbridge County Council to aid in their decision making.



Methodology

The Link Pathway project can only be constructed following the final approval of Lethbridge County Council. Like all development projects in a populated area, this decision must balance the regional social and economic benefits of the project against the individual concerns of landowners and stakeholders who may be directly or indirectly impacted by the project. Being a good neighbor means collecting feedback from those who may be impacted and using that information to inform project design so as to mitigate individual concerns to the greatest extent possible, while still realizing the wider social and economic impacts that may benefit a much larger population.

For reporting on the positive and negative impacts of the project, our approach has therefore been to:

1. **Define the social and economic implications** to the region from the project by researching comparable projects and compiling evidence from existing literature on rural recreation projects such as this.
2. **Address the known concern of regional safety** stemming from the project by speaking directly to police detachments serving areas where rural bike pathways already exist and by surveying the extensive literature on the topic.
3. Hire an arms-length and impartial subcontractor to **speak directly to residents** in areas that are likely to be in close proximity to the completed project and record and report on those conversations.
4. Conduct a wider regional engagement activity that **solicits public opinion** on the project from the communities involved, including Lethbridge, Lethbridge County, and the Town of Coaldale. (To be reported separately).

For recommending a viable route for the Link Pathway our methodology has involved balancing the following factors:

1. Wherever possible, utilize **publicly or institutionally owned right-of-ways**.
2. **Where possible, avoid proximity to private residences**.
3. Where proximity to private residences cannot be avoided, **go above and beyond** to address private resident concerns with project engineering and design.
4. **Accommodate unique or individual landowner requests** to the greatest extent feasible.

This report will cover only project research and phase 1 in-person consultations. **Two further reports** will be forthcoming detailing the logical conclusions of our route-finding efforts and the feedback from Phase 2 of regional consultations with the public.



Regional Impacts of Rural Bike Pathways

The positive socio-economic impacts of cycling, and by extension the construction of infrastructure to enable it, is quite well understood with substantial literature being available on the subject. Scholarly searches for the negative impacts of cycling on health, social, or economic factors have no appreciable returns, with identified negative health impacts being restricted to individual physical impairments associated with excessive bicycle use, and negative economic or social impacts being limited to concerns over improper maintenance or design. The sections below provide researched and referenced overviews of the various benefit/risk categories.

Economic Benefit Categories

Tourism Economy

Tourism is big business, and a new bike pathway anchored on a regional destination like Exhibition Park offering a truly rural southern-Alberta experience, will contribute towards the ongoing growth of this sector.

According to Travel Alberta, tourism related GDP in 2019 (pre-pandemic) was \$8.4 billion (Economic Impact, Tourism Related). The pandemic took a huge toll on the industry, depressing the sector by almost 50% in 2020 with steady recovery since. However, the global tourism market is a growth industry on the strength of a rapidly growing global middle class which will see 3 billion more people join the middle-income ranges by 2050. These people want to experience the world, and Alberta can and should be a sought-after destination on the global agenda. Travel Alberta's baseline projections for sector GDP share by 2030 are around \$12 billion (Economic Impact, Tourism Related) and with the mountain corridor lacking the capacity to accommodate rapid increases in the visitor economy, much of the provincial gains need to be realized on the Prairies.

Figure 1.1 Tourism Alberta Recovery Forecast



The Lethbridge Region is in competition not with the mountain corridors for new visitor spend, but rather with other prairie destinations that are within easy driving distance of the Calgary travel hub. Excelling in that competition will require a combinatory process of building new product, enhancing existing offers, and making sure our destinations get sufficient airtime to attract visitors.

“A regional bike path running between Lethbridge and Coaldale will showcase the best of our region to new visitors, letting them experience southern Alberta while getting exercise and fresh air! An experience like this would enhance everything we’re trying to do at Tourism Lethbridge to promote experiences in the agri-food sector for visitors, would enhance conference offerings at Exhibition Park, and would be a valuable offering for our team to profile at the national and international level.” – Erin Crane, CEO, Tourism Lethbridge.



A 2012 Economic Impact Study on Tourism in the south-zone compiled by the Government of Alberta clocked direct visitor spend by all tourists at \$734 million, sustaining a total of 10,185 jobs province-wide, with approximately \$322 million in total tax revenue accruing to all three levels of government because of tourism activity in southern Alberta alone (3).

The Link Pathway as envisioned would provide a new tourism product on the Prairies that would add to the goal of regional destination development to take advantage of these trends.



“Connectivity is vital to the physical and economic health of our community at large and the events we host at the Agri-food Hub and Trade Centre,” says Mike Warkentin, Chief Executive Officer, Lethbridge & District. “The proposed Link Pathway creates an on-site activation that drives centralized engagement through Southern Alberta’s newest asset for connection, events and entertainment.”

Construction Impact

Construction spend for pathways has a wide range of prices. For example, a shared-use pathway in Edmonton was built in 2016 at a cost of \$1,223.00 per meter. Compare this to the \$101.00 per metre spent in Guelph, Ontario for shoulder bike lanes on a rural road. (Benni et al, 2019) The LINK Pathway project is comparatively simple, consisting largely of at-grade asphalt surfacing on an aggregate bed over mostly flat ground in a rural environment. The pathway is approximately 14.76 km in total surface length and must accommodate 3 bridges, an underpass, 3 picnic kiosks,

additional project engineering components, and landscaping. The estimated cost of the project (informed by MPE Engineering) is **\$4,394,177.20** with almost all of that being local spend.

Job creation from a project like this is either negligible or temporary in nature, with the actual construction demands for the project being fairly light.

Property Value Increases

The impacts on property values from bike paths has been well studied and there is a large amount of data available on the subject. With few exceptions, the consensus of the literature is that bike paths either increase the property value of nearby and adjacent land, or have no effect; with the preponderance of examples being the former. This is because outdoor features like trails not only provide health benefits, but they are viewed as an amenity by most of the population - similar to parks or greenways, and are also correlated in commercial districts with higher revenue. The trend is so constant in the literature, that bike infrastructure is routinely listed as a factor in determining community quality, such as in a 2020 study on the best places in Canada to live (Remax, 2020).

Supporting evidence for the conclusion that bike paths either improve or have no effect on property values can be found in numerous credible sources. In 2006, the Delaware Center for Transportation at the University of Delaware published a literature review of studies on the property value impacts of bicycle paths. The study looks at what was known at the time on the impacts on property values from the introduction of bike paths and presents information about crime in relation to bicycle and pedestrian paths, then uses a statistical model to examine the impacts on nearby housing.

The conclusion was:

*“The majority of studies indicate that the presence of a bike path/trail either **increases property values and ease of sale slightly or has no effect**. Studies have shown that neighbors of many bike paths/trails feel that the quality of life of their neighborhood has been improved, that the trails were a good use of open space, and in the case of abandoned railways were an improvement from before the trails went in. There is definitely a large portion of the population that sees bike paths as an amenity and will seek out residences near trails, parks, and other natural resource areas. (Racca and Danju 11)*

Other reports echo this conclusion. In 2011, a report from Vancouver indicated that 65 percent of realtors used new bikeways as a selling feature. In North Carolina, realtors found that 40 homes adjacent to the rural Shepherd’s Vineway Bikeway saw property value increases of \$5000 and up, and that bike paths were placed a shocking third on a list of 39 features homebuyers defined as crucial in buying homes in a new community (Smith, para 6).

A 2016, a study by the Urban Land Institute - the world's largest global network of cross-disciplinary real estate and land use experts, looked at overall trends in active transportation which was primarily concerned with the benefits and impacts of bicycle transportation amenities. This study compiled data from 6 additional studies on property value impacts from bike pathways and detailed what the authors called “a growing body of evidence that bicycling has a positive impact on retail sales, commercial property values, and overall economic development”(Urban Land Institute, 2016).

The positive impression conveyed above is no cherry picking of the data. Scholarly searches for negative impacts on property values from bike infrastructure yield no immediate results. Digging into the cited sources of the literature reviews conducted by others yields references to individual counterfactuals or property rights groups who have taken a vocal online position. However, the counterfactuals provided little impact on the trend when aggregated because of the nuances of situational factors which must be considered. Property value impacts are highly situational and depend on a multitude of factors such as maintenance, and project design. If a piece of infrastructure is an eyesore, it will have the impact that all eyesores have - which is negative.

Concerns about proper maintenance and design are valid; and therefore, it is important to ensure that there is a proper plan in place for maintenance and the ongoing greening of the space. Careful project planning to integrate the pathway into the existing neighbourhood in order to minimize potential homeowner – user conflicts is imperative. Provided the Pathway is planned, implemented, and maintained properly, it is our opinion that the Link Pathway should not negatively impact property values.

Reduced Medical Costs

Canadians are exhibiting a renewed awareness of the connection between lifestyle and individual health. Recent studies have found that rural Canadians are more likely than urban residents to be overweight and less active in their leisure time. Therefore, encouraging active modes of transportation like walking and cycling is one strategy to combat this trend. (StatsCan, 2020 Data Blog)

It has long been noted that active commuting is regularly linked to a lower risk of cancer and heart disease - with cycling, in particular, being associated with much lower morbidity and mortality rates (Celis-Moralies et al, 2017). The individual health benefits of cycling are well understood, but what is often less appreciated are the financial impacts on the publicly funded health care system from healthy lifestyle choices, such as cycling. Numerous sources in the literature agree with the trends that Darren Flusche identified in his 2009 paper, 'Economic Benefits of Bicycle Infrastructure Investments when he concluded:

“The health savings resulting from physical activity, measured in 10 different studies, range up to \$1,175 per person, per year.” (Flusche, 2009)

Another notable study in the extensive literature on the topic is a study from Lincoln, Nebraska into reducing health care costs associated with inactivity where the researchers concluded that:

“Building trails is cost beneficial from a public health perspective - even when controlling for highest cost, for every 1 dollar invested in trails resulted in a greater return in direct medical benefit.” (Wang et al, 2005)

The significant cost savings to society in general through reduced medical bills is an invariable trend in the literature.

Product Development

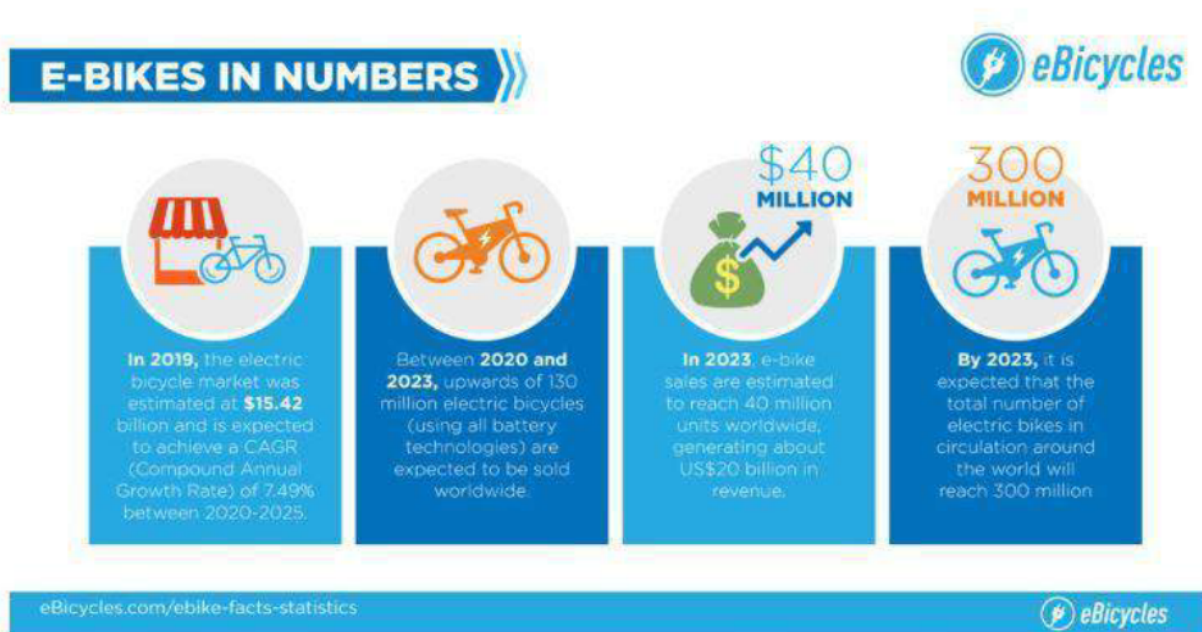
The plan being proposed by the Link Pathway Committee offers not only economic benefits but provides the region with a new tourism product which has multiple use-cases. Bike-friendly roads and trails offer small towns a way to attract outdoor enthusiasts and channel that enthusiasm into local business. (Elswick, 2019)

New Rural Cycling Opportunity

Cycling itself is a growth market, propelled even faster by the pandemic and a common desire to get outside and out of our collective isolation. According to NPD, Cycling equipment revenue in the United States grew by 15% to \$8.5 billion in the 12 months ending July 2021 compared to the previous year (Sorenson, 2021). The whole market trend has been applicable in Canada as well with bike shops struggling to maintain stock. There's a lot more people with bikes than before the pandemic and a marked increase in cycling as a hobby. The Link Pathway would be a unique offering in this space, giving cyclists a rural route on a paved surface to travel. The current regional inventory of dedicated bike surfaces is limited to in-city locales, or unpaved routes.

The pathway would also be an ideal route for electrified bicycle riding, with a 14 km route on paved surfaces. E-bike sales have surged in recent years as more models come onto the market and become more affordable

Figure 1.2 E-Bike Market Growth (ebicycles.com)



The global electric bicycle market is expected to skyrocket in the following decade, achieving massive growth in Europe, Asia, and North America.

Running / Biking Event Route

There is a distinct lack of biking events in the Lethbridge area, but this infrastructure will create a new venue on which to host a wide variety of events - particularly for riders in younger demographics who may not want to be biking on-road. The facility would offer the possibility of off-road bike-a-thons, cross country racing, time-trialing, and other bike-related activities.

It can also serve as a running path. The Lethbridge Region is home to a robust running community with runnersoul.com listing about a dozen formal running events in the calendar year (runnersoul.com/events). With the Link Pathway connecting into the Henderson Park area and out to the Town of Coaldale, this secure off-road route would be a natural destination for future running events.

Picnic Opportunities

As envisioned, the Link Pathway will have 3 picnic kiosks along the route - one near the western edge, one near the Highway 512 underpass, and one near Coaldale. Kiosks will be equipped with picnic shelters and tables for picnicking providing a destination for families to use while spending time together outdoors.

Bike Rentals

As a tourism product, there will be a distinct business opportunity for new or existing businesses, including Exhibition Park, Tourism Lethbridge, Nikka Yuko Japanese Gardens, and others, to offer bike and e-bike rentals for use on the pathway, creating more economic activity. This is an opportunity for many businesses to capitalize on.

Cycling Tours

The pathway also speaks strongly to the vision of Tourism Lethbridge to develop regional agri-food tourism products and would allow the development of interpretive tours that can travel along the irrigation canals, past the Lethbridge College demonstration farm, through the irrigation demonstration facility, and past a myriad of crops. This is a value-added offering that can be tacked onto Exhibition Park events or offered as a stand-alone service by a business.



Product Enhancement

The project as envisioned is not just a stand-alone offering but could also enhance existing facilities by becoming an extension or value-added component of them.

Regional Bike Access

For one, the pathway will tie into the municipal pathway systems in both the City of Lethbridge and the Town of Coaldale, offering a true inter-municipal bikeway that links the two communities and allows bike, e-bike, or other forms of commuting between the two. E-bikes typically travel at around 25 kms/h, making the passage from Coaldale to Lethbridge along the pathway about a 30-minute trip. Furthermore, the pathway would provide commuter access to places of work midpoint in the county, such as the Research Station, Fresh Start, the Demonstration Farm, Broxburn Industrial Park, Greenhaven, and other locations.

Exhibition Park / Henderson Lake/ Nikka Yuko Complex

The pathway would also serve as a value-added facility for the new and expanded Exhibition Park and secure its position as a hub for social and economic activity. It's easy to envision bike rentals available at Exhibition Park serving as a value-add component for every conference, exhibition, and event that occurs at that facility, making it an even more attractive amenity.

Lethbridge College Demo Farm

Lethbridge College's developing demonstration farm on provincial land will also be adjacent to the pathway, and the College is eager to see the development of a stopping point (picnic kiosk) near their facility where they can showcase their research and work to the public.



Healthy Living

Proven Health Impacts

The College of Family Physicians of Canada recommends communities work to increase rates of cycling in their communities stating that “cycling in particular has been shown to reduce carbon footprints, improve overall well-being, prevent chronic diseases and all-cause mortality, reduce noise pollution, and foster social interaction,” (Green). [A]ll of which contribute to improved health outcomes, not only for those who participate directly in cycling, but for those who live in communities with increased rates of cycling as well, because “motorists consistently experience the highest exposure to air pollution” (Green).

Specific health benefits of cycling as stated in the literature are: increased cardiovascular fitness, increased muscle strength and flexibility, improved joint mobility, decreased stress, improved posture and coordination, strengthened bones, decreased body fat, prevention or management of disease, reduction of anxiety and depression, in addition to, reduction of pollution and greenhouse gas emissions, and psychological benefits accruing from social interactions.

GHG Reductions for Commuters

The World Health Organization has called climate change the biggest health threat of this century, with a range of direct and indirect physical and mental health effects, which include: heat-related illnesses, worsening lung and heart disease from air pollution, direct injury and displacement from floods, droughts, and other extreme weather events, and increased food insecurity (Watts). With this existential threat hanging over all our heads, the College of Family Physicians (CFP) of Canada recommends that Canadian communities do what they can to encourage the further adoption of alternate modes of transportation rather than personal vehicle use. The CFP recommendation cites a study using recent travel activity data from European cities which found that “those who switch 1 trip per day from car driving to cycling reduce their carbon footprint by about 0.5 metric tons per year. Thus, if 10% of the population were to change their travel behaviour, the emissions savings would be around 4% of life-cycle carbon dioxide emissions from all car travel” (Green). This is not an insignificant impact. The Link Pathway is a project that encourages the adoption of cycling as a part of life which would hopefully have impacts in the regional population by encouraging increased bicycle adoption for daily commuting where possible or applicable - both in the region, but more specifically, within the City of Lethbridge and Town of Coaldale.

Fresh Start Treatment Centre

The envisioned route of the Link Pathway will be adjacent to the Fresh Start Treatment Centre in Lethbridge County and has been enthusiastically embraced by them as an attractive value-add to their own facility. The study referred to previously by the College of Family Physicians enumerated the many psychological benefits of outdoor activities (such as cycling) and Fresh Start would be looking to take advantage of the pathway to increase their own on-site offerings to patients.

Project Liabilities

An enumeration of benefits must be followed by an enumeration of liabilities from the project that must be considered and addressed. The researched items below have informed specific recommendations at the end of this document.

Poor Design and Maintenance

The design and construction of a pathway is no small undertaking and there are many technical aspects that must be considered. Having engaged with technical expertise early on in this process has been an invaluable investment as infrastructure projects of any size or scale must be considered through many lenses. The collaborative effort of these technical experts, informed by their decades of experience, has mitigated many of the pitfalls new trail development groups can find themselves in. However, continued engagement with these and other professionals will be key to success.

As noted above in the section on 'Property Value Increases', bike paths typically add value to the regions through which they pass *except where the path is either poorly designed, poorly maintained, or both*. In the case where improper design or maintenance is present, the pathway itself can become a liability. Improper groundwork can lead to slumping or asphalt cracking. Improper installation of fences or other infrastructure can lead to slumping of posts, bench pads, or other natural degradation of infrastructure. If there is a proper plan and a responsible party identified with resources and continuity, these issues can be addressed through ongoing maintenance - but if there is not a robust maintenance plan, the pathway can suffer from overgrowth of weeds, unhealthy trees, or hazards created by degrading infrastructure. This liability will need to be addressed by ensuring there is a robust maintenance plan in place and a responsible party that can be held accountable by residents.

Chemical Spraying

The Link Pathway will pass through active agricultural zones, past irrigated fields where pesticides, insecticides, herbicides, fungicides, fertilizers, and other chemicals are routinely used. There is a growing body of evidence that human exposure to various agricultural chemical applications can have adverse health impacts. A 2017 publication from Penn State does a good job of summarizing the range of applications and possible health impacts. The list is as long as the list of possible chemical applications and the authors conclude by stating:

"All pesticides have the potential to be harmful to humans, animals, other living organisms, and the environment if used incorrectly. The key to reducing health hazards when using pesticides is to always limit your exposure by wearing PPE and use a low-toxicity pesticide when available" (Lorenz).

Penn State also offers recommendations on how to mitigate these risks, advising that the basic formula for hazard is the toxicity of the specific chemical x the degree of exposure to that chemical. The standard mitigations are to reduce exposure and/or wear recommended personal protective equipment (Lorenz).

In the case of personal use of the pathway through agricultural zones, the mandate to impose PPE is clearly impractical, therefore reducing exposure will be the key factor informing recommendations at the

end of this document. We should note that the complete elimination of exposure is not practical and the realities of life in rural Alberta where a low level of exposure to agricultural chemical applications is shared by all members of society (particularly those who live in the country) is a simple fact of life. Reasonable goals should be to reduce exposure but to not be deterred by the impossible standard of complete elimination of exposure.



Irrigation Overspray

Irrigation overspray involves field pivots spraying further than intended and inadvertently coating the surfaces that they are not intended to. Overspray can occur from a variety of mechanical, system, or environmental reasons and does not necessarily involve error on the part of the farm operator.

In our opinion, irrigation water should not be considered a hazard, but simply an environmental factor pathway users should be educated on and cognizant of.

Stakeholder Abandonment

The typical apparatus for land access for the Link Pathway is an easement agreement with the property owner, and therefore a natural risk is the abandonment of commitment by the landowner to honor the easement.

Edwards Land, the agents acting on behalf of the Pathway, have advised that in such an event the landowner would have to file an application with an arbitrator under the *Arbitration Act* leading to the review by an independent third party arbitrator of the issues involved. In the opinion of Edwards Land, it is highly unlikely that public infrastructure would be removed from a parcel of land for which there was a legal easement due to a landowner's change of heart. In the event of a direct conflict between a landowner during development, the arbitration may result in a recommendation to reroute or re-site either the Pathway or the landowner's development components. Furthermore, the easement agreement

in use by the Link Pathway binds the infrastructure to the land itself such that the agreement survives changes in land ownership.

Neighbour Relations

The project as proposed will route near several private residences - particularly in the Vista Meadows area, where its construction imposes a new physical reality in direct adjacency to properties where this did not previously exist. Naturally, the unknowns of a new reality come with concerns from those neighbours.

While Lethbridge County owns the land through this area and has the legal right to develop it, it behooves all parties to be good neighbours and seek to go above and beyond to listen to, and address the concerns of those landowners, and reflect their concerns meaningfully in project design, even at increase expense to the Link Pathway.

This liability has informed our engagement of all of the private landowners in the Vista Meadows area and is expanded on thoroughly in the section below, yielding specific recommendations in the final section.

Vandalism

The addition of any built amenity will bring up concerns about vandalism both to the new feature as well as to adjacent property owners. Trails that are located near private property should take this increased risk into consideration. We have undertaken extensive research and review of past and existing stakeholder concerns and equipped ourselves with the tools and resources available to make sound recommendations. There are many mitigation tools available to reduce the likelihood of vandalism. Visual separation of the trail from private property in the form of vegetation or fencing is an effective mitigation measure. It should be restated that although there is an increased risk of vandalism - the actual incidents of where this has occurred are still very low. We will turn to look at comparable projects in the next section to expand on this claim.



Comparable Projects and Public Safety

Public Safety Overview (research)

An issue that comes up frequently when new trails are proposed are concerns about increased incidents of crime. After investigating this issue thoroughly, the overwhelming evidence from studies spanning hundreds of trails and from local enforcement data is that **trails are safe**. They do not pose a risk of increased crime to adjacent landowners or to users of a trail themselves. In fact, in several locales, **the rate of crime decreased**.

The trends evident in the literature are:

- Every major study of trails confirms that crime does not increase with the building of a new trail. This includes all studies which include input from local homeowners, law enforcement officers, real estate professionals and trail managers.
- After the trails are built, adjacent residents of properties and police agree that new trails do not increase crime for them and become enjoyable amenities.
- There are many positive testimonials from law enforcement officers regarding trails. Typically, they state that trail users watch out for each other and report crime as they see it occur, thus helping law enforcement to do its job.
- There is no supporting evidence that trails have led to increased homeowner crime (Shearin, 2018).

It is important to note that much of the research in this area has been done in the US, so to validate for a Canadian and more specifically - a rural Albertan perspective – PWC has undertaken lengthy research to either validate or refute the claims made above. Below are the testimonies we have received. All statements have been provided with the express consent of the individual.

“Unaware of any calls for issues related to incidents in the trail area” – Randy Peel, Police Information Manager. Medicine Hat Police

“Unaware of any calls for issues related to incidents in the trail area” and “No increase in crime due to the presence of trails”

- Sgt. Michael Corty, Acting Detachment Commander, Redcliff RCMP

“Decrease in crime in the area”

- Corporal Trepanier, Chestermere RCMP

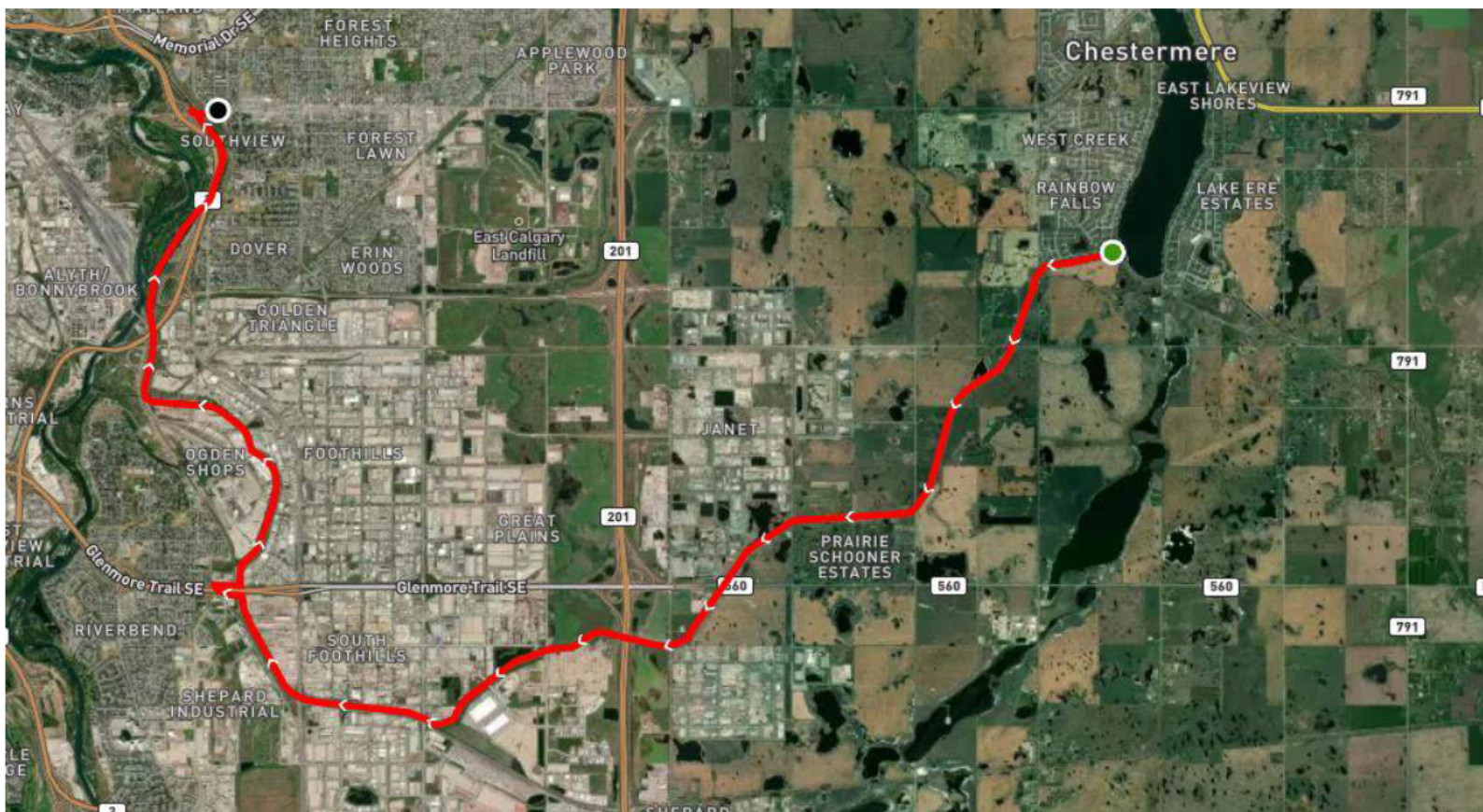
PWC has also spoken with the Kimberley RCMP detachment and although no formal statement was available, their experience was similar. **The overwhelming conclusion of both research and police officers is that rural bike trails do not increase crime. For reference, we’ve provided detailed information and maps below on the trails referred to in the RCMP interviews above.**



Western Headworks Canal Pathway

25.3 km point to point paved pathway connecting the City of Calgary to the City of Chestermere via Rocky View County.

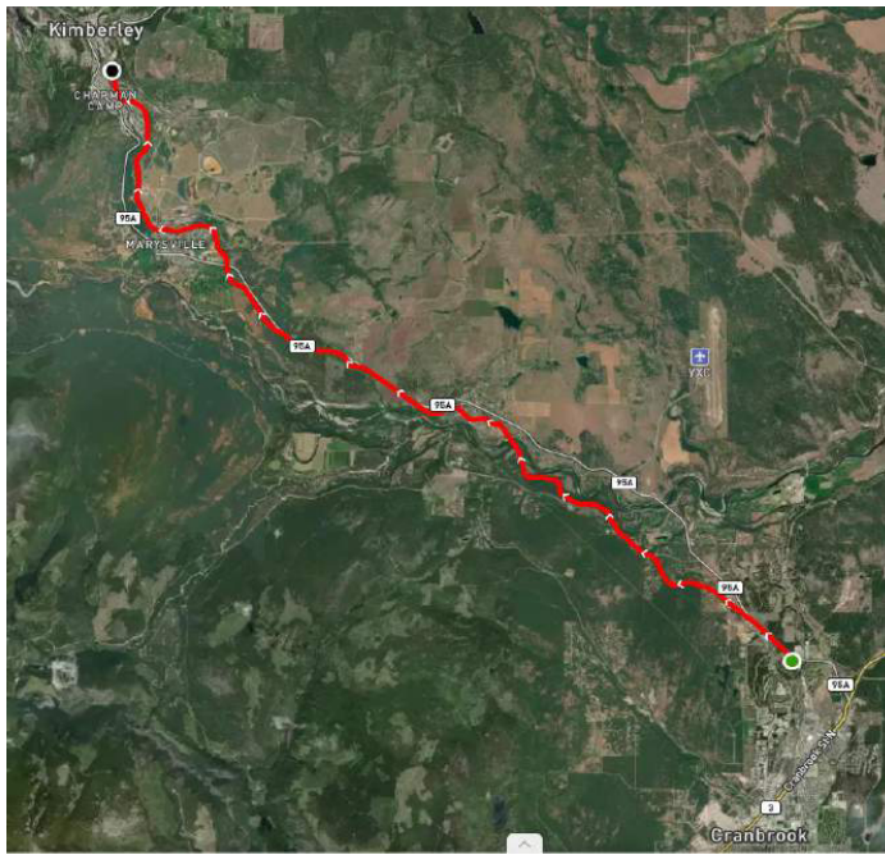
This pathway has a larger urban element than the LINK Pathway however, many of the components are the same - most notably the proximity to rural residential properties and the use of irrigation district infrastructure. The Western Headworks Canal pathway is owned and operated by Alberta Environment and Parks - outside of structural maintenance, the City of Calgary, Rocky View County, and the City of Chestermere have responsibility for weed control, grass cutting and garbage where the trail passes through their respective areas.



North Star Rails to Trails

26km paved point to point trail connecting the City of Cranbrook to the City of Kimberley via the Regional District of East Kootenay.

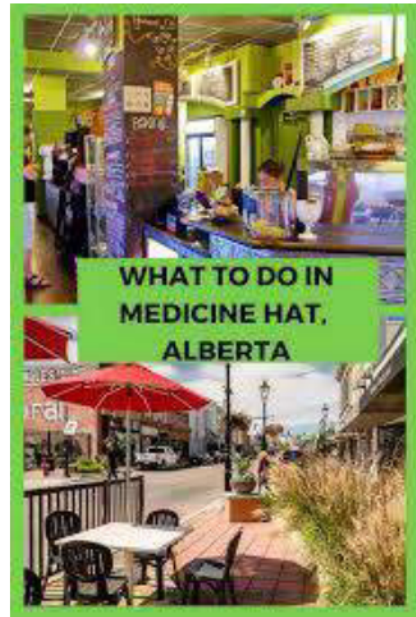
The trail is managed by the North Star Rails to Trails Society and is maintained by both the City of Cranbrook and the City of Kimberley. This pathway almost exclusively runs adjacent to highway 95A so there are no rural residential property owners along the route and exists within the highway right of way.



Mr. Burnside Trail

10.6km out and back trail located between the City of Medicine Hat and the Town of Redcliff.

This is an unpaved, multi-use trail that connects directly into the mountain bike trails in the Town of Redcliff. The trail is maintained by the 670 Mountain Bike Club. This is the least similar in both use and design to the LINK pathway but offers important lessons for our purpose, as it relates to local experience.



Take-aways

Residents and community members impacted by the development of trails have expressed concerns about safety from crime if the proposed trail is built. These are real and valid concerns that must be addressed. Unfortunately, trails are not immune to crime. Incidents happen in almost every kind of environment - bike and walking paths are no exception. However, this is a subject that has been researched extensively by academics, trail proponents, and economic development agencies including PWC. **When specifically looking at crime - the conclusions are unanimous: trail development does not lead to an increase in crime.** Even in instances where there was initial opposition - after the trails are built, adjacent residents of properties and police agree that new trails do not increase crime for them and become enjoyable amenities (Shearin, 2018).



Adjacent Resident Consultation

Routing of the Link Pathway from Coaldale to Lethbridge is possible by making extensive use of Saint Mary's River Irrigation District right-of-ways which offers linear east-west lines owned by a single property owner. An inevitable result of this restriction is that the Link Pathway must pass along the irrigation ditch that runs adjacent to the Vista Meadows residential development and Mustang Acres. The stretch of land that passes through here adjacent to an SMRID drainage ditch is owned by Lethbridge County. New construction of a pathway near private residences changes the landscape and has caused concern from some residents who want to know precisely what will be going where, or who are not enthusiastic about a pathway routing near their properties. In previous years, the Link Pathway Committee had published possible routes and had expanded on plans to construct pathway infrastructure, such as a picnic kiosk, near this location, assuming that the addition of an amenity would be viewed favorably. When negative feedback was received it was evident that proper public consultation was needed. Progressive West Consulting was engaged by the Link Pathway to gather feedback from private residences who would be near the proposed pathway and to share this feedback with pathway stakeholders and with Lethbridge County to be used in further development of the pathway concept and conversations with the aim of being a good neighbour.

In addition to this, Lethbridge County sought advice from their lawyers on the use and development of the stretch of land on which the pathway is proposed to be installed through this area. According to a legal opinion by North & Company LLP dated August 17 solicited by Lethbridge County administration, the question was asked:

"Does Lethbridge County have the ability to allow the creation of a public pathway for non-motorized vehicles on its PLU running behind the Vista Meadows Subdivision?"

The opinion of North & Company found that Lethbridge County is certainly within their rights to construct a public pathway for pedestrians and non-motorized vehicles. However, they also found that the easement does not have any provisions relating to construction access or disturbance and that Lethbridge County should seek the Vista Meadows Homeowners' Association permission to conduct construction activities on any lots that Lethbridge County does NOT own, and that the homeowners association may request Lethbridge County enter into an agreement to ensure the clean-up of any construction debris (Kerry, 2020)

However, in our opinion legal right is not enough and sincere consultation with the intent of using that consultation to address specific concerns within project development and design - even at increased cost to the project - is best practice.

Approach

Because of the multiple outcomes that Progressive West Consulting is responsible for with the Link Pathway, we secured the services of a third-party subcontractor to conduct the actual interviews. Karla Pynch, a local realtor, was tasked with trying to discuss the project with every private landowner in the Vista Meadows and Mustang Acres developments to record their concerns, suggestions, and level of support for the project.

Between July and August 2021, Mrs. Pynch left a document at every door in the area requesting a conversation and made repeated returns to the developments to talk to as many folks as she could. After two months of efforts, it was her opinion that she had talked to everyone who was interested in talking in the area and she concluded her efforts and submitted her report.

Mrs. Pynch’s approach was to communicate that she was a third-party subcontractor hired to listen and record the opinions and thoughts of local residents on the project and report that feedback without alteration to the Link Pathway. Karla recorded notes on the conversations as they occurred, then at the end of the conversation she showed the notes to the interviewee and asked them to confirm if the notes accurately reflected their position and views. Only once the interviewee was satisfied with the record did she close the file on that conversation. The outcomes of the conversations are listed in the table below in detail.

Please note: Progressive West Consulting has redacted the addresses and names of the individual conversations, replacing specific home addresses with a general description of where the home is located. Other clearly and specifically identifying comments have been redacted as well. Progressive West Consulting retains the identifiers securely in our database. This is to protect backlash against any individual by any other individual.

Findings

Note included in submission from Karla Pynch:

“Consultations with residents, whose properties are adjacent to proposed routes of the Cor Van Raay Link Pathway, were completed during the months of July and August, 2021 by Karla Pynch. Each resident was visited in person by Karla; they were asked to provide their opinions and concerns about the pathway. They were then asked if they had any solutions or requests that would make placement of the pathway more enjoyable and/or tolerable if it were to abut their property. If no one answered the door, a flyer was left, inviting them to contact Karla by phone or email, to provide input or request an appointment for an in-person meeting. Please find the input gathered in the chart below.”

Address	Date 2021	Name	Level of Support	Concerns & Suggestions
Area Acreage	July 15	██████████		Requested I speak to ██████████ first
Area Business	July 22 August 3 August 16	Left message with reception ██████████ Met with ██████████ ██████████	Supportive with conditions	Has been in contact with the land agent and provided concerns and condition to them Reviewed acceptable route for pathway – includes donated land, partial use of existing hard surface. More discussion required for short distance between corner and ██████████ research land. Suggest using ditch on west side of road. More viable option would be east side of roadway but may require a carot. Wind fence perhaps?
Vista Meadows				
██████████ ██████████	July 19	██████████	Support	Would like assurance that the maintenance of the path will be better than the current level of maintenance at the lake

█	July 21	█	Uncertain – somewhat negative	Concern with neighbourhood safety, vandalism and security. Perhaps a fence would help.
█	July 21	No answer – left flyer		
█	July 21	█	Support	Good - positive
█	July 21	█	Support	Positive overall but would prefer northside of canal. Concerned with plan for maintenance, cleanliness, and litter, as well as snow removal and weeds. Would not like the lake to be part of the route and no staging area nearby
█	July 21	█	Proponents	Concerned with level of lake maintenance and care. Suggest berm or other sound proofing
█	July 21	No answer – left flyer	Home sold	
█	July 21	No answer – left flyer		
█	July 21	No answer – left flyer		
█	July 21	No answer – left flyer	Positive	Contractor/friend said they were positive. Lady came to the door, seemed positive but said it was an inconvenient time to talk – Invited her to contact me for further discussion at her convenience
█	July 21	█	Uncertain – Not opposed	Prefer it located on Northside of canal. Would like a berm and trees. Has large dogs that will be disruptive if there is a lot of traffic behind his fence.
█	July 21	█	Support	No concerns
█	July 21	█	Like the concept but many concerns	Lake is not a lake – is a storm pond and important water source. Not pleased with County's maintenance of pond and common areas. Who will provide and maintain garbage receptacles? Litter in lake will ruin system for irrigation. Many complaints have been voiced but no response from County. Believes crime will be an issue and again does not think response will be adequate. Fence to meet architectural controls may be okay – not chain-link, a berm would be better. There should be more transparency on costs, different location options, maintenance plans. Would not like pathway lighting and no stops in area – keep users moving through.
█	July 21	No answer – left flyer		
█	July 21	█	Indifferent	Would like to see better maintenance/cleaning than currently done at lake
█	July 21	No answer – left flyer		
█	July 30	█	Support	
█	July 30	No answer – left flyer		
█	July 30	█ in Drive. No answer – Left Flyer		
█	July 30	█	From Holland – Like Bike paths, might use it but has concerns	Concerned with public access to yards and pollution to water in ditch (not a canal) and lake. What will width of path be? Will ATV's use it? Berms will not be enough protection for backyards, fencing might be better. Who will be responsible for the liability of someone swimming in the lake? Prefers no picnic or stopping area.
█	July 30 August 5	No answer – Left Flyer Meeting requested by █ █ 6:30 pm	Opposed Would be neutral if path was on Northside of Canal	No reason to come through development. Purchased home there for peace and quiet, lifestyle. Unhappy with communication provided by █ regarding receivership of development, litigation with Gibraltar and County takeover of settlement and common grounds in the development. Homeowners do maintenance

				of green areas. Area for path is a utility easement and St Mary's bring in backhoes there for maintenance. Has tried to reach out to the Minister of Environment to discuss his discontent. Is concerned with path user's dogs, security for his property (he is a snowbird), gas line and irrigation line will be interfered with. Does not want a fence but a berm will cause a drainage issue.
█	July 30 August 3	No Answer – Left Flyer Meeting requested by █ █ 1:00 pm	Opposed Would be neutral if path was on Northside of Canal	Was told (by █ if access was given to the lake, path would go on northside of canal. St Mary's is supposed to put in culverts to bury the canal. Vista Meadows will not maintain pathway or adjacent land – County will have to pay to do that. Has sent correspondence to █ and County – no response. Concerned path will be used by ATVs. Thinks a berm would cause flooding -currently experiences backflow into his yard but does not want a fence. DOES NOT WANT ON SOUTHSIDE OF CANAL! Suggest bridge after the last house to the west, with no bridge access to the lake. He says that they have already compromised by agreeing to a pathway on the northside of the canal. Better suggestion would be to run along roadway 20-5 South and the Brown Road West.
█ █ █ █ █	July 30	No answer – Left Flyer		
█ █ █ █	July 30	█	Opposed to Path on Southside!!! Would support and use path on Northside	Zero barrier between path and his yard and home. (My impression was that it would feel strange as a path user to go through their yard) Has small children and is concerned for safety from path users, potential dogs and criminal activity. Would like to see safety analysis for path users. Thinks a fence or barrier would be better but does not want one. Suggestions include safety for kids, no stopping area, berm fence or trees would help. Concerned with barking from neighbors' dogs at passers-by – not a bother currently. Ensure no ability for path users to step off into yards, better if not see through. Stay away from the lake and put path on the North side!!! Then there will be no objection from him. Doesn't trust information provided by █ – too many changes are causing confusion.
Area Business	August 5	Left flyer with staff member		
Mustang Ranch				

█	August 5	█	Negative	<p>Not pleased. Concerned with traffic from jail or treatment centre. Have free range chickens and dogs will cause barking problems. Moved to acreage for privacy, do not want to be on display or scoped out for crime. Husband █ has sent emails detailing opinion. Fence may help but don't want one, thinks that may be negative for pathway user experience as well. Understands the need for bike safety but does not want it in their backyard.</p> <p>First communication he received was in spring 2021, when he also heard about a petition being circulated from the residents of Howe Road. Not happy about pathway on Southside of canal but will proceed with civil litigation if it goes on the Northside. No scenario for support on a route that passes his property but may use pathway if it does not go through any backyards. Is supportive of recreation in the area. Is a █ and says the impact of a pathway cannot be understated as a pathway for criminals. Moved to the country to get away from that and for privacy. Agreed that most users would be fine but that would not make up for the few with bad intentions. Wants to know if an environmental impact assessment has been completed and what effect this will have on taxes and who will cover maintenance costs. A large amount of infrastructure would be required if placed on north side of canal. Many acreage owners have free roaming dogs and other animals that may interfere with the users of the pathway and decrease their enjoyment. Would like to see the results of this consultation and receive information about the process and timelines for further development.</p>
	September 22, 2021	█		
█	August 5	█	Negative	<p>Not in favor of pathway, particularly do not want on North side of canal or on their private access road, already too many people accessing from Broxburn Road which is dangerous for kids and animals. Do not want a midway meeting point or a picnic area near their homes.</p>
█	August 5	█	Uncertain	<p>Would enjoy having the pathway but are concerned it will cause their taxes to increase and about the maintenance cost. It would cost more to build on the north side and think care should be taken to be most cost effective. Are not concerned by the staging area.</p>
█	August 5	█	Supportive	<p>Prefer North side of canal – would like access but recommends putting pathway lower – stepped down to be closer to the level of the ditch. Say Jail Road is dangerous for cyclists and a safer alternative is necessary. More trees would be better between pathway and houses to provide a barrier.</p>
█	August 5	Left flyer – Returned for in person visit August 20 █	Supportive if on Southside	<p>Concerned with disrupting wildlife and excessive lighting. Bank is steep and their property butts right up to the bank of the canal and is intensively landscaped right to the bank and does not think there is enough room to terrace down closer to the canal. Concerned with dogs too close to pedestrians, would need a large fence. Also, the overflow stream may flood if the path is lowered.</p>

Take-aways

32 properties were approached by Mrs. Pynch. No response was received from 10 of the properties. of the remaining twenty-two 5 property owners were not supportive of the project (some with conditions). 12 were outright supportive, and an additional 5 were uncertain or indifferent.

Themes that emerged from the conversation are the following:

1. Vista Meadows area residents are concerned that any pathway development be properly maintained and kept in a visually appealing state of repair. County maintenance at the nearby storm pond has not inspired confidence.
2. Several respondents have indicated that a picnic kiosk in the area would not be welcome.
3. Privacy and security from directly adjacent properties is a repeated concern.
4. Free-roaming dogs interfering with pathway users and thus causing negative backlash on dog owners is a concern.
5. Motorized vehicles are a concern.

Recommendations from Research and Consultations

Health and Safety

1. If possible, secure a donation of bicycles to be gifted to the Fresh Start Treatment Centre to encourage their use of the pathway for patients to increase health outcomes.
2. Position highly visible signs at each end of the pathway and at key midpoints advising pathway users to avoid use of pathway if field spraying appears to be occurring. Consider including an interpretive board that educates users on chemical uses in agriculture and how to identify if spraying is occurring.
3. Position warning signs for possible irrigation overspray near sections of pathway where irrigating occurs.
4. Partner with Lethbridge College to install educational signage about irrigation near their Irrigation Demonstration site adjacent to the pathway.
5. Position signs along the pathway indicating that Lethbridge County is patrolled by the RCMP.
6. Ensure that there is a robust maintenance agreement in place with Lethbridge County to provide for life-cycle care of the project and an authority that can be appealed to by users and neighbours in the event that maintenance is lacking.

Good Neighbour

1. Position clear and highly visible signage acknowledging trial boundaries and that accessing land not a part of the trail network is committing an act of trespass.
2. Ensure that adjacent property owners' concerns are reasonably accommodated related to visual separation of pathway from property, lighting, and other crime mitigation measures.

Vista Meadows Specific Recommendations

1. Ensure that there is a robust commitment from Lethbridge County to provide timely maintenance and care for the pathway through the Vista Meadows area such that the physical surface is maintained in a good condition, weeds and garbage are mitigated and regularly addressed, and associated infrastructure is kept in a good state of repair.
2. Change development plans to not put a picnic kiosk on County land near the Vista Meadows storm-pond and relocate north of Highway 512 to land owned by the Link Pathway.
3. Install privacy fencing on the south side of the Pathway through the Vista Meadows corridor. Offer individual residents a lockable gate through the fence that they can put their own lock on.
4. Consider planting trees along the path through the Vista Meadows area in consultation with individual homeowners regarding their siting preferences if possible.

5. Install a low chain-link fence on the north side of the Link Pathway, separating it from the drainage ditch, to prevent loose dogs from going on the pathway.
6. Do not install pathway lighting through the area.
7. If home-owner irrigation extends beyond their legal land boundaries, offer to have irrigation professionally re-located back within their legal boundaries at Link Pathway expense.
8. Install signs at either end of Vista Meadow section advising that motorized vehicles are not permitted on the pathway.
9. Install posts and chains at either end of the Vista Meadows stretch allowing bike and pedestrian access but effectively shutting off motor vehicle access.



Next Steps

We highly recommend that the Link Pathway Committee seriously considers the recommendations made above in their detailed development of the project and that this report be included in an information submission to Lethbridge County Council in advance of the request for final approval of the project by Council.

Of course, the opinions that matter on a regional project such as this are not limited to only the views and concerns of adjacent property owners. The merits and liabilities of a project have to also consider the views and opinions of the regional population for whom the project would serve as a new asset. Progressive West Consulting has been tasked with soliciting regional feedback on the project from residents of the City of Lethbridge, Lethbridge County, and the Town of Coaldale as soon as a feasible planned route has been finalized. With a viable route for the project all but established, PWC will be pushing out a Phase 2 call for regional input on the project in the coming weeks.

It will also be important to share information from this report with the public by posting it on the Committee's website so that it is publicly available. Several residents of the Vista Meadows area have followed up over the past few months to inquire about the status and outcome of the consultations they engaged in and this information should be available to them.



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