

Dear Mayor Guthrie and Members of Council:

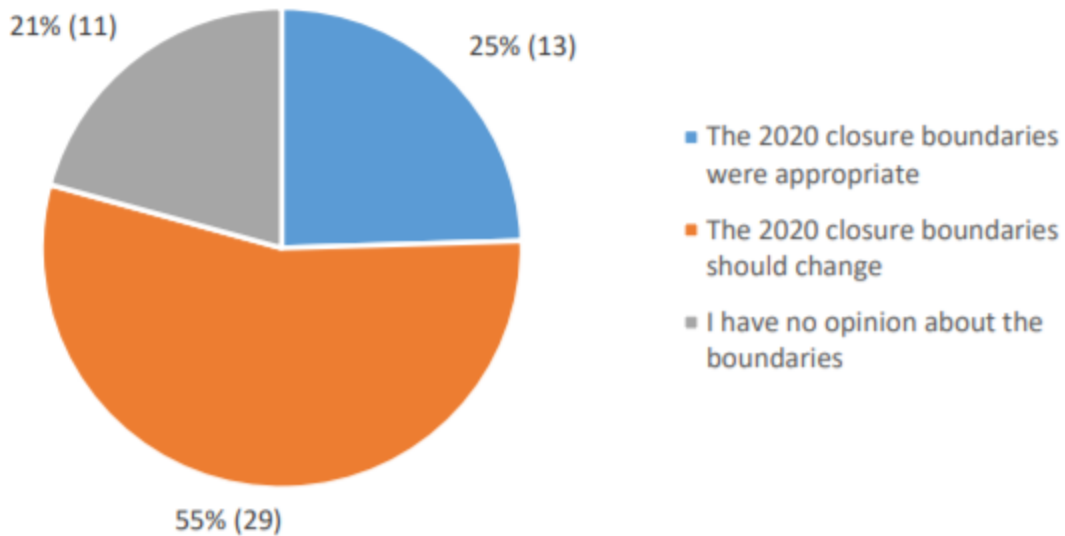
The Guelph Coalition for Active Transportation (GCAT) is a non-profit corporation that seeks to increase the quantity, quality and safety of active transportation in the City of Guelph. In addition to its advocacy, GCAT serves as the collective voice for its members and social media followers now numbering more than a thousand.

In general, GCAT supports the continued implementation of the Seasonal Patio Program. However we wish to offer the following recommendations to Council with respect to road closures:

1. GCAT recommends that Staff be directed to implement the very same road closures as last year's Temporary Patio Program for at least one more year. Our reasons are the following:

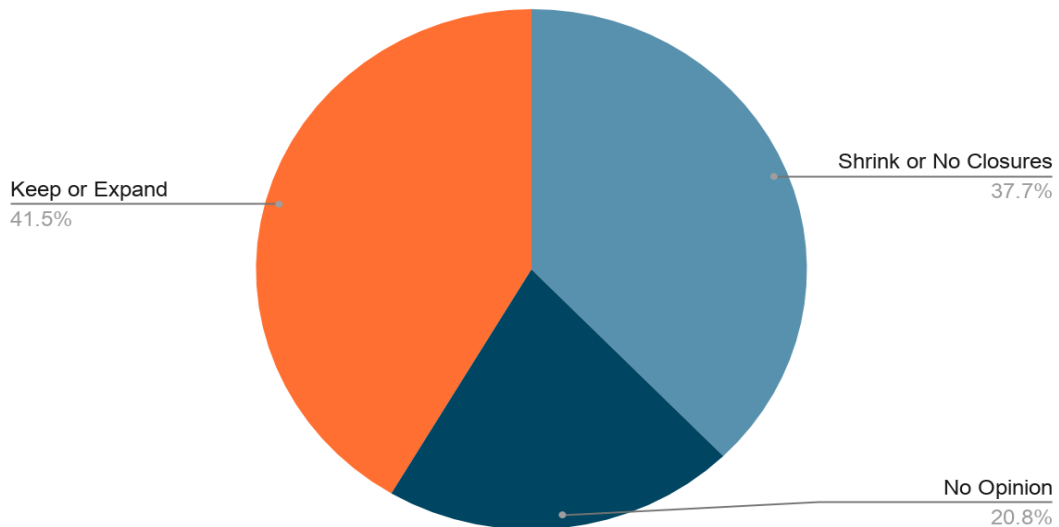
- Aside from the obvious factor of outdoor dining itself, last year's road closures were the defining characteristic of the public space. The novelty, inherent safety, and people-centred atmosphere of the pedestrianized public space were the attraction.
- There is no advantage to either businesses or patrons in allowing car traffic to pass through the Downtown district when perimeter roads offer viable alternatives. Drivers passing through are not patrons of Downtown businesses because they are going somewhere else.
- Permitting traffic to flow through the district does not improve access to it. Routes from throughout the City to the vicinity of the road closures are sufficient for drivers (but not active transportation users) to arrive at this destination without having to drive through the intersection. We acknowledge that attention must be given to diverted traffic through residential areas.
- It is important to recognize that the pandemic itself was the overwhelmingly dominant factor in business revenue and customer count decreases, not road closures as some stakeholders have claimed.
- On this point, GCAT believes that the engagement report has under-represented the opinions of those non-participating businesses who believe the road closure boundaries should be *expanded*. Specifically, the engagement report's pie chart showing non-participant business' responses regarding road closures gives the wrong impression. The City Staff pie chart showing non-participating business' opinions about road closure boundaries is below:

Thoughts on current road closure boundaries



A more careful analysis shows that only 20 of a total of 53 who responded (of 72 who were asked) believed that the boundaries should be shrunk or eliminated. In fact, as was reported, 31% of the non-participating respondents who think the boundaries should change were in favour of *expanding the boundaries*, as is shown in the GCAT pie chart below.

Road Closure Boundaries



GCAT believes that representing the data in this way shows the true level of support for maintaining or expanding the road closure boundaries among non-participating businesses.

- Additionally, GCAT questions the validity of asking business owners on either side of the road closure debate to report their customer feedback. Doing this is to invite second-hand information that has been filtered, amplified and interpreted from a biased position. The responses to this question should be disregarded. *However, the responses obtained first hand from citizens who either attended a patio or did not are vitally important to consider because they reveal overwhelming support for the program.*

GCAT believes that our analysis of the engagement results provides a more compelling argument for adopting Option 2, seasonal road closures with boundaries at least as large as last year's program.

- Some stakeholders are decrying the loss of parking spaces due to the street closures. By definition, the patio program itself decreases the number of parking spaces available to local businesses. Allowing traffic to pass through the district, even if there are limited lanes, does not restore 'lost' parking spaces.
- Although GCAT commends City Staff and many Downtown businesses for their rapid response in implementing last year's program, we also note that throughout its duration there was considerable, but completely understandable uncertainty. Patrons and businesses alike need to have time to adjust to changes to their realities. GCAT believes that businesses of all kinds who are given at least one more year to seize the opportunity of the pedestrianized space due to road closures will do so and will benefit from it as has been seen in study after study around the world.

2. GCAT recommends that active transportation routes into the Seasonal Patio Program from all directions be reviewed and improved.

3. GCAT recommends that in the interests of making the Seasonal Patio Program more appealing for all patrons and more convenient for active transportation users, bicycle parking installations be set up in key locations within the closed streets.

If Council finds it cannot support Option 2 road closures, GCAT hopes that it would choose Option 3, although we wish to emphasize that this is not our preference.

Thank you for your service to the community.

Yours truly,
Mike Darmon, Vice President, GCAT