



Calgary



2023 Fall Focus Groups

Final Report
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Background & methodology

Background

The qualitative research was designed to gather residents' perceptions of safety in Calgary, with an additional focus on both safety on transit and safety in the downtown area of the city.

Methodology

A total of ten (10) focus groups were conducted between October 17th and 25th, 2023 with Calgarians from the four quadrants of the city (N.E., S.E., S.W., N.W.) and downtown (2 groups each). Each session was two hours in length and participants were offered an honorarium of \$100 for their time and participation.

In close collaboration with The City's Corporate Research Team, Ipsos designed a recruitment screening questionnaire to ensure a good mix of gender, age (18+), education, and income. Eight (8) participants were recruited for 7-8 to show for each session. A total of **72 Calgarians participated** in the research (with some "no shows" due to inclement weather.)

Ipsos also worked with The City to develop a moderator's guide of discussion themes.

The focus groups were hosted in-person at a downtown facility (Stone-Olafson). City of Calgary representatives observed the sessions through a one-way mirror in the backroom, as well as remotely (live streamed by the facility).

Please note: the following findings are qualitative in nature. The work is exploratory as a result of the number of participants and the method by which the sample was drawn. The results should be regarded as directional in nature and may not be projected to the larger population without further quantitative research.

Key findings

Calgary is seen to be a ‘great place to live’ by participants.

- This was largely a function of the proximity to nature, diversity in communities and foods, recreational facilities and programming, arts and cultural installations and events, and job opportunities and affordability (comparative to other major Canadian cities). However, safety concerns related to petty crimes, addiction and homelessness and transit were brought up by participants unprompted as caveats.

While Calgary is perceived to be mostly safe, participants emphasized the importance of ‘street smarts,’ taking precautions and personal safety measures.

- Most felt Calgary was safer than other major Canadian cities (e.g., Toronto, Vancouver, Montreal, Winnipeg). However, they reported taking various precautions, including locking doors, carrying whistles or personal alarms, and installing cameras on their property. To further contribute to their sense of safety, Calgarians avoid certain areas of the city, largely due to reputation and history, drug and alcohol-related erratic behavior and an increased presence of homeless people.

Participants felt that certain groups may be less safe than others and perceptions of safety in Calgary may differ based on location.

- The perceived lack of supports for marginalized groups and increase in discrimination and racism led participants to believe that some Calgarians may feel less safe than others. Perceptions of safety in Calgary were also believed to differ based on geographic location (e.g., areas of the city), ethnicity, gender identity and time of year (e.g., due to increased police presence during the Stampede.)

There was a consensus that, overall, crime in Calgary has increased since the pandemic

- This was believed to be due to job loss, the rising cost of living and a “sense of desperation” as people across Calgary are struggling economically. While there was some variation across city quadrants, S.E. and Downtown participants tended to be more unified in their perceptions of increasing crime levels.

Key findings (continued)

Despite the variation in information sources used, most participants expressed concerns about misinformation and bias in news reporting.

- Participants used various sources to get information about crime and safety, ranging from traditional media (e.g., radio, television, newspaper) to social media (e.g., Facebook, Instagram, X) as well as directly from City sources (e.g., CPS, those in political office). Some expressed a desire for more information provided by The City. Many cited the prevalence of bias and fear mongering in the news, as well as unbalanced reporting.

There were high levels of concern regarding safety on transit, largely related to homeless individuals and open drug use.

- Transit usage ranged across participants, however most shared concerns about the increasing use of drugs and the prevalence of homeless individuals using transit cars and bus shelters for protection from the elements. The “free entry” to the train downtown was seen as contributing to these issues. Participants noted City efforts to address safety concerns, including more Peace Officers, cameras and safety systems, and PR and media events.

Many participants do not feel that downtown is safe, due to poor lighting and unpopulated areas, as well as homeless or addicted individuals. However, some enjoy downtown – frequently visiting patios, restaurants, events and parks.

- Participants noted attempts by The City to address safety concerns (e.g., police presence, DOAP Team), although they felt that there were several key issues still needing to be addressed, including: the homeless, mental health and addiction, youth getting into trouble, new immigrants, and local government policies.

Participants recognized that addressing safety concerns would require more than a one-sided approach, considering both prevention and response.

- Suggested solutions included: “more boots on the ground” to deal with situations and make arrests; investment in social services and programs, investing in transit (e.g., cleanliness, referring to other transit models, finishing/building additional train lines), supporting those who are low-income or homeless, addressing affordable housing concerns (e.g., retrofitting buildings, creating co-housing opportunities), and installing more lights, cameras and HELP stations.



Detailed findings

Calgary



Life in Calgary

Calgary - a “great place to live”

Participants were able to identify numerous factors that contributed to Calgary being a ‘great place to live,’ including:

- **Affordability:** the cost of living and housing, especially in comparison to other major cities (e.g., Toronto, Vancouver).
- **Diversity:** multiculturalism in communities, foods, and events
- **Nature:** proximity to the mountains and natural spaces.
- **Green spaces and parks** (e.g., Fish Creek Park, Nose Hill Park, Bowness Park), as well as off-leash dog parks, golf courses and rivers.
- **Recreation:** availability of libraries and recreational programming (especially for families.)
- **International airport:** encourages tourism, and allows Calgarians to easily travel
- **Transportation:** availability of transit and extensive bike paths
- **Arts and culture:** public art and murals (e.g., Wonderland – Big Head sculpture), performing arts and live music.
- **Events:** summer festivals, Stampede, night markets, sporting events, and the affordability of these events for Calgarians.
- **Job opportunities:** specifically in oil and gas industries, and compared to other regions in Canada (e.g., the Maritimes)
- **Cleanliness:** well-maintained, with clean streets and air quality.

Despite the factors that make Calgary a ‘great place to live,’ there were some complaints and caveats that emerged, including: urban sprawl, lack of transit services. Safety concerns emerged unprompted for some, related to an increase of petty crimes, visible addictions and homelessness and safety concerns on transit.



Safety

Compared to other cities

- Several participants acknowledged that “crime is everywhere,” and overall people feel relatively safe in Calgary – mostly during the day or in well-lit areas.
- Calgary was seen as being safer than Vancouver (especially East Hastings), Edmonton, Winnipeg and Toronto.
- The perception of comparative safety is qualified by having lived in another city (i.e., personal experience) vs. just visiting for a week. Tourists may be in safer areas or not privy to what’s happening crime-wise in other parts of the city.
- In comparison to Calgary – Montreal, New York, Toronto and Chicago were seen as having a “vibrancy,” because the cities are well lit, the streets are active, and people are downtown day and night.
- Calgary was instead believed to feel more “small town” with fewer people on the streets and a downtown that “shuts down” early.
- Overall, participants felt that while Calgary is relatively safe, it is less safe than it was a decade ago.



*“It’s better than **Winnipeg**. My car was broken into, **I felt violated. Didn’t feel safe downtown.**” – S.E. participant*

*“In **Montreal**, I didn’t feel safe. There was **no police presence.**” – N.W. participant*

*“**Edmonton** is not safe day or night. You don’t walk around. **There are transient people who are aggressive.**” – N.E. participant*

*“**Calgary feels safe – despite the news.**” – S.W. participant*

*“When a lot of people [are] downtown, you feel safe. **Calgary is a ghost town, and addicts take over like a Zombie Apocalypse.**” – S.W. participant*

*“**Calgarians are naïve compared to other parts of the world. Is it really as bad as you think?**” – Downtown participant*

Taking safety precautions

- Participants felt that there is a need to be ‘street smart’ – specifically, to be aware of their surroundings and avoid people who are high or unpredictable.
- Participants noted the importance of taking precautions, including: locking doors, not leaving things in cars, not going out at night, avoiding alleys, talking on the phone when walking alone, and always having an “exit plan.”
- A few women reported having carried a whistle or personal alarm or walking with their keys between their fingers. One person mentioned the “Life360 App” with friends to track each other.
- Several also noted safety in numbers, wherein Calgarians may feel more at ease in a crowd after a Flames game or a concert, for example.
- Some participants have installed cameras as a deterrent, but this did not tend to prevent crime. They mentioned instances where perpetrators were caught checking car and dwelling doors, entering a garage, stealing an egg chair, taking a camper in the middle of the day, and taking golf clubs from a van. The thief is seldom caught.
- The *Nextdoor App* was used by several to connect with others in their community, alerting neighbours about attempted break-ins, prowlers and theft. Others mentioned reporting incidents to Calgary Police Service (CPS), but not receiving a response from Police.

“Now that I’m older, I don’t run as fast.” – N.W. participant

“I get on the last car [train] at the end, so no one is behind me.” – Downtown participant

Taking safety precautions (continued)

There were some areas of the city that Calgarians tend to avoid, as it makes them feel unsafe. This was due to several factors, including:

Crime history of communities

- Some communities were noted as having a history of crime, particularly Forest Lawn, Bowness, Dover and Marlboro, to name a few.

Poorly lit areas

- Such as parks and areas where The City has dimmed the lights to help eradicate light pollution.

Drug or alcohol-induced behaviour

- Specifically erratic behaviour or altercations downtown and on transit.

Reputation and altercations

- As reported by the media, in the Northeast Calgary, the east side of Calgary and Olympic Plaza.

Increased presence of homeless people

- Downtown, at the river front, and the East Village (i.e., homeless camps, panhandlers, drug paraphernalia on the ground, etc.)
- Although some noted that they were more afraid of reckless youth than the homeless.

“East Village is insane (by Super Store and Drop-in). Post-Covid is a whole other story with gangs of angry people with no resources.” – Downtown participant

“Drug dealers target the Sheldon Chumir.” – S.W. participant

“There are dark spaces in Calgary. They’ve been dimming the lights.” – S.E. participant

“There are groups of people not in their right mind. On 10th, there are drunk people coming out of the bars.” – Downtown participant

Safety for everyone

- There was a perception that discrimination and racism has increased in Calgary since the pandemic; and there is a lack of supports for people who are marginalized.
 - There have been protests and counter-protests at City Hall around “hot bed” issues (e.g., 2SLGBTQIA+rights; Palestinians vs Israelis; “FU Trudeau” protest and “tribal conflicts” in Falconridge resulting in brawls and stabbings). There was also tension and attacks during the pandemic between anti-vaxxers / anti-maskers and those who chose to get a vaccine or wear a mask.
 - When asked whether Calgary was safe for everyone, participants felt that there were certain groups who may be less safe in Calgary than others.
- **Indigenous participants** noted that they don't feel comfortable in many situations. One participant was excluded from events and banned from a centre due to their Indigenous last name. Despite Calgarians broadly supporting Truth and Reconciliation, one participant expressed a desire for the Residential Schools' children's shoe display at City Hall to be “cleaned up.”
 - **2SLGBTQIA+ (particularly transgender) participants** feel at risk, due to personal experiences of blatant homophobia, verbal (and other) attacks, few Queer-accessible spaces, belligerent comments on trains and at school, Pride Parade protests and rallies about the use of pronouns and Drag Queen Storytime at libraries.
 - **Neurodiverse and those with mental health issues** were noted as being discriminated against and not treated appropriately in the Alberta Healthcare System.
 - **Some Racialized participants** experienced (or witnessed) blatant racism and unconscious biases (e.g., being spat at, being called the N-word, comments made about accents), and subtle transgressions. Some said the provincial healthcare system has an unconscious bias to minority groups, and some patients do not receive equal care
 - **The homeless and addicts** were noted as being victimized – not always receiving the care they need as healthcare workers are “sick of dealing with them in ER.”
 - **Northeast communities** are stigmatized owing to the number of visible minorities that live in the quadrant. Some feel they are misrepresented in the media and underserved by The City, compared to other quadrants.

Safety for everyone (continued)

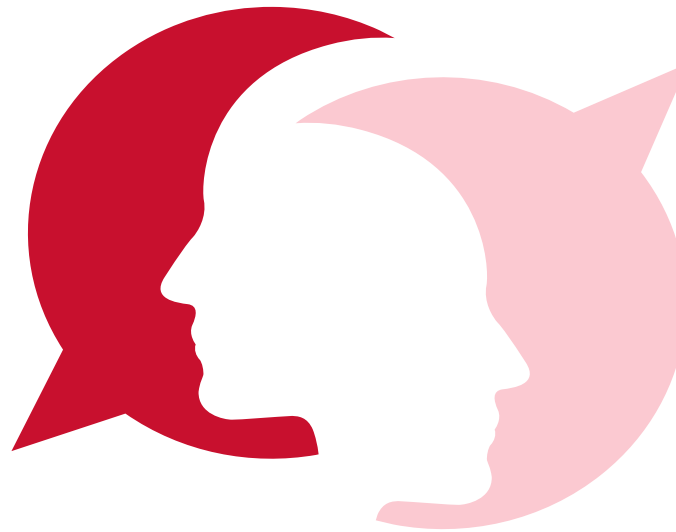
*"I think low income. Safety as in their basic needs aren't being met in a safe way. I'm a social worker, I worked with non-profits for 17 years. **People don't have housing, they don't have food, they can't pay their utility bill. That's safety, if your basic needs aren't met, you're not safe.**"*

– S.E. participant

*"Well, I think sometimes that our governments, cities, take those particular things a little too far. **I don't think that there should be a million pairs of shoes still on the front steps of City Hall. I don't disagree with the whole matter, but I don't think it should be displayed forever in a public space. It's not a public thing. And basically, the government and The City are backing this thing.**"*

– N.E. participant

*"**I think it depends on what's happening in the world**, like when COVID first started, there were targeted attacks on people with Asian backgrounds." – S.We participant*



*"**Neurodiversity**, he [son] was **being discriminated against getting mental health treatment because he was neurodiverse.**"*

– N.W. participant

*"I think that some of the communities, **drag communities and LGBT, I think those communities are struggling right now.** I'm not sure that it's unique to Calgary but I do have a number of friends whose children are trans, and they certainly don't feel like they're as safe as their friends who are not."*

– S.E. participant

*"I work at a restaurant just across from **Olympic Plaza**, and I've seen a couple of incidents with someone called a **Black man the N word**, and then someone else had a **swastika and stuff like that.** And someone else spat at my co-worker who is, I don't know her ethnicity, but she's not white. But not to excuse it, I do think a lot of those people were not in their right minds just to begin with."*

– Downtown participant

Reactions to survey results

Participants were read a statement noting that: “In a recent survey, less than half (47%) of Calgarians feel the city is safe for all residents and visitors”

- Participants had mixed reactions to the percentage, with some who found the number surprising. Many participants felt that this number was low, and Calgary was quite safe, while others felt that it was too high. A handful of participants thought that this number seemed pretty accurate.
- Several questioned the demographics of those sampled, i.e., which area of the city they live in, ethnicity, as well as the time of year when the survey was conducted (as there is more police presence during The Stampede, for example).
- A few also wondered about the wording of the question, i.e., safe for **all** people. As mentioned previously, some marginalized people (i.e., Indigenous Peoples, Black Peoples, People(s) of Colour, Transgender, etc.) feel less safe than others. Therefore, lived experience could also have an impact on perceptions and opinions.



*“Depends on your experience. If marginalized, there’s not as **many options**. **With social disorder, people become more verbal and physical.**” – Downtown participant*

*“I would presume that the poll was taken across a wide range of neighbourhoods, too, to be an average. It’s hard to really assess something like that. **If you live in a particular neighbourhood, you can have a bias towards the perception of safety.**” – S.E. participant*

*“**47% is disappointing – but I’m not surprised.**” – N.W. participant*

*“**We’re inundated with bad news. It influences opinions.**” – S.W. participant*

Levels of crime in communities

- The consensus is that crime in Calgary, overall, has increased since the pandemic. Communities have changed owing to social disorder. Participants believe it is due to job loss, the rising cost of living, and a sense of “desperation” with people “falling on hard times.”
- There is a sense of low morale based on uncertainty and negative news. Others think part of the problem is people trading stolen money or items for drugs; or bored teenagers getting into mischief, and “Millennials doing stuff for TikTok.”

Northeast

- Some living in the N.E. quadrant feel that the incidence of crime has stayed about the same over the past few years. Others feel it has increased, due to thefts and reports of shootings.
- Many living in the N.E. feel safe and believe that their quadrant gets a “bad rap” in the media, feeding negative perceptions.

“People saying N.E. is dangerous is ignorance and closeted racism.” – N.E. participant

Northwest

- Those in the N.W. were split regarding crime rates in their quadrant.
- Those living more inner city (e.g., Kensington) said that they haven’t seen a difference or increase – likely owing to higher traffic.
- Further out, (e.g., Beddington) has had more vandalism, bus shelters smashed in, gang crime, speeding. They feel this is partly due to the calls to de-fund police, not enough CPS officers and no preventative programs.

Levels of crime (continued)

Southeast

- Residents feel that crime has gone up in the SE – mostly petty crime or crimes of opportunity (i.e., breaking into cars or garages). It was noted that some people are just trying to survive by going through the garbage, etc.
- One person claimed to have been attacked by a neighbour. Another had seen security guards at Save on Foods because people resort to stealing when it's a choice between paying rent or providing food for their family.

Southwest

- Perception of crime in the SW, depends on the neighbourhood one lives in.
- However, overall, there has been an up-tick in crime with mentions of cars being ransacked, bikes stolen, teens testing car doors, theft of catalytic converters, bronze plaques stolen for the metal, etc.
- It was also noted that people have become less patient, ruder, and there is more road rage.

Downtown

- Downtowners say that crime has increased and there are more addicts in the core in the past 3-5 years.
- There is open drug use on the pathway, in the park across from “Crack Mac’s” (Circle K), around Sheldon Chumir and Safe Injection Site, encampments on Memorial Drive and 7th Avenue CTrain line (platforms and cars) are “really bad.” Back alleys are active with people who are struggling.
- Folks generally try to avoid the shelter on Macleod Trail, Mustard Seed and Alpha House.
- Some noted that the installation of murals on buildings downtown has reduced graffiti.



Information Sources

Information sources

- Participants get their news and information from several different sources.
- Some participants use traditional media (e.g., CTV, CBC, CBS, Global, City News, PBS, Fox, CNN.) Some read newspapers, online and a few printed (e.g., The Calgary Herald, The Sun, Globe & Mail, National Post). Several said they use multiple sources, to understand all sides and then form their own opinion.
- Others said they do not have cable and tend to stream news or get information from social media, e.g., Facebook groups, TikTok, X (Twitter), Instagram, Reddit, podcasts, “The Sprawl” (local, independent journalism), neighbourhood apps (Nextdoor), FB Neighbourhood Watch and Community Associations and Crack Macs.
- Some listen to the radio – stations include 660 News, 770, 960, CBC, 92.9 (news/traffic) 93.7, 97.7, 103.1.
- A few get flyers in the mail from their MLA or MP or quarterly updates from their councilor, as well as community magazines – sponsored by community associations. A few said they miss the community papers, like Metro, that reported on things happening around the city.
- There were several Calgarians who said that they do not follow or listen to the news because it is so negative, sensationalized and depressing. They rely on spouses and friends to keep them informed.



*“The only thing I use Twitter for is to see **what’s happening in the world or in our city, because it’s fast.** It’ll tell you right away, or Facebook groups that you can get information right away.” – N.W. participant*

*“**Our community association** puts a little blurb in it every month. Like the little thing from the police about **crime statistics in our neighbourhood.**” – S.W. participant*

*“I listen to the radio, yeah, 103.1. I’m a big **Twitter guy and Instagram, there’s Curiosity Calgary, Urban Calgary,** you get all the fun stuff on there” – S.E. participant*

*“I watch the traditional news, I guess it’s CBC Calgary, CTV, maybe the Calgary Herald type of stuff. **I make an effort to get different perspectives, really avoid the whole social media echo chamber type thing.**” – Downtown participant*

Information from The City

- There were some participants who visit The City's website, but more so for specific information vs. news. Several mentioned difficulties navigating the site and locating the information they were looking for. Noting "errors" and dead links, they felt the site needed to be updated.
- Many participants followed Calgary Police Services (CPS) on Twitter and their website, to know what is happening in the city, crime-wise, areas to avoid, road closures, protests, etc. CPS also provides crime stats by neighbourhood, which is considered very helpful. The CPS source is considered trustworthy and unbiased, as the police only report facts without a "journalistic story" or spin.
- Some said they would like to hear more from The City (elected officials, councillors, etc.), i.e., what is property tax being spent on (transparency and accountability). "Did you know?" and reports on what The City has been working on could be communicated more effectively, i.e., the extension of the CTrain to the north.
- A few people follow the mayor or their MPs on Instagram. However, when Calgarians hear from the Mayor or the Chief of Police, they feel things are "whitewashed" (i.e., "well-rehearsed"; "high level fluff") and they are told "we are working on it."
- They don't feel that the new mayor is "present." Several participants said that they would prefer to hear from a Communications staff member or Ambassador for the City to relay news (i.e., non-political).

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"It's not like I specifically go out of my way to go to their website. It's if I'm searching up something in particular and it's recommended, it depends on whether there's a story posted or it's a related topic I'm looking up, then I'd go there." – S.W. participant

"I think CPS is the right person for the job. The CPS to me are the people who have the best information about crime and safety. Because they're the ones responsible for it, it's in their purview to know about it. If they publish something, then it's going to be a lot more trustworthy. But I prefer to go find it rather than having it given to me all the time." – S.E. participant

"I feel like the previous mayor was more vocal and prevalent on social media than our new mayor. I don't know if that's just the different styles of how they're leading. But I used to get a lot more news because I followed our previous mayor and knew where he was going and what he was up to, and what was happening in the city. Now, I don't know what's happening" – N.W. participant

Bias in reporting the news

Some feel that there is a lot of misinformation, sensationalism, unbalanced views, filters, and fearmongering in the news.



- Participants question whether news can ever be unbiased or impartial. There is some trust in news, but believe it also perpetuates generalizations, biases and judgments.
- Calgarians want to know the sources of stories reported. Some feel things are taken out of context or there is a twist or skew to the facts, i.e., “Yellow Journalism,” for ratings or to feed what people already believe, in order to “sell news.”
- Participants noted that the media doesn’t report on communities, and some areas are underrepresented because they do not report all incidences and isolated occurrences get all the attention – i.e., get in the headlines. Some feel “news” is click-bait and creates “artificial hysteria.”

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*“You know, it’s like the way they report the news. It’s like when they report the news in the Southwest, it **sounds like people from the Northeast came to attack people in the south.**” – N.E. participant*

*“**If it bleeds, it leads, juicy stories, sensational.**” – N.W. participant*

*“**It shows the NE as dangerous. It should report the positive stories.**” – S.W. participant*



Transit

Use of Transit

- Many participants said they used to take transit – especially those who work(ed) downtown. Some now work from home (or hybrid work). Many said they would rather drive or take a cab or Uber, than wait for a bus or put themselves in a tenuous position.
- With lack of transit service to all areas in the city (routes, schedules, delays, no CTrain line), some feel their only option is to drive, as it is more efficient. A handful of participants also felt there is a need to get cars off the road for environmental reasons, and the reliance on cars may not reflect well on Calgary.
- There are some folks, however, that do take transit, either daily or a few times a week or month for work and/or school. They feel relatively safe during peak times, when there are a lot of people onboard. Others, however, only use the CTrain for occasional events, such as the Stampede and Flames games.
- A few parents commented that they won't let their kids take transit and one mom said her kids have Apple watches so she can track them. However, one participant noted letting their teen ride transit without safety concerns. Essentially, riders take precautions mentioned earlier, such as being aware of their surroundings, being careful about who sits next to them, or is in the same car. Change cars, or get off, if necessary – and always have an exit plan.
- Some said they would take transit more often, if it was “cleaned up” and they felt safe, as parking downtown is very expensive.



“She's gone alone, she's gone with friends. She took the train from Applewood to downtown to go to the Stampede to meet her friends alone. You've just got to trust them, and we have to take chances. Like, you can be scared but you still have to do it, right? Something might happen, something might not happen, and you can't just assume that it's going to happen because you're being aggressive or something. There's a lot of unprovoked aggression, too, so you've just got to live.” – S.E. participant

Safety on transit

- The prevalence of homeless individuals, as well as the increasing drug use on transit were noted by many Calgarians as contributing to safety concerns.
- The homeless use transit cars and bus shelters for protection from the elements and for warmth. It is assumed drug addicts and drunk people use it for the same reason.
- Many said they have witnessed people drinking openly, shooting up, doing meth, overdosing, passing out or fighting on transit. The unpredictability of someone who is high is where the fear comes from. A few feel the addicts use drugs in the open in case they overdose (then someone can call for help).
- The 7th Avenue stretch (CTrain platforms) and certain stations were cited as having issues of harassment and people who are high or drunk, leading to many not feeling safe. Some stations mentioned include Marlborough, Rundle, Whitehorn, Chinook, Victoria Park, Erlton, Lion's Park, and Sunnyside stations.
- The “free entry” to the train downtown has contributed to these issues, as anyone can hop on or off the train without payment. This costs The City lost revenue – and owing to Calgarians no longer wanting to ride the train (due to safety issues) this contributes to additional loss of revenue.



“It's like a large unsupervised area. Anytime the general public have that much access to warmth and accessibility and there's just no rules or transportation and you don't need a car.” – S.E. participant

“There is crack and cocaine on the CTrain. Open drug use!” – Downtown participant

“It's an awesome train system, but it's grade-level, and you can just walk on downtown. I think in Toronto, it's elevated, it's caged. You have to go through at least a turnstile. And it's policed. But I've never seen that at a grade-level train system with no real blockade system. They're [Calgary Transit] relying on the honour system, and then the police officer. I think this is the only place I've ever seen that.” – S.W. participant

Addressing issues on transit

Participants noticed several attempts by The City to address safety concerns on transit.

- **Peace Officers:** Many had heard of and/or seen more Peace Officers on transit. However, it was noted that they tend to focus on “the wrong things” (e.g., fare checking) and have limited powers or ability to intervene in emergency situations.
- **Cameras and safety systems:** Newer train cars have a safety system installed, so riders can request help if needed. Some noticed more security cameras on platforms as well.
- **PR/Media events:** A few mentioned the PR/Media event of Calgary’s Mayor Gondek riding the CTrain to demonstrate how safe it is. However, she had security guards protecting her, so the message didn’t “land.”

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*“I wonder what that does. Two peace officers to 500 people at a train platform, I don’t see how supportive that really is in the event of an emergency. **Maybe just being a presence there to try to prevent it. But if something was to happen, I’m not sure what they could do to help.**”*

– S.E. participant

*“I think putting CPS, not peace officers [on transit], because they can only go so far. And **I think having police on the CTrain would actually start to change things** versus C Train police.”*

– S.W. participant



Downtown

Safety in Downtown Calgary

- Many participants – particularly those who live outside of the downtown core, do not feel downtown is safe. There are very few people on the streets (other than homeless) – especially at night.
- There are areas that are poorly lit and/or people avoid owing to the population, i.e., many homeless, addicts, and “walking zombies” on Fentanyl who are unpredictable and sometimes dangerous.
- One SW resident, adjacent to downtown, reported that homeless people were camping behind his house and go between houses for shelter.
- Some participants noted that The Calgary Stampede is “an excuse for bad behaviour,” with alcohol consumption, harassment increases.
- Others, however, enjoy downtown with friends and visitors – the patios, Prince’s Island Park, the Beltline, Kensington, Inglewood and Stephen Avenue.



*“I work downtown at a firm. **People come [into office], some sketchy, some dangerous.**” – S.W. participant*

*“**What’s the point of coming downtown? Shops close at 6:00 and parking is terrible.**” – N.E. participant*

*“I work in a store on 4th street. **A guy on cocaine came in and scared staff and customers.**” – S.W. participant*

*“**Going along the bike path, you know, during the day. And there's still people shooting up. Obviously sleeping.**” – Downtown participant*

Addressing safety concerns

Participants noticed several attempts by The City to address safety concerns in downtown Calgary, including:

- Friendly police presence, i.e., more cops walking a beat, or on bikes and horses riding through downtown and the parks this past summer.
- The opening up of the area adjacent to the river (Prince's Island Park) is helping to make people feel safer in that area. Very few participants were aware of the HELP stations installed by the river and in parks, on the walls under bridges, etc. Some of these individuals were unsure of who specifically is on the receiving end of these HELP stations (e.g., CPS), identifying a potential opportunity for education or awareness efforts.
- A few Downtown participants mentioned the Stephen Avenue Safety Hub.
- Calgary's DOAP Team and Bear Claw Patrol are commended for helping people in crisis and taking biohazards off the streets. A couple of participants say they (personally) carry Naloxone kits in case they witness an overdose.

However, several put forth suggestions for The City, including

- Investing in the revitalization of downtown, filling empty spaces with more businesses, art shows, events, etc. Some felt the new Event Centre and new Arena will also bring more vibrancy to the core.
- Prioritizing housing to help get people off the streets and have a safe haven to get the care they need.

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“I did notice more presence of police officers in a friendly way when we were down here this summer, like on horses, on bicycles. They just don’t come across as they’re here to police you, but they’re here as a presence, but a friendly presence. That started a few years ago, the bike police. I used to see the horses too, and the police are very friendly. They want to talk to you and engage with you in a way that’s positive” – N.W. participant

“I sometimes see [help stations] on a pathway where there’s not a lot going on.” – N.E. participant

Key issues to address

Participants identified several key issues related to safety concerns in downtown Calgary, that urgently need to be addressed. These key issues include:

- **The homeless:** not enough shelters, lack of affordable housing/rent, and lack of programs to help them change their circumstances. There are a lot of “new” homeless – people who are well put together, have jobs, but have nowhere to live.
- **New Immigrants / Migrants from other parts of Canada:** bringing people into the city but with not enough infrastructure / adequate support, including housing to meet their needs. There was a successful campaign inviting people from Toronto and elsewhere to move to Alberta, but Calgary was not ready for the influx. A few participants also feel that some immigrants and refugees bring problems from their homelands with them and disparities between religions and cultures continues in Calgary, e.g., immigrant children (Muslim and Christian) throwing rocks at each other.
- **Local government policies:** A few noted that the City of Calgary seemingly “allows” drug use in the streets and on transit, and there is not enough action taken to address the drug issue in the city.
- **Mental health and addictions:** There is still a stigma around mental health and uninformed perceptions about addictions, believing that addicts “choose” their lifestyle. There is a lack of services and barriers to getting the care they need to get clean or access the counselling and psychiatric care to address mental health issues. Participants noted that there is only one detox facility in Calgary with 18 beds, and people get turned away. Some go to ER because they have no other choice.
- **Youth that get into trouble:** A few participants noted that teenagers can “get up to no good” while parents are working. There is some gang activity, where younger kids are employed to do “the dirty work” because they are underage, and therefore there are no consequences to their actions. Some feel that there should be some sort of discipline or “scared straight” initiatives in place.

Suggested solutions

Despite a recognition among most that addressing safety concerns and issues would require a multifaceted, rather than a one-sided approach, there emerged some polarization among participants regarding solutions to these issues – **Focus on Prevention vs. Focus on Response.**

Some were adamant that “more boots on the ground” (CPS vs. Peace Officers) to deal with situations and make arrests is the solution. However, others felt that this is somewhat of a “Bandaid solution,” not addressing the core social issues at play.

Some suggested solutions (from Calgarians) include:

- **Hire more CPS Officers to patrol, have a presence and deal with issues on the ground.** Peace Officers do not have the authority to deal with some situations.
 - **Have CPS at transit stations and riding the train, patrolling downtown** and intervening when there is open drug use or altercations.
 - Having mental health clinicians on the train with an CPS officer is good in theory (according to one participant), however, depending on the situation, they may not be able to intervene and may be putting themselves at risk.
 - **CPS to be more responsive to reports made by Calgarians** of theft or other incidents.
 - **Invest in an App** for the public to report and police to respond to

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“So, an Addiction and Mental Health Clinician with an officer (CPS) on transit. But I think it’s a really bad idea. I think the ability for [a mental health expert] to intervene in the situations that are happening on the trains, it is actually very low, because those people are intoxicated. [They] can’t do things properly and can’t resource them. You’re sending [them] into an unsafe situation with, yes, with an officer, but only one officer, so [the] officer is put in a jeopardized position because they are now looking at [the mental health clinician’s] safety.” – N.W. participant

Suggested solutions (continued)

- **Invest more in social services and programs**, to address mental health and addictions.
 - Provide more supports to those who are struggling.
 - Build a bigger (or more satellite) Rehab Centre(s).
 - Initiatives and programs to keep youth out of trouble.
- **Invest more in transit**, this includes:
 - Ensure stations and platforms are clean and safe, with working elevators
 - Look at other city's transit models (e.g., Toronto, New York, London, Montreal) – particularly systems to only let paying riders onto trains (e.g., “scan in/scan out” system or turnstiles)
 - Finish the Green Line
 - Build a trainline to the airport
 - Consult Seniors, who may no longer be driving, to see what they need



“I worked in public education, if you had students you suspected were being groomed for gang activity, there was a program that would actually work with the city police. They would come out with your school and work with different kids, and it was highly, highly effective.” – N.W. participant

“The only thing I didn't touch on for transit would be the airport. It's definitely outrageous to get to the airport in our own city without driving your own car. I would 100,000% take transit if I could get there.” – S.E. participant

“In Montreal, they have [turnstiles]. So, you have to scan before you can even get on [transit].” – N.W. participant

Suggested solutions (continued)

▪ Address the Housing Crisis and Homeless Calgarians

- **More assistance and support for those who are homeless and/or living below the poverty line**, and struggle with having the necessities, i.e., food, shelter, access to housing, employment, etc.
- **Create more co-housing opportunities** for people to live in a “small village,” where they can support each other in their community, within the city limits. This would mean allowing building permits and infrastructure to support Tiny Homes.
- **Retrofit buildings downtown into affordable housing.**

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*“I agree we need affordable housing, but I also feel like it’s relatively affordable in some other places. So, I think for me, it’s **resource development and the idea of inclusivity in our resource development.**” – N.W. participant*

*“I thought what they were going to do is **add the affordable housing component, so that they could get a step out of homelessness and poverty, and have safe, clean place where they could detox.**” – Downtown participant*

*“Calgary needs to be **building more apartment towers as opposed to multi-million dollar condo towers.** That’s not helping with the distress in the city. Make accommodations that are capable for human beings. I think that is a big deal.” – S.E. participant*

*“**Affordable housing. I like the tiny homes thing. It’s so efficient.** We used to live in this big house out in Savanna, and then we moved the suite attached to my daughter’s [when it] became available, and we snatched it up. Everyone is like, it’s such a blessing, but how do you go from that big house to that little suite? It’s way easier to clean. And to run, right? With the utilities, it’s so expensive.” – N.W. participant*

Suggested solutions (continued)

- **Invest in Public Relations with a City Ambassador to inform Calgarians**
 - PSAs and testimonials from downtown locals, i.e., “Why I love the inner city”
 - Provide stats to counter the negative narrative (about downtown and N.E. quadrant)
 - Bring awareness to a non-emergency number to call, the DOAP team and other supports.
- **Install more cameras, lights and HELP stations downtown.**
 - Have eyes on the street, by installing cameras or drone cops watching live.

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“I remember hearing there's certain lights that you can use...how it reflects up doesn't really do much to the light pollution. So, I wonder if that could be something they could do. It was talked about specifically for astronomers and what they're doing with their equipment and how it's interfered with.” – S.W. participant

“You can always collect a lot of data from footage and [information about] why this happened and what happened. I believe they do that in England.” – N.W. participant

“It's also just narratives, right? Like reporting crime in the Northeast just feeds into what people already believe.” – Downtown participant

“More cameras... so that there's backup if something happens, you know. Like there's people that have been stabbed and jumped downtown, we have nothing.” – S.W. participant



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