

## Report to Civic Works Committee

**To:** Chair and Members Civic Works Committee

**From:** Kelly Scherr, P. Eng., MBA, FEC  
Deputy City Manager, Environment & Infrastructure

**Subject:** Blackfriars Bridge – Long Term Use  
Public Participation Meeting

**Date:** June 13, 2023

## Recommendation

That on the recommendation of the Deputy City Manager, Environment & Infrastructure, the following actions **BE TAKEN** with respect to the future operation of the Blackfriars Bridge:

- (a) the proposed by-law, attached as Appendix A, **BE INTRODUCED** at the Municipal Council meeting to be held on June 25, 2023, for the purpose of amending the Traffic and Parking Bylaw to annually prohibit motor vehicles on the Blackfriars Bridge from May 1 to October 31 beginning in 2024; and,
- (b) the recommendation from the Long Term Use Study as described in the report and associated bylaw **BE SUBMITTED** to the Director of the Environmental Approvals Branch, Ontario Ministry of Environment, Conservation and Parks as required by the previous environmental assessment review.

## Executive Summary

### Purpose

This report provides a review of options and a recommendation for the long-term use of Blackfriars Bridge by pedestrians, cyclists and motorists. A traffic study and a public engagement survey have been undertaken to inform the recommendation related to the future use of the bridge.

### Context

In 2016, the City completed a Class Environmental Assessment (EA) which recommended that Blackfriars Bridge be rehabilitated to provide a one-way eastbound motor vehicle operation, two-directional cycling operation and a pedestrian sidewalk. As part of the EA process, two Part II order requests were submitted to the Ontario Ministry of Environment and Climate Change (MOEEACC), now named the Ministry of Environment, Conservation and Parks (MECP). A decision letter from the MOEEACC in 2017 approved the Environmental Study Report with the following condition:

“that within 5 years of Project completion, the Proponent must submit a report with additional traffic studies to the Director of the Environmental Approvals Branch. The report shall study the traffic patterns of the bridge and shall demonstrate the need for the continued use of the bridge for vehicle traffic. If it is determined through the report that the bridge is no longer required for vehicle traffic within the City’s transportation network, the City shall document this determination in the report and consider converting the Project to a pedestrian and cycling only bridge and acquire any necessary approvals for implementation.”

The bridge rehabilitation project commenced in the fall of 2017 and the bridge was re-opened to public use on December 1, 2018. The requirement for a report within the five years from project completion referenced in the MOEEACC letter correlates to a deadline of December 2023. A submission to MECP communicating Municipal Council’s direction on this matter is planned by that deadline.

In response to pandemic public health considerations, the bridge was temporarily restricted to only walking and cycling in May 2020. This was part of an overall city plan to support physical distancing in public areas of sidewalks, bridges and parks. As the provincial pandemic restrictions were being eased in the fall of 2021, City Council received a petition requesting that the bridge remain closed to vehicle traffic. In November 2021 City Council passed the following resolution (2021-11-16 Resolution 5.4-14-CWC):

“the consideration for Blackfriars Bridge remaining closed to vehicle traffic indefinitely BE REFERRED to a future meeting of the Civic Works Committee in order for the Civic Administration to complete the required usage study as required in the Provincial EA, provide the related report to council, and allow for a more fulsome public engagement with respect to this matter.”

The bridge was reopened to vehicle traffic in November 2021. This report provides a summary of the study and corresponding recommendation for Council consideration.

## **Linkage to the Corporate Strategic Plan**

Municipal Council’s new Strategic Plan identifies “Mobility and Transportation” as a strategic area of focus. This report supports the Strategic Plan by identifying the building of infrastructure that provides safe, integrated, connected, reliable and efficient transportation choices.

## **Analysis**

### **1.0 Background Information**

#### **1.1 Previous Reports Related to this Matter**

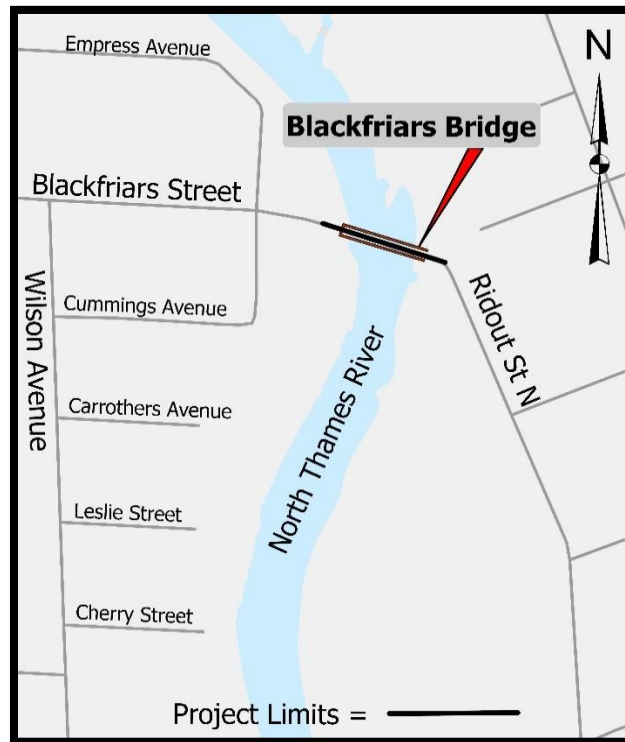
- Council Resolution – November 16, 2021 – Traffic Study and Public engagement
- Civic Works Committee – August 29, 2017 – Contract Award Tender No. 17-72 Blackfriars Bridge Rehabilitation
- Civic Works Committee – June 7, 2017 – Blackfriars Bridge Project Status update
- London Advisory Committee on Heritage (LACH) – May 10, 2017 – Heritage Alteration Permit Application at Blackfriars Bridge (2 Blackfriars Street)
- Civic Works Committee – April 25, 2016 – Blackfriars Bridge – Detailed Design & Tendering Appointment of Consulting Engineer
- Civic Works Committee – February 2, 2016 – Blackfriars Bridge - Environmental Study Report
- Civic Works Committee – May 26, 2014 – Appointment of Consulting Engineers, Blackfriars Bridge Environmental Assessment

### **2.0 Discussion and Considerations**

#### **2.1 History**

Blackfriars Bridge spans the north branch of the Thames River, connecting Blackfriars Street to Ridout Street North as shown in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1. Bridge Location

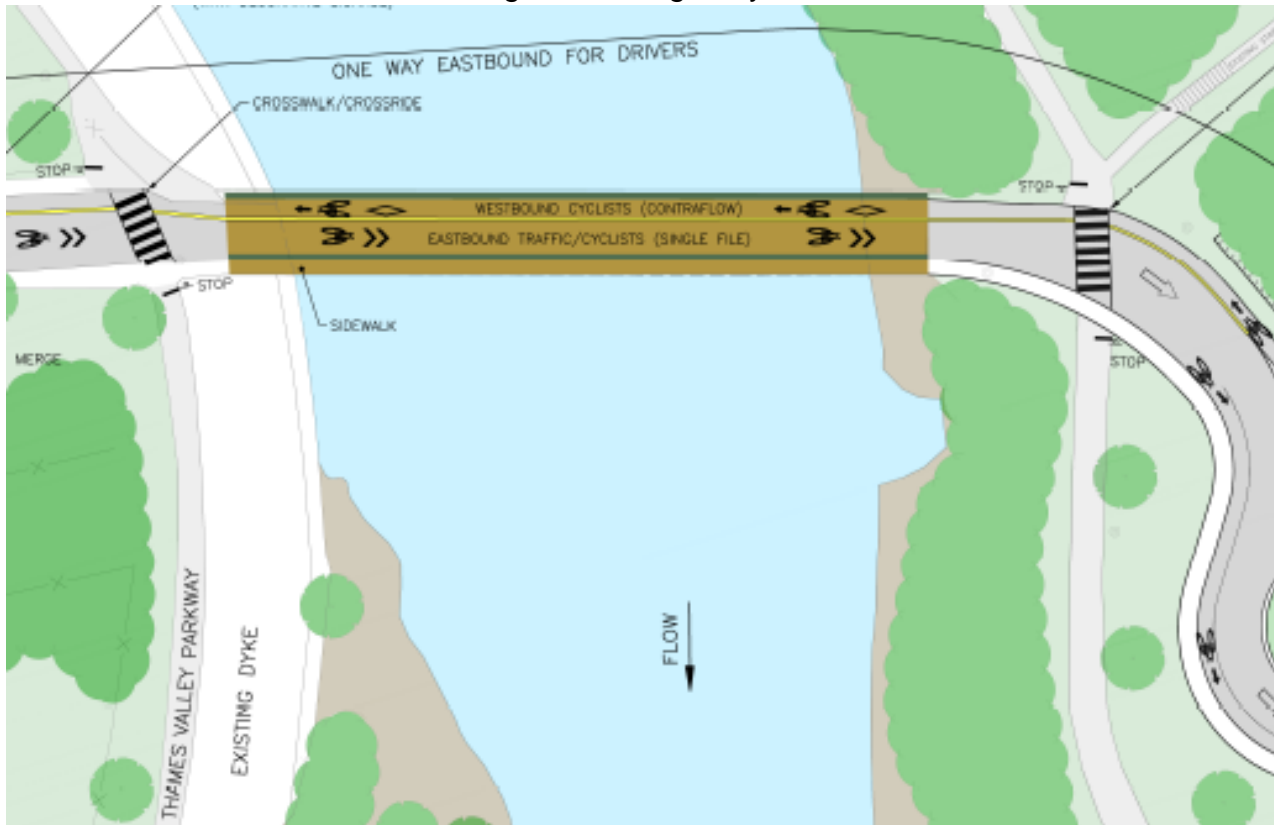


This is the third distinct bridge in this location, providing travel over the Thames River since 1831. The first and second structures, built in 1831 and 1851, were destroyed by flooding in 1851 and 1875, respectively. Blackfriars Bridge, originally constructed in 1875, has been a landmark within the City of London for more than 145 years. Until its most recent rehabilitation, which was completed in 2018, the bridge allowed for vehicle travel in both east and west bound directions with approximately 5,500 vehicles per day using this bridge to cross the river. The bridge was individually designated under Part IV of the Ontario Heritage Act in 1992 by By-law No. L.S.P.-3140-106, as well as being designated under Part V of the Ontario Heritage Act in both the Blackfriars/Petersville Heritage Conservation District and the Downtown Heritage Conservation District.

Due to deteriorating bridge condition and as a matter of public safety, the bridge was closed to all users on August 20, 2013. A report to the Civic Works Committee on September 9, 2013 provided some recommendations for interim repairs and that the bridge be temporarily closed to vehicle usage, while an EA was completed to determine the future for this structure. The conversion of the bridge to pedestrian-only use required the installation of chain link fencing to reduce the area that pedestrians could access due to bridge loading constraints.

The EA was initiated in July 2014, and followed the Municipal Class Schedule 'C' process. The Notice of Completion for the EA was issued on February 25, 2016 recommending that the bridge be rehabilitated maintaining its core uses. With consideration of the public consultation combined with recommendations from a risk assessment, the bridge would be converted from a dual direction vehicle bridge to eastbound-only for motor vehicles. Westbound motor vehicle usage would be prohibited, but a westbound cycle lane would be incorporated into the design as shown in Figure 2 below.

Figure 2. Bridge Layout



City Council accepted this recommendation on Feb. 17, 2016, and the EA public review commenced. During the 30-day public review period two Part II Orders were received by the MOEEACC. In April 2017, MOEEACC issued their decision on the Part II Order Requests, and authorized the City to proceed with the project, subject to a condition of studying traffic patterns and use.

A contract for the rehabilitation of Blackfriars Bridge was awarded in Fall 2017 at which time the bridge was closed to all users. The rehabilitated bridge was subsequently reopened to all users on December 1st, 2018 with the configuration shown in the EA. The rehabilitation restored the bridge to good condition and it can continue to serve Londoners for future generations.

In March 2020, the Province declared restrictions in response to the Coronavirus Pandemic. In May 2020, driving of motor vehicles on the bridge was temporarily prohibited based on its significance as a walking route, the narrow and constrained sidewalk, and the desire to provide space to support pandemic-related physical distancing. This closure remained in place until November 2021.

In the Fall 2021, when pandemic restrictions were being eased, City Council received a petition requesting that the Blackfriars Bridge remain as a pedestrian/cyclist-only bridge on a permanent basis. Council passed a resolution that this decision be deferred to a future CWC meeting, following the completion of the required traffic usage study, and that as part of this study, public engagement be sought. To meet provincial requirements, the usage study is to be completed and submitted to MECP by December 2023.

## 2.2 Discussion

A traffic study and a comprehensive community survey have been completed to inform decisions related to the future use of the bridge. The reports for the traffic study and community survey can be found at the project website <https://getinvolved.london.ca/blackfriarsbridge>.

### Traffic Study

Dillon Consulting was retained to complete a traffic study which included a review of information in the area from 2013 before the bridge closure and after rehabilitation.

The findings from the Traffic Study indicate:

- Daily volumes of motor vehicle and active transportation (walking and cycling) on the bridge are currently similar. Current car volumes of 1,000 on a typical day are much lower than in 2013 when they were approximately 5,500.
- The lower car volumes may be due in part to driver route selection associated with the change to one-way traffic configuration for vehicles and also recent Covid-related traffic pattern changes (lower number of work trips into downtown).
- Modelling closing Blackfriars Bridge to all traffic and reallocating the current traffic volumes to the Oxford Street East and Riverside Drive river crossings predicts minimal traffic impacts on those structures.
- The bridge and adjoining Thames Valley Parkway (TVP) are used extensively by cyclists and pedestrians. Bridge counts performed on a weekday in September, 2022 indicate almost as many walkers and cyclists as motor vehicles. The count measured 471 pedestrian trips across the bridge sidewalk in 8 hours, which translates to nearly 800 pedestrian trips in a typical 24-hour period. Cycling counts suggest 140 bicycle trips across the bridge daily. Pedestrian activity on the TVP was similar to the bridge proper and cycling activity slightly higher.
- A review of the collision information near the bridge did not identify any concerns. There have been no reported collisions since the bridge was re-opened to traffic in late 2018.
- The bridge connecting Blackfriars Street and Ridout Street is classified as a Neighbourhood Connector Street. Based on the London Plan, neighbourhood connectors are intended to provide priority for pedestrians and move low to medium volumes of cycle and vehicle movements. The current vehicular volumes are at the low end of the range expected on streets of that classification.
- The bridge has a posted speed limit of 20 km/h.
- The bridge's 3-tonne load limit restricts traffic to light-duty vehicles only.
- The bridge does provide connectivity to downtown for drivers, particularly Blackfriars residents, and a potential alternate route during downtown construction and any unplanned or emergency road closures.

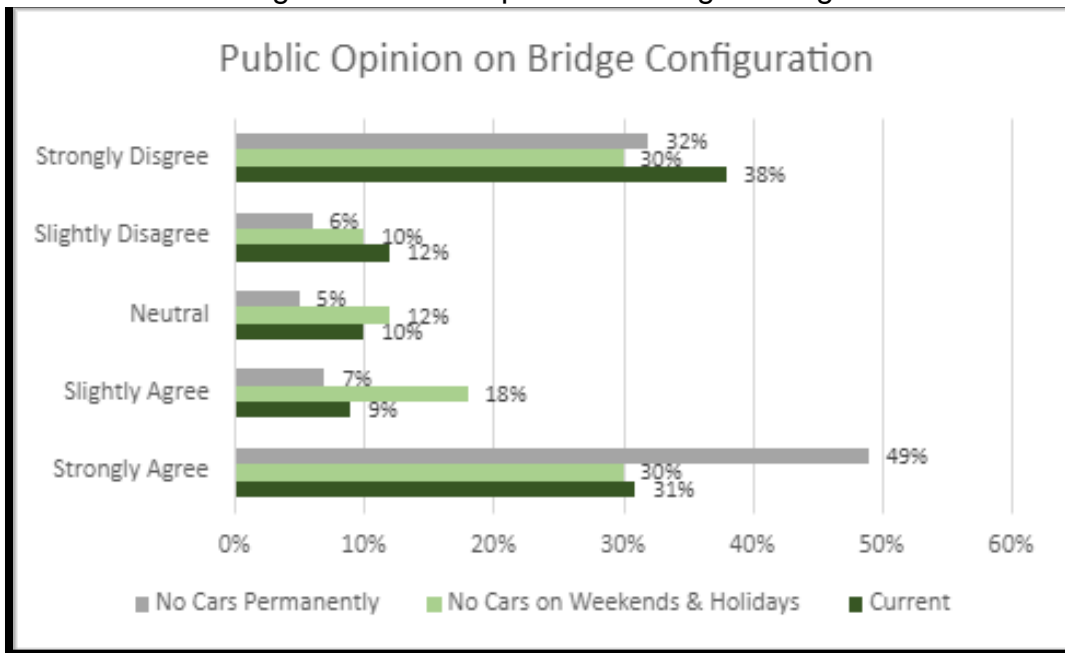
### Public Engagement

Western University's HEAL Lab conducted a comprehensive community survey involving nearly 1,200 respondents who provided their thoughts and perceptions related to bridge use. This survey involved neighbourhood residents, bridge users and included online and intercept surveys of pedestrians and cyclists. Resident feedback was also gathered through the City's Get Involved website.

A summary of the findings of the survey indicates:

- There was good distribution of survey responses from across the city. Nearly 50% of the survey responses are from the neighbourhoods surrounding the bridge.
- The survey feedback regarding the use of the bridge is mixed with strong opinions about preference. As shown in Figure 3 below, 49% of the survey respondents indicated that they strongly agree with closing the bridge to car traffic while 32% strongly disagree.
- Most survey comments were related to discontinuing car traffic on the bridge, but this was followed closely by a desire to maintain car traffic.

Figure 3. Public Opinion on Bridge Configuration



- Of all respondents, 61% identified active travel as their primary travel mode, 20% identified motorized travel as their primary mode, and the balance identified various combinations and other modes.
- The most predominant purpose provided for crossing the bridge was for recreation and leisure at 34% followed by utilitarian trips for errands or appointments. Commuting was identified by 11% of the respondents.
- The survey results also indicate that most users feel safe when crossing the bridge. 28% of the active travel users felt uncomfortable some of the time citing the speed of vehicles as a concern.

### 2.3 Options and Considerations

Blackfriars Bridge serves several functions and is cherished by many Londoners. It serves as one of a few mobility connections across the North Branch of the Thames River and connects Blackfriars/Petersville Neighbourhood to Downtown. The bridge is also an individually designated heritage feature that informs an awareness of London’s history. Blackfriars Bridge is also a recognizable neighbourhood feature that creates identity and establishes a destination and gathering point.

Three options and associated considerations for the future operation of the bridge are described below. The findings of the community survey and technical considerations are both important due to the uniqueness of the bridge.

#### Option 1: Continue with the current bridge configuration

- With car traffic volumes relatively low, the current configuration could be considered to adequately accommodate all users and mobility needs.
- This option provides one-way car access to downtown for commuters, neighbourhood residents and local businesses.
- This option provides a level of roadway network redundancy for drivers to access downtown during construction, unanticipated closures or events.

## **Option 2: Dedicate the bridge to walking and cycling during the warmer months by prohibiting car traffic from May to October annually**

- This option supports active transportation and responds to increased use of the TVP and nearby parks during higher demand months while providing access for all users during the winter and shoulder months.
- This would retain partial roadway network redundancy for drivers to access downtown during unanticipated disruptions.
- Partially aligns with the goals of the Climate Emergency Action Plan (CEAP).
- A gate system, signage and minor ongoing operating resources may be required.
- A communications strategy will be required to provide information related to bridge use throughout the year.

## **Option 3: Dedicate the bridge to walking and cycling year-round by prohibiting cars permanently**

- This option would permanently reduce some vehicular connectivity to downtown for residents and businesses.
- Aligns with the goals of the CEAP.
- Would reduce traffic volumes on adjacent neighbourhood streets.
- Would require operational changes to accommodate snow removal.
- A gate to prevent cars but allow operations may be required.
- To ensure compliance with bridge code requirements, physical measures to limit pedestrian loading on the bridge may need to be considered under unique scenarios.

## **Conclusion**

All three of the options presented in this report are feasible based on the technical work completed to date and can be supported by Civic Administration. Civic Administration are recommending Option 2 based on the information obtained through the consultative and technical process. Option 2, a partial year dedication of the bridge to active mobility, supports healthy lifestyles during times of higher use and considers neighbourhood feedback around easy access to Downtown in the colder months.

With Option 2, the bridge would be dedicated to active transportation during the warmer months of higher active mobility and outdoor recreation. Car traffic would be permitted to use the bridge only from November to April. These months correspond to lower usage of the TVP and adjacent parks. If approved as proposed, this annual configuration is recommended to start in 2024 when the construction-related traffic disruption in and around the Downtown will be significantly reduced and connectivity on other routes improves.

The adoption of Option 2 has minimal impact to the surrounding major road network on Oxford Street and Riverside Drive, but does result in some local limitations for residents and businesses that rely on the bridge for vehicular mobility. It is acknowledged that there will be some impacts for residents in the surrounding neighbourhood who drive needing to take a more circuitous route, however, there are also some benefits associated with lower traffic volumes on connecting streets.

The attached By-law amendment reflects the implementation of Option 2 beginning in 2024 as described above.

Pending Council direction, a response to the Ontario Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks (MECP) will be made as required by the previous EA condition.

**Prepared by:** Garfield Dales, P. Eng., Division Manager  
Transportation Planning and Design

**Submitted by:** Doug MacRae, P. Eng., MPA, Director, Transportation  
and Mobility

**Recommended by:** Kelly Scherr, P. Eng., MBA, FEC, Deputy City Manager,  
Environment and Infrastructure

**Attach:** Appendix A: By-law to amend Traffic and Parking Bylaw (PS-114)

**c:** Shane Maguire, City of London  
Karl Grabowski, City of London  
Jane Fullick, City of London



## APPENDIX A By-law to amend the Traffic and Parking By-law (PS-114)

Bill No.

By-law No. PS-114

A by-law to amend By-law PS-114 entitled, “A by-law to regulate traffic and the parking of motor vehicles in the City of London.”

WHEREAS subsection 10(2) paragraph 7. Of the *Municipal Act, 2001*, S.O. 2001, c.25, as amended, provides that a municipality may pass by-laws to provide any service or thing that the municipality considers necessary or desirable to the public;

AND WHEREAS subsection 5(3) of the *Municipal Act, 2001*, as amended, provides that a municipal power shall be exercised by by-law;

NOW THEREFORE the Municipal Council of The Corporation of the City of London enacts as follows:

### 1. Vehicles Prohibited

Section 35 of the By-law PS-114 is amended **by deleting it in its entirety and replacing it** with the following:

35. (1) No person shall use a bicycle, a motor assisted bicycle, a wheelchair, a motor assisted wheelchair, an Electric Kick-Scooter, a Cargo Power-assisted Bicycle or an animal-drawn vehicle on the highways set out in Column 1 of Schedule 22 of this by-law between the limits set out in Columns 2 and 3.

(2) No person shall operate a vehicle except for a bicycle, a motor assisted bicycle, power-assisted bicycle, a wheelchair, a motor assisted wheelchair, an Electric Kick-Scooter, a Cargo Power-assisted Bicycle, on Blackfriars Street from a point a point 24 m east of Napier Street to Ridout Street N from May 1 to October 31.

2. This by-law comes into effect May 1, 2024.

Josh Morgan  
Mayor

Michael Schulthess  
City Clerk

First Reading – June 25, 2023

Second Reading – June 25, 2023

Third Reading – June 25, 2023