



# Small Towns Big Steps in Active Transport

# Municipal Survey Summary Report



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# Introduction

BC Alliance for Healthy Living (BCAHL) led the ‘Small Towns, Big Steps in Active Transport’ research project in 2020/21 to fill a knowledge gap in promising practices for promoting and supporting active transportation in smaller communities. The research activities included a literature review, the development and application of active transportation indicators to measure progress, qualitative research including interviews and site visits with select communities to develop case studies and a survey.

The survey was intended to give small communities an opportunity to identify and provide insights into the specific barriers and success factors at play in smaller municipalities. The planned outcomes were to improve our understanding of active transportation priorities, activities and challenges among communities with populations between 1,000 and 30,000.

This document summarizes the results from that survey.

Companion documents include the Summary of Literature and Small Towns, Big Steps in Active Transport Final Report that includes findings from the qualitative research and case studies.

# Response statistics

BCAHL sent the survey to 86 small towns (CAO) via email on November 3, 2020. We included communities with a population between 1,000 and 30,000 people, that were not in the Metro Vancouver or Capital Regional Districts. We sent reminders on November 12th and November 25th, and the survey was promoted in the Union of BC Municipalities newsletter (Compass) on November 18th.

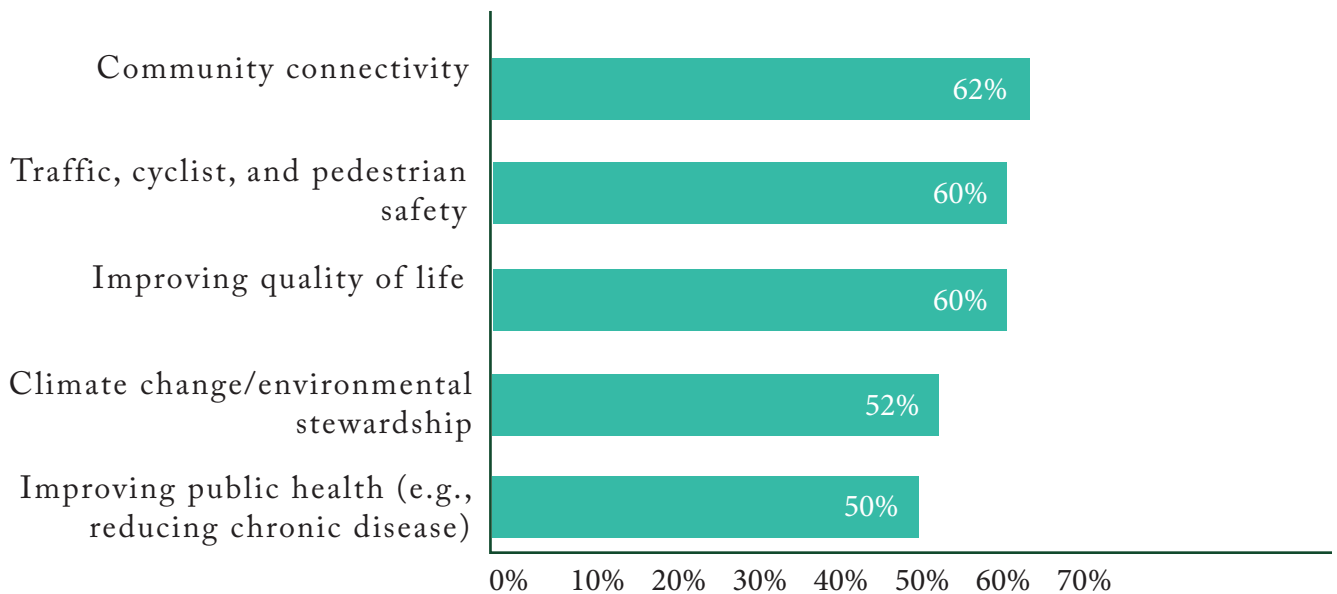
Of the 86 municipalities invited to participate, 56 responded (65% response rate). An additional two municipalities who were not on our original invite list responded (Saltspring Island, and Southern Gulf Islands Electoral Area of the Capital Regional District), for a total of 58 responding communities. The full list of communities responding to the survey is provided in Appendix A.

As requested, the majority of respondents were municipal staff: CAOs made up 38% of the respondent group, 45% were planning staff, 17% were engineering staff, and 9% were parks and recreation staff. Respondents could select more than one answer for the roles they played in the community. One respondent indicated they were a representative of an organization involved in active transportation. Five respondents (9%) selected “other” and specified the following roles/positions: Community Development Coordinator, Economic Development Officer, Local Government Management, Local Government Public Works Staff, and Elected Official.

# Motivators for achieving active transportation improvements

BCAHL asked respondents to select the top five motivators for achieving active transportation improvements in their community. Six options were selected most frequently (Figure 1), with over 50% of respondents selecting each of the six options. The next most frequently chosen option was “increasing the age-friendliness of the community”, selected by 28% of respondents. Subsequently, we asked respondents to select the most important motivator from their top five. Traffic, cyclist and pedestrian safety (24%) and improving quality of life (23%) were most frequently selected as most important.





**Figure 1.** Motivators for active transportation improvements, selected as “top 5” by representatives of small towns in BC.

Half (50%) of survey respondents reported that their community had leadership or a champion acting on active transportation, while half indicated they did not have leadership. Champions came from a variety of roles and organizations in the community:

- Municipal staff (18 responses)
- Council (and council committees) or councilor (7 responses)
- Revelstoke Go by Bike and the Revelstoke Cycling Association
- Local trails organization, unnamed (2 responses)
- Transportation Choices of the Sunshine Coast (TraC) (2 responses)
- Mayor (3 responses)
- Development services department (2 responses)
- Trails Task Force Committee (District of Clearwater).
- CAO
- Non-profit groups such as the Access and Age-friendly Committee and Walk Around Lake Country.
- Local cycling association, unnamed (2 responses).
- Non-profit community group, unnamed (2 responses)
- Community Champions include “Cycling without Age” and Greenways Trail Alliance.
- Retired accessibility advocate.
- Climate Action Task Force Community groups - Whistler Cycling Club, Whistler Off Road Cycling Association

We asked respondents for their opinion on how motivated their community is to increase active transportation, with one representing low motivation and 10 representing high motivation. The average answer was 6.6, with a median answer of 7. Similarly, we asked how motivated the respondent was personally to increase active transportation in their community (1=low motivation, 10=high motivation). The average for individual motivation was 8.4, with 20 respondents indicating their motivation was at 10; the median response was 9. Clearly, survey respondents were highly motivated to increase active transportation in their communities.

# Facilitating factors for active transportation

## Policies

Many respondents (64%) indicated that their municipality had one or more policies that supported active transportation. Many respondents described policies in their Official Community Plan (OCP) or in transportation plans.

## Capacity

Respondents indicated their municipality's capacity, in several areas, to promote active transportation. Over a third of respondents (38%) indicated that their municipality had low or no capacity to work on active transportation. About a quarter of respondents indicated that they had dedicated staff, funding, and/or resources that they could use in promoting active transportation (Figure 2).

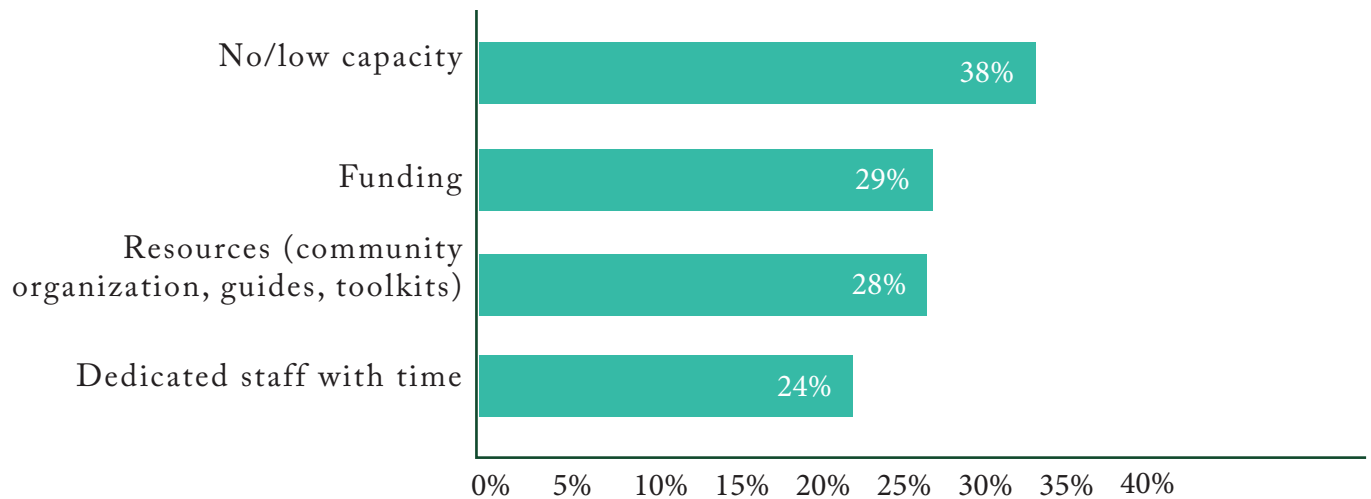


Figure 2. Capacity available to municipalities to work on active transportation.

We asked those who indicated their community had resources like useful guides or toolkits for active transportation, to specify which resources helped smaller towns with active transportation planning or practices. Respondents indicated:

- Bike Sense - BC Cycling Coalition
- Active Transportation BC Climate Action
- Provincial resources
- BC Community Road Safety Tool Kit 8-80 Cities
- BC Active Transportation Guidelines
- Contract planner to help with subdivision design. TCT Foundation, local staff resources
- We work with the existing organizations and neighbouring communities. Currently working with The Shuswap Indian Band on a joint active Transportation plan focusing on connectivity.
- BC AT Infrastructure Design Guide, NACTO Design Guides, TAC Manuals
- UBCM, MOTI, BC Active Transport stakeholder workshops facilitated by Urban Systems Ltd.
- MOTI new Active Transportation Guide, MOTI Cycling Policy, Canadian Guide to Bikeways, NACTO Guides

## Plans

BCAHL asked respondents to indicate whether their municipality had various plans related to active transportation (Figure 3). Respondents most frequently indicated (66%) that their municipality incorporated active transportation into their Official Community Plan (OCP). Less than half of respondents indicated that their municipality had a standalone active transportation plan (43%), age-friendly plan (41%), or a goal/target/plan for emissions reduction that specified active transportation (38%). An additional 22% of respondents indicated that their municipality's active transportation plan was under development. Very few had a universal design or mobility plan for people with disabilities (3%) or no active transportation-related plans (2%).

Those with standalone active transportation plans or active transportation as part of their OCP were in various stages of implementation: 25% of municipalities were at 10% or less implementation, 30% were at 10-25% implementation, 35% were at 26-50% implementation, and just 10% were over 50% implementation.

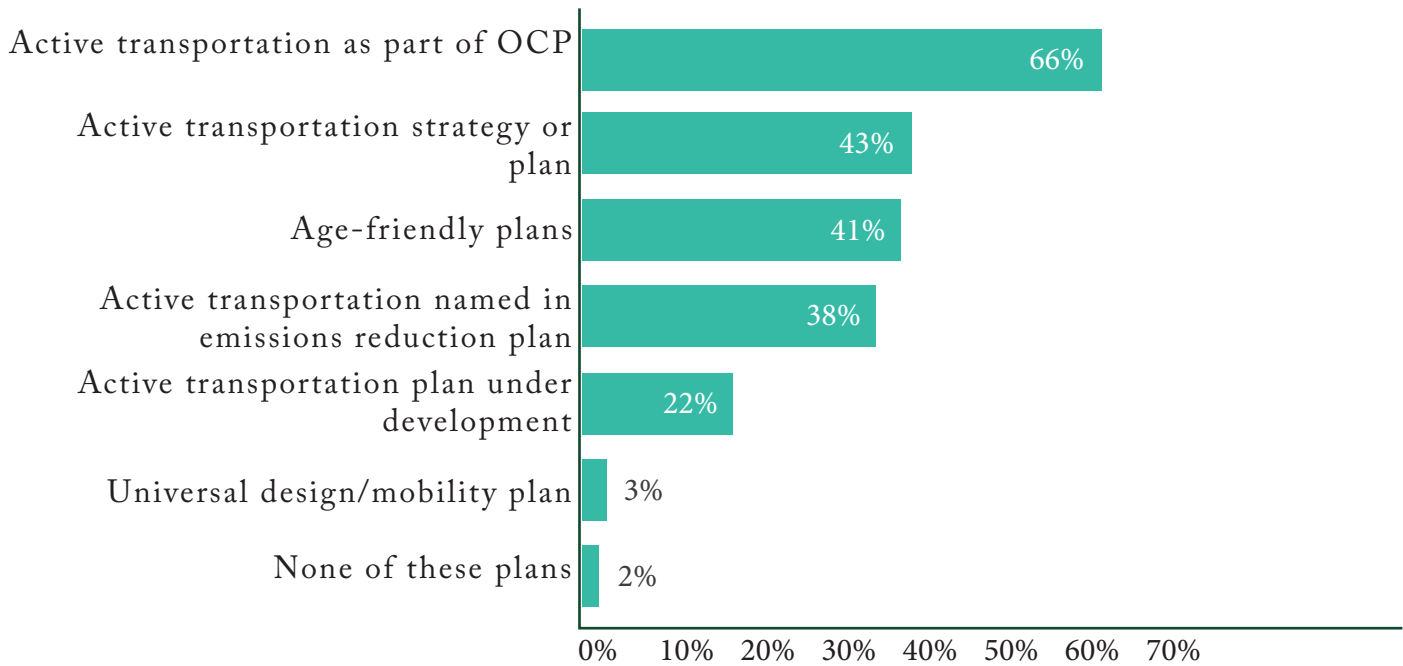


Figure 3. Proportion of municipalities with active transportation-related plans

## Active transportation to school

Many respondents were unsure whether schools in their community had active travel plans (71%). Very few (7%) indicated that most schools had active travel plans (Figure 4).

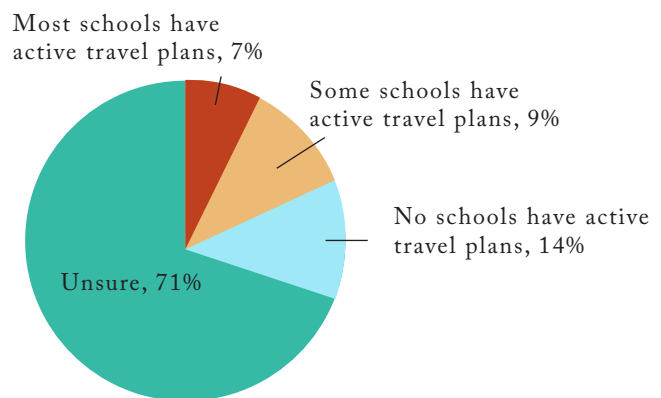


Figure 4. Proportion of survey respondents who reported on school active travel plans in their community.

There were several additional responses regarding school active travel plans:

- This would be a great question for the school district.
- It's part of our active transportation plan. We are currently in communications with a local school as we are upgrading at infrastructure adjacent to the school.
- Our active transportation plan identified Active Safe Routes to School but there is: no support no implementation no champion.
- One of our parks staff have taken the time to work on a trails map and outdoor parks facilities plan.
- It would be desirable to have designated safe active transportation routes from residential areas to schools in our community.
- We have a significant safety concern at a pinch point for our K-grade 7 school students but have no funding to rectify the situation by developing a separated pathway for the students to walk.
- We know there are resources and grant opportunities available - but we have had some difficulty with the school board as they have not identified this as a priority.
- I know that schools are interested in active transportation for students. Our Vancouver Coastal Health surveys show that many students (20-30%) would like to walk/bike to school but few do (less than 5%).
- Important but not a lot of communication with the school district in this regard.
- Would be great if the school districts had enough capacity to be more involved in this. The schools themselves try super hard with their limited resources, but the school district is really hard to engage.
- We have some key pathways to our schools that staff are aware of and cognizant of need to retain as those areas develop.
- Town staff work with the local School District staff to encourage safe pedestrian and cycling routes to all the schools. Several capital infrastructure improvement projects have been completed, including a pedestrian-activated Rapid Flashing Rectangular Beacon at an elementary school crosswalk, with ICBC funding assistance. Staff are working with the project managers for the new elementary school being built to ensure safe student access for all modes of transportation.
- The school active travel group disbanded a few years ago due to funding difficulties.
- The schools and school district in our area do not feel that this is within their prerogative. We have engaged with parent advisory committee for a decade and do have funding in place for safe routes to school, but to date both the school and district are diametrically opposed to engaging the topic.
- Very little community school. Local government coordination in a transportation context.
- The schools all participate in Bike to Work/School week. All of our schools have bike racks but need more. Most of the students have the option to get bused to school. Many parents still drive their children to school. Creating safe (multi-use trail) to schools from neighbourhoods is a municipal priority. The Municipality is also attempting to keep a basic set of trails open (snow-cleared) in the winter for walkers and bikers. There are also free and pay xc ski trails for the northern neighbourhoods to connect to two schools. Hills, snow and ice are issues for winter as well as young children riding to school.



## Existing supportive infrastructure for active transportation

BCAHL asked respondents about supportive infrastructure for active transportation that was already in place in their community (Figure 5). Most commonly, municipalities had some ‘continuous and connected pathways for pedestrians and cyclists’ (57%), ‘places to sit along active transportation routes’ (53%), and ‘paths or trails that connect two or more communities’ (52%). All other supportive infrastructure was much less common, with about a third or less of municipalities indicating that the infrastructure already existed. See the sidebar for specific comments respondents made about their active transportation infrastructure deficits.

Respondents specified several other traffic calming measures, in addition to narrower traffic lanes and residential traffic diversion to reduce traffic speeds and volume. These included:

- Speed bumps (7 responses)
- 30km/hr speed limit
- Four way stops, non continuous street flows
- Reducing the number on lanes and driveways in our street redesign
- Centre boulevards
- Highway pedestrian crossings
- Horizontal deflection
- Raised crosswalks
- Signage and banners at beginning and end of community to increase awareness that vehicles are entering/exiting the community

“We have a few basic painted bike lanes. Other infrastructure is lacking and needs to be improved.”

“[Our community] has many amenities in the community but there is still a lot of work to do to complete the active transportation network. For example, we have lights but not everywhere, we have off-street paths but there are many missing links.”

“None of our pathways allow for cyclists; there are minimal clearly differentiated bike lanes.”

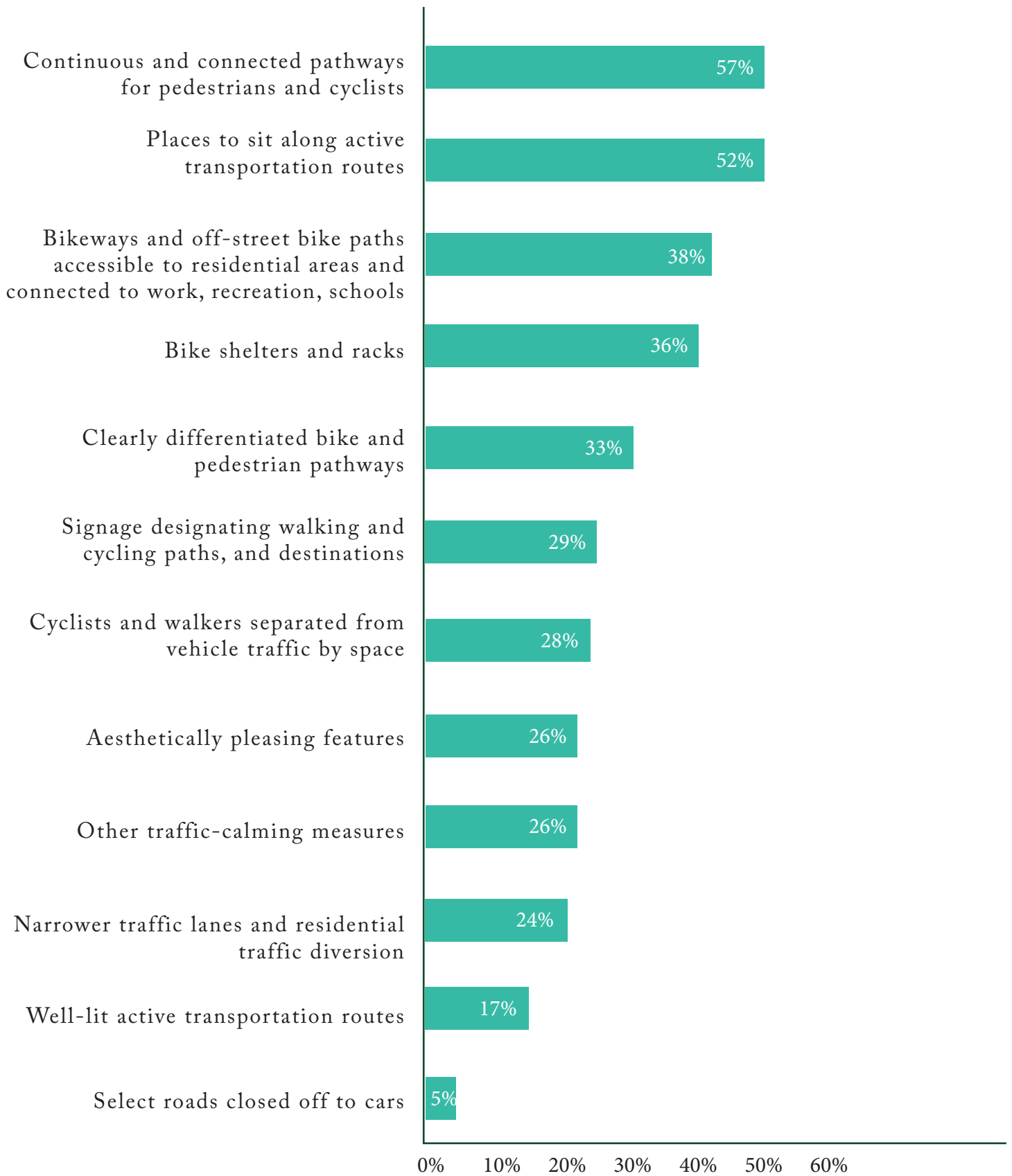


Figure 5. Existing active transportation infrastructure in BC small towns.

**Table 1. Measures of sidewalks, bike lanes, and multi-use paths.**

Infrastructure	# Respondents providing measure	'Don't know' or 'data not available' (# respondents)	Range	Average	Illustrative comments
Pedestrian sidewalks	21	36	0.4 km* – 170 km** *population <1,200 **population >25,000	37.3	“We have only one part of our community with a sidewalk. It is several hundred feet max. Our roads are where people walk generally.”
Separated (protected) bike lanes	10	30	0.3 km – 30+ km	5.8	“Not needed. This is a small community with very wide, quiet roads.”  “We have over 40 km of shared pathway - ... but we do not have separated (protected) bike only lanes.”
Unseparated bike paths/lanes (with lane markings)	14	29	0 km – 54 km	13.3 km	“No bike lanes at all.”  “Everyone can use the roads, sidewalks or park trails. This is a very small community. You can walk or bike to everything in the Village.”  “We have several kilometers; however, there is insufficient right of way space to accommodate both bike lanes and parallel parking, and so there is much opposition to bike lanes, at least from home owners.”
Multiuse paths	27	26	0.3 km -50.8 km	13.6	“I think another category is necessary here and is often missed when discussing active transportation in small towns: trails. I’m not sure if multi use path is the same as trail?”

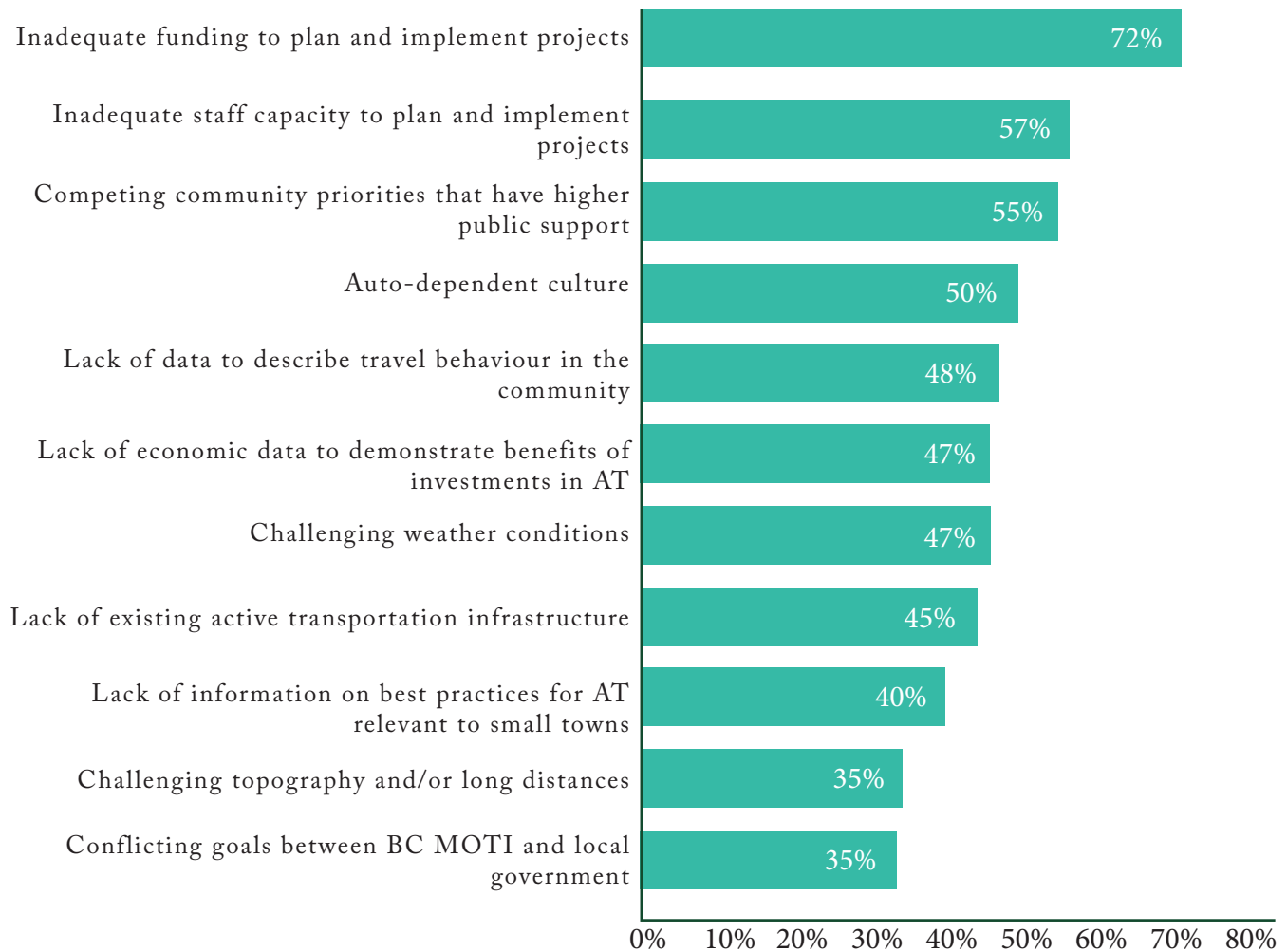
Infrastructure	# Respondents providing measure	'Don't know' or 'data not available' (# respondents)	Range	Average	Illustrative comments
Multiuse paths	27	26	0.3 km -50.8 km	13.6	<p>We separate the categories. We have sidewalks, multi purpose paths (which is usually just a very wide sidewalk), separated bike lanes, road bike lanes and the trails. We have many small trails linking parts of our community and this has been a big part of our active transportation plan. These kilometers are missing from this survey.”</p> <p>“No multi use paths that can safely accommodate bikes or wheelchairs.”</p> <p>“The perimeter trails and sidewalk networks are developed to facilitate access for people with electric wheelchairs and walkers. The perimeter trails, though, are not cleared for year round access.”</p>



# Barriers to active transportation planning, policies, and projects

BCAHL asked whether communities had experienced barriers to planning or implementing active transportation policies, programs, or projects (Figure 6). One barrier was selected by most respondents: inadequate funding to plan and implement projects (72%). Six other barriers were selected by about half of respondents, including inadequate staff capacity to plan and implement projects (57%), competing community priorities that have higher public support (55%), auto-dependent culture (50%), lack of data to describe travel behaviour in the community (48%), lack of economic data to demonstrate the benefits of investments in active transportation (47%), and challenging weather conditions (47%). Figure 6 provides the 10 barriers selected most frequently. Figure 7 shows the barriers that were chosen

“We have experienced many barriers and are chipping away. The biggest issue is funding and staff capacity to apply for funding, plan and deliver projects.”



**Figure 6.** Top 10 barriers to planning or implementing active transportation policies, programs, or projects in BC small towns. AT=Active Transportation. MOTI=Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure.

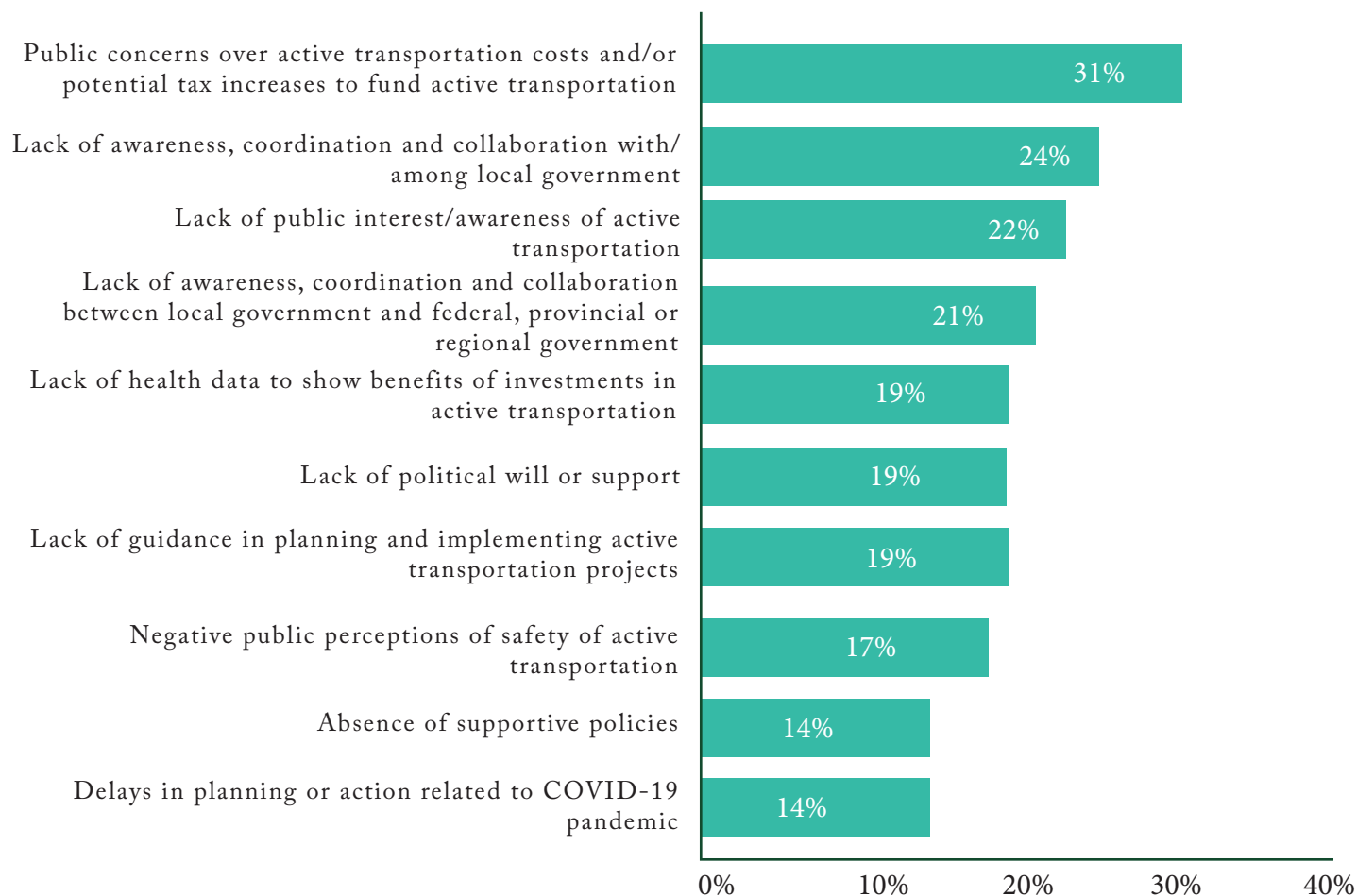


Figure 7. Less frequent barriers to planning or implementing active transportation policies, programs, or projects in BC small towns.

## Progress in key action areas

### Events and programs

BCAHL asked respondents about community events and programs aimed at increasing active transportation held over the last two years. Most commonly, communities participated in Go By Bike Week/Day (40%) or Bike to School Week/Day (29%), held a community walking event (26%), or had a bicycle education program or event (28%). Other types of events and programs were much less common (e.g., bike mentorship programs, community cycling event, skateboard or scooter events, safe routes to school program), and 22% of respondents indicated that their community had no active transportation events or programs in the last two years.

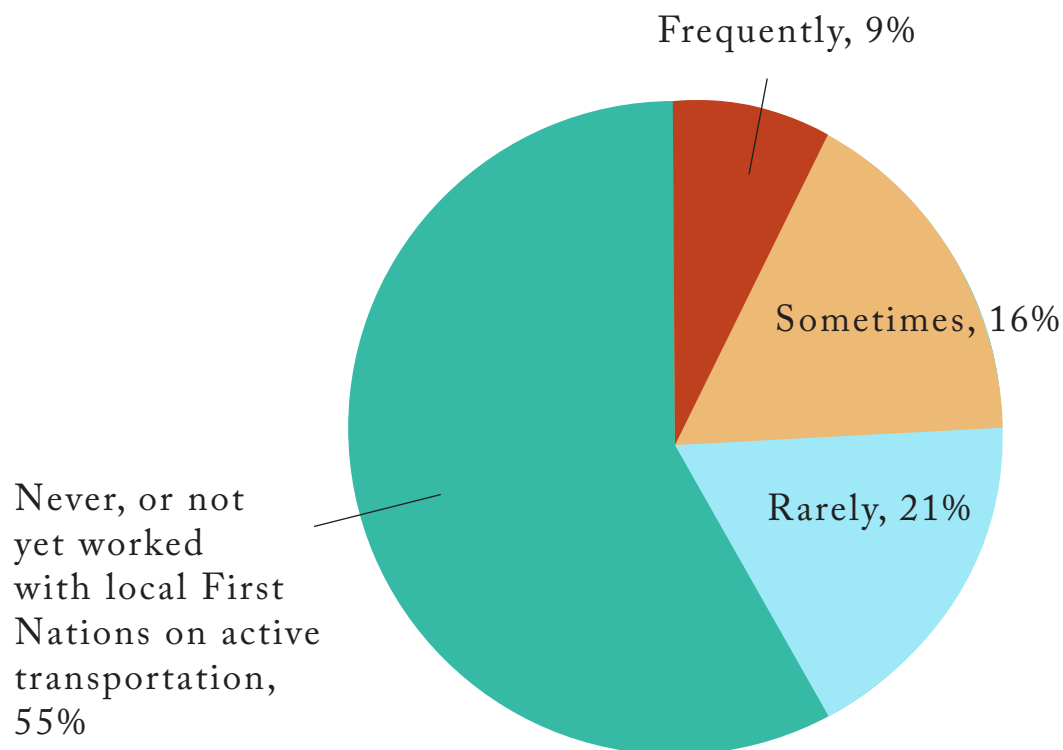
### Equity

BCAHL also queried a number of actions related to increasing the equity of active transportation. Most commonly, respondents indicated that their community had taken none of the specified actions (50%), however, some reported local government and health sector collaboration on active transportation (17%), formation of a disability and/or seniors committee to comment on transportation and facility plans (16%), and incorporation of Universal Design into planning and transportation facility design (14%). Fewer reported that their community analyzed

existing/ planned active transportation strategy and activities through an equity/inclusion lens (10%), tailored programs to reach a specific sociodemographic group (9%), or promoted diversity in images and communications related to active transportation (7%). One respondent, commenting in the “other” category, indicated that their community had consulted with two First Nations on implementing an active transportation network.

### Working with local First Nations communities

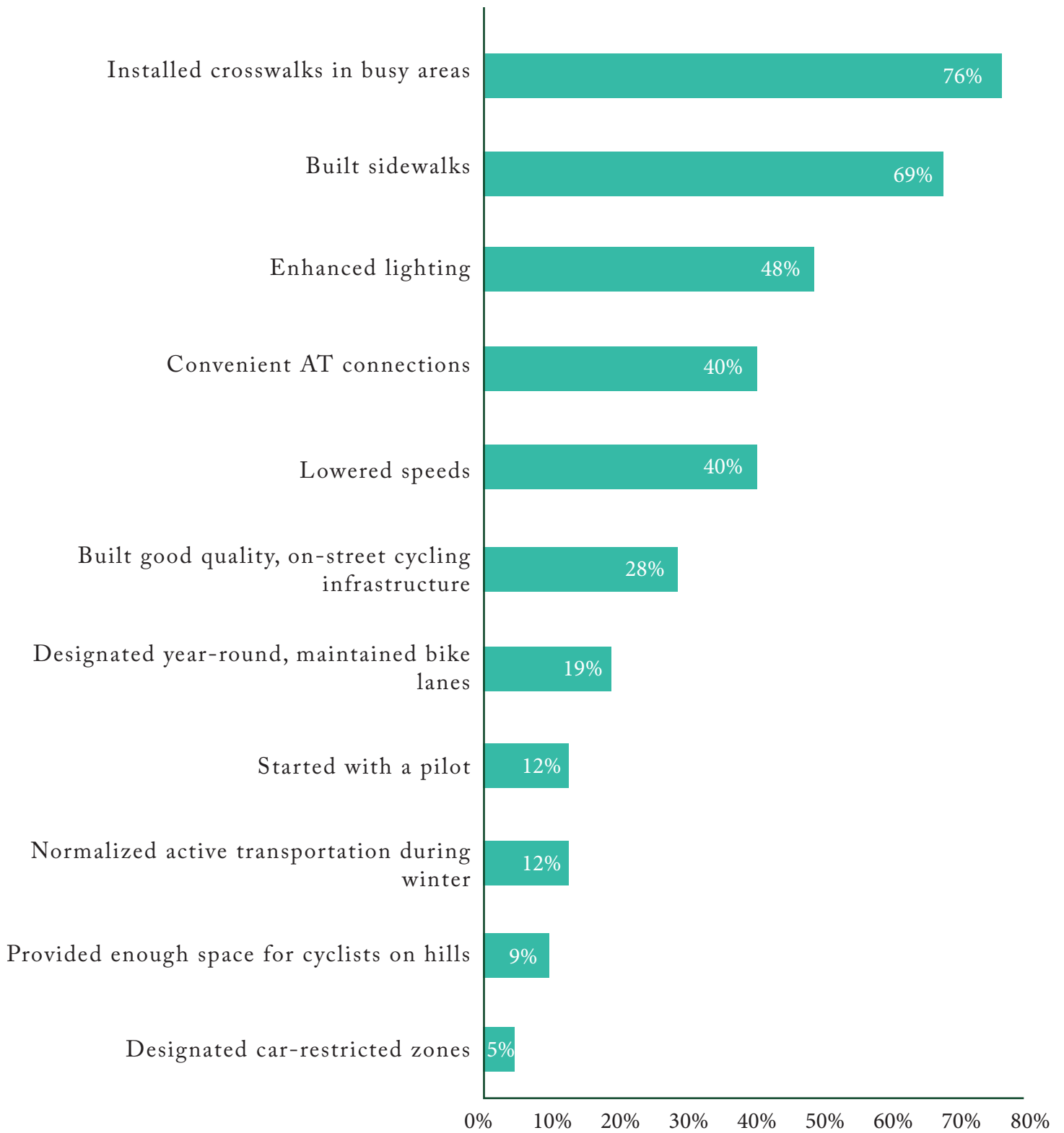
BCAHL asked to respondents about the extent to which their community has worked with local First Nations communities on active transportation (Figure 8). Though over half (55%) had not yet worked with any First Nations on active transportation, 45% had, at some point, worked with a First Nations community on active transportation.



**Figure 8.** Extent to which small towns in BC have worked with local First Nations communities on active transportation.

### Safety

Respondents indicated the extent to which their community had improved active transportation safety. Most commonly, communities installed crosswalks in busy areas (76%), and built sidewalks (69%), and nearly half had enhanced lighting on active transportation routes (48%). Other actions to improve safety were much less common (Figure 9), but very few (5%) had taken no action to improve safety.



**Figure 9.** Actions to improve active transportation (AT) safety in BC small towns.



## Partnerships

BCAHL asked respondents to describe partnerships that existed within their communities that promote active transportation (for example, between the municipality and a local organization, or across municipal departments. 27 respondents provided descriptions of their within-community partnerships, which varied quite a bit (see box for particularly far-reaching partnerships).

We provide examples in the list below.

- Partnerships among municipality, local First Nations Band, and Mountain Bike Association.
- Partnerships among the municipality, economic development/tourism agency, Pathway Partners (local non-profit), and Fraser Health
- Partnership between local government and trail organization.
- Partnerships among various municipal departments within municipality, local NGO, school district, regional district and regional health authority.
- Partnership between municipality and local cycling association.
- Partnerships among municipality, provincial government and local First Nations community.
- Partnerships among municipality, local cycling coalition, regional district, and Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure.
- Collaboration among District departments including planning, engineering and community services.

Nearly half (45%) of respondents also worked collaboratively on active transportation with other communities in their region.

“Internally, Planning and Engineering department work closely together on active transportation; bylaw is involved occasionally. We also work with schools, school district, RCMP, ICBC, MoTI, BC Transit, VCH, Trails Society, Off Road Cycling Association, BIA etc.”

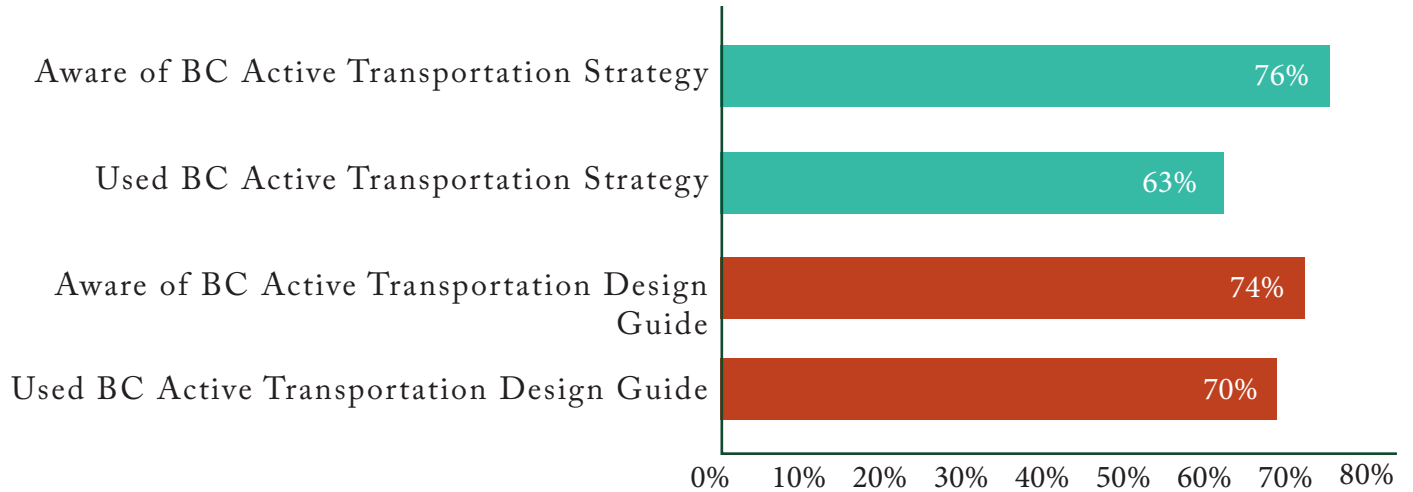
## Counts and monitoring

Most respondents indicated that their community did not do any kind of active transportation monitoring or counting (76%). Some did pedestrian (14%) or cyclist (12%) counts, and some reported that they did other types of data collection (14%), including:

- mobile speed sign counts
- pneumatic traffic tube sensors
- data count at busy highway intersection as part of Vision Zero grant program in 2019
- count vehicles in populated areas and on busy side roads
- surveys
- collect usage of some of the recreation trails
- counts are taken when investigating a corridor or intersection to make sure all modes of traffic are considered

# Supports

Most respondents were aware of the BC Active Transportation Strategy (76%) and had accessed, read or used it (63%). Similarly most respondents were aware of the BC Active Transportation Design Guide (74%), and had accessed, read, or used the guide (70%) (Figure 10).



**Figure 10.** Awareness and use of the BC Active Transportation Strategy and the BC Active Transportation Design Guide.

# Impact of COVID-19 pandemic

Most respondents indicated that the COVID-19 pandemic had not impacted their community's active transportation plans or progress (62%), though some (26%) were negatively affected (Figure 11). A few communities (12%) were able to ramp up active transportation planning and progress during the pandemic. See examples in sidebar.

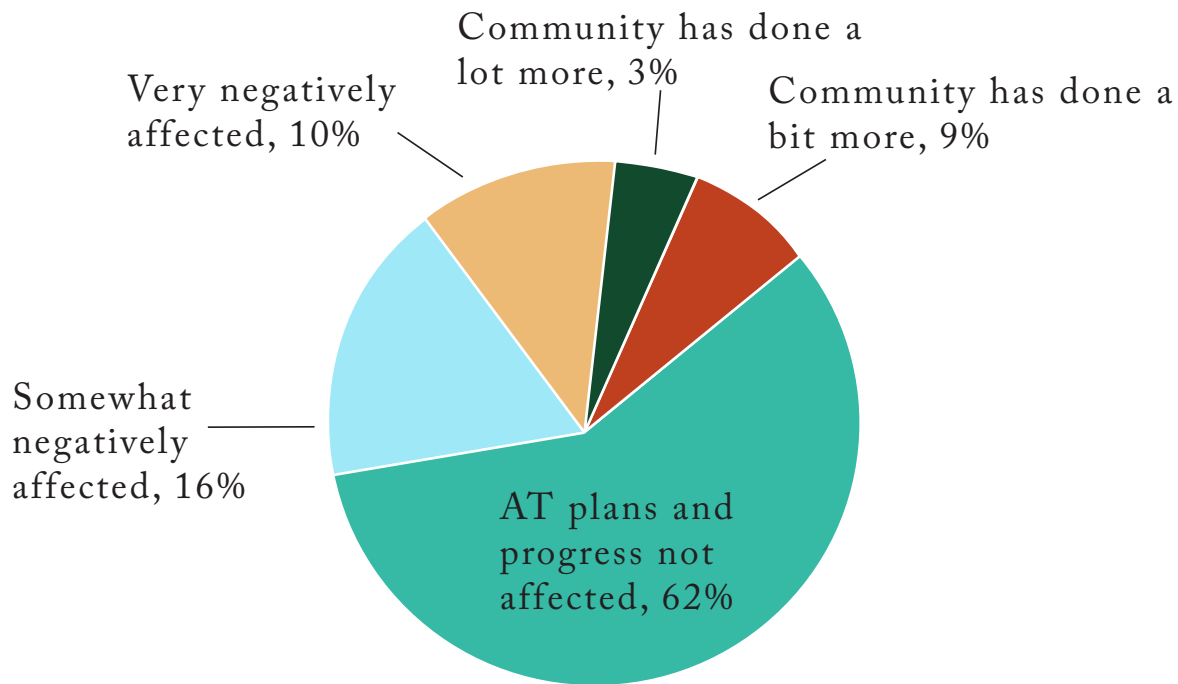


Figure 11. Effect of COVID-19 pandemic on active transportation (AT) plans and progress in BC small

## Negative impact of pandemic:

“Staff time and resources has been focused on Covid-19 versus implementing new initiatives such as active transportation for our community.”

“Local government resources have been depleted. We are suffering financially as well. So, we need lot more funding from other levels of government to expand our active transportation network.”

## Continued progress during pandemic:

“We continued to build 780m multiuse pathway that is separated from a main highly traveled road. We paved a connection trail for students/community to link to crosswalk and not cross major arterial highway.”

“More grants are available and the Town has been applying for them to try and expand our AT network.”



# Appendix A – Communities responding to survey

- Ashcroft
- Barriere
- Burns Lake
- Chase
- Chetwynd
- Clearwater
- Coldstream
- Comox
- Courtenay
- Cranbrook
- Cumberland
- Dawson Creek
- Duncan
- Fernie
- Fort St. James
- Fort St. John
- Fruitvale
- Gibsons
- Harrison Hot Springs
- Hope
- Hudson's Hope
- Invermere
- Kent (Agassiz)
- Keremeos
- Ladysmith
- Lake Country
- Lillooet
- Logan Lake
- Mackenzie
- Nelson
- North Cowichan
- Northern Rockies
- Oliver
- Osoyoos
- Parksville
- Pemberton
- Port McNeill
- Powell River
- Princeton
- Qualicum Beach
- Quesnel
- Revelstoke
- Rosland
- Salmo
- Salmon Arm
- Saltspring Island
- Sechelt
- Smithers
- Southern Gulf Islands Electoral Area of the Capital Regional District
- Sparwood
- Squamish
- Telkwa
- Ucluelet
- Valemount
- Vanderhoof
- Warfield
- Whistler
- Williams Lake





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