



WHAT WE HEARD:

# LAKE LOUISE AREA VISITOR USE MANAGEMENT

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PHASE 1: VALIDATING DESIRED CONDITIONS





## VISITATION TO BANFF NATIONAL PARK HAS GROWN 31 PERCENT BETWEEN 2013 AND 2023. IN LAKE LOUISE INCREASES HAVE BEEN UP TO 70%.

Banff National Park saw 4.28 million visits in 2023/24, the busiest year on record. The Lake Louise area has seen an even more pronounced increase in visitation within this time frame, especially in the busy summer season. Increased visitation strains programs and infrastructure and can create challenges for maintaining exceptional visitor experiences and protecting cultural and natural resources.

Parks Canada is conducting visitor use management planning for the Lake Louise area. The Lake Louise Area Visitor Use Management Plan will provide Parks Canada with a long-term approach to managing visitor use in the Lake Louise area in a way that protects nature and history, is safe for visitors and

staff alike, and provides a positive experience when visiting. The visitor use management planning process will provide Parks Canada with the tools and tactics needed to achieve these goals.

Public engagement aligns with existing policies and plans (such as the Banff National Park Management Plan and the Lake Louise Area Strategy) and will happen in 2 phases:

### PHASE 1: DESIRED CONDITIONS

This phase collected public input on desired conditions and aspirations for the Lake Louise area. **This phase of engagement is complete, and results are presented below.**

### PHASE 2: STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS

This phase will seek input on certain management strategies and actions being considered to achieve desired conditions. **This phase of engagement is scheduled to occur in spring 2025.**



# CONTEXT

In spring 2023, Parks Canada engaged with staff and local stakeholders to create draft desired conditions for key visitor nodes in the Lake Louise area. In total, **34 draft desired conditions** (also referred to as “goals” throughout this document) were created across four categories: visitor experience (15); facilities & operations (5); natural & cultural resources (11); staff & visitor safety (3). These can be found linked above or in Appendix I.

From June 17 to July 28, 2024, Parks Canada asked the public for feedback on the draft desired conditions on the [‘Let’s Talk Mountain Parks’](#) website. The survey included a combination of both rating system (0-5) and open-ended questions. No multiple-choice questions were asked. The survey took approximately 15 minutes to complete. Responses were optional for all questions.



## QUESTIONS WERE DESIGNED TO:

- provide details about experiences respondents felt were important and what barriers they faced when visiting and enjoying the Lake Louise area,
- measure levels of support for the draft desired conditions rated from 0 to 5, where 5 was highly supportive (respondents were presented each set of draft conditions by category),
- explain their reasons for their indicated level of support, and
- solicit suggestions from respondents for how access and experience for visitors can be improved, while maintaining safe spaces for wildlife and people.







## WHO WE HEARD FROM

1,016 people responded to the draft desired conditions through the survey with 19 email submissions. The majority of survey respondents resided in Alberta (79%) – of which 19% reside in the Bow Valley (Bow Valley includes Lake Louise, Banff, Canmore,

and Exshaw). 18% reside elsewhere in Canada. 2% of respondents indicated that they reside in another country. Other demographic information (age, gender, or visitation frequency) was not collected.

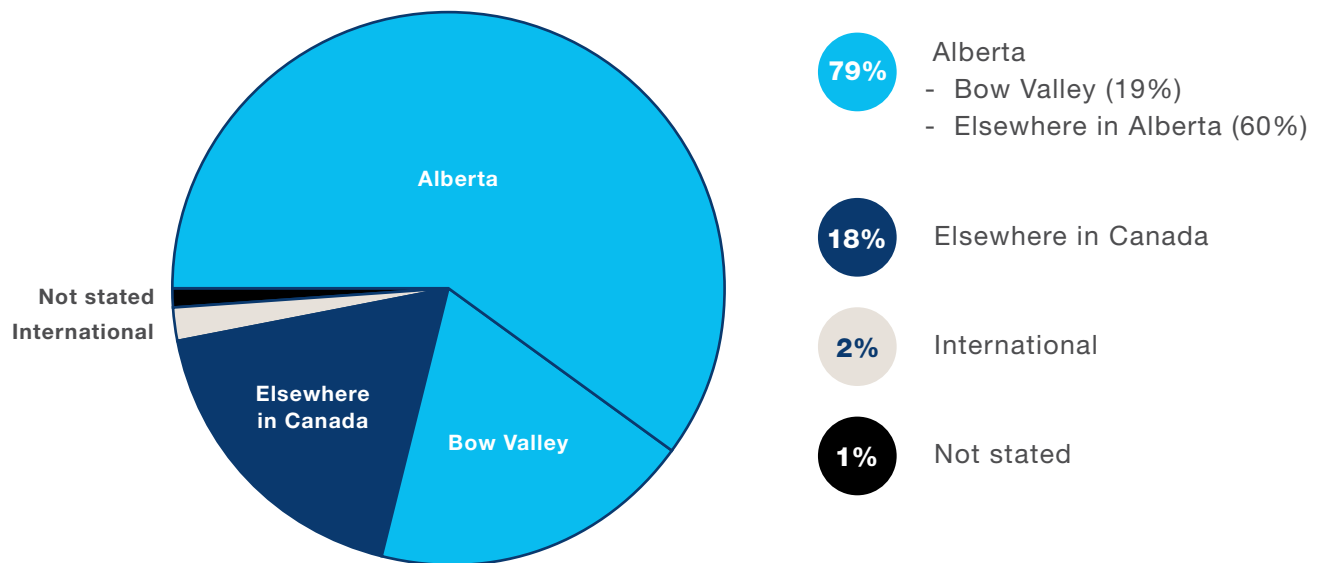


Figure 1: Phase one survey respondents: place of residence



# WHAT WE HEARD

Overall, support for the draft desired conditions was reasonably high with **62% to 75% of survey respondents being supportive of these goals** (4 or 5 ratings out of 5). Reasons for support varied but were often driven by the opinion that these goals are generally important and may help improve current park conditions or issues.

When asked follow-up questions, respondents often suggested strategies and actions to achieve the desired conditions and/or asked how Parks Canada plans to achieve the desired conditions. Strategies and actions will be engaged on in phase two (spring 2025).

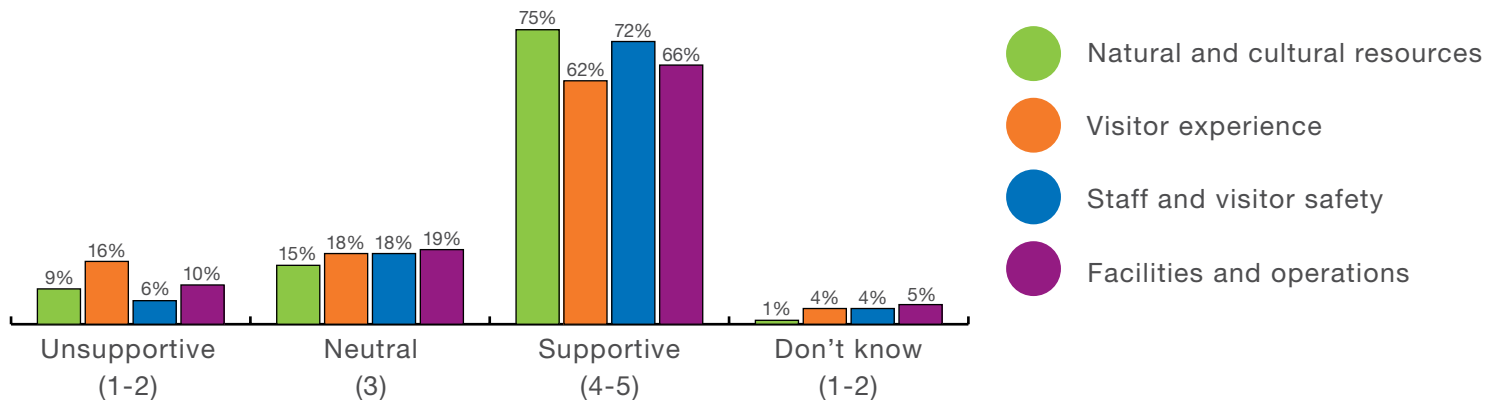


Figure 2: Support for the draft desired conditions proposed in the survey is reasonably high with 62% to 75% of survey respondents being supportive of these goals (supportive = a score of 4 or 5 out of 5).



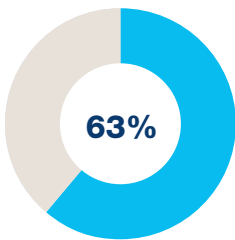


# WHAT WE HEARD ABOUT

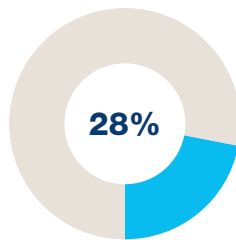
## IMPORTANT EXPERIENCES:

We asked visitors to list what experiences in the Lake Louise area were most important to them. This question was open-ended, not multiple choice.

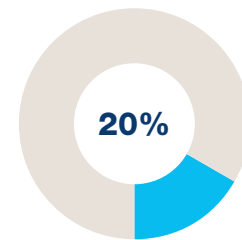
### TOP RESPONSES:



**1.** trail-related experiences such as hiking and walking



**2.** scenery and enjoyment of nature



**3.** visiting lakes and rivers, and enjoyment of watersports

### Other important experiences less frequently mentioned included:

- mountain climbing/mountaineering (8%)
- downhill skiing/snowboarding (6%)
- cross-country skiing (5%)
- wildlife viewing (5%)
- biking/cycling (4%)
- camping (4%)

Many respondents appreciated that the area was being managed to sustainably support outdoor activities and mentioned these activities as important experiences even if they did not directly participate in them. We also heard an emphasis on the importance of the Lake Louise area being a culturally significant place for Indigenous Peoples, and important to Canadian identities. This intrinsic value drove concern for maintaining the area as an important Canadian landmark and protecting the ecosystem for purposes beyond human enjoyment.



# BARRIERS TO ENJOYMENT AND VISITATION:

We asked, “*What prevents you from visiting and enjoying the Lake Louise area.*” This question was open-ended, not multiple choice.

## OVERCROWDING 62%

Many respondents mentioned overcrowding as a barrier to visiting and enjoying the area. Some respondents suggested limiting or reducing the number of daily visitors. Others felt that changes could be made to infrastructure and services to improve access and better disperse visitors. Additionally, respondents mention access issues (12%), and high vehicle volume and congestion (10%) also linked to this theme.

## PARKING 28%

Parking was particularly contentious. Respondents often mentioned the lack of personal vehicle parking as a barrier. Some respondents suggested more parking is needed and/or alternate options to better spread-out crowds. Others, while recognizing parking as a barrier, strictly opposed providing more parking or expanding infrastructure. They argued that this would compromise visitor experience and reduce space for wildlife.

## PARKS CANADA SHUTTLES 21%

Respondents mentioned the Parks Canada shuttle service as a barrier. Even among those supportive of the shuttle service overall, some expressed a desire for expanded hours, frequency, service capacity, and expanded route offerings to lower barriers to access and enjoyment. Others disliked the service altogether, inferring that the shuttle service was contributing to overcrowding. Those who were dissatisfied with the service indicated:

- not wanting to spend time waiting for a bus,
- shuttle costs are too high,
- lack of pet-friendly shuttles, and
- not being convenient for families with young children.

## COST 9%

Respondents mentioned several cost-related barriers including general expenses for visiting the area, current parking costs, travel costs and rising prices due to inflation.

## VISITOR BEHAVIOUR 8%

Respondents mentioned that their enjoyment was impaired by visitors exhibiting poor or disrespectful behaviour, such as disregarding park rules/regulations or being disruptive to others. Some respondents also expressed disdain for visitors they perceived to be preoccupied with taking photos for social media.

## SPONTANEITY

Many people expressed a desire to visit the Lake Louise area without having to plan beforehand. Limited availability of parking spaces and the shuttle reservation system inhibited some from enjoying a spontaneous trip or from being able to quickly adjust activity plans depending on the weather or other conditions.

## ONLY 2% OF SURVEY

**RESPONDENTS** (less than twenty people in over 1000) indicated there is nothing that prevents them from visiting and enjoying the Lake Louise area.

## DRAFT DESIRED CONDITIONS 1

### NATURAL & CULTURAL RESOURCES

The natural and cultural desired conditions received the highest proportion of support across the four categories with 75% of all respondents supporting

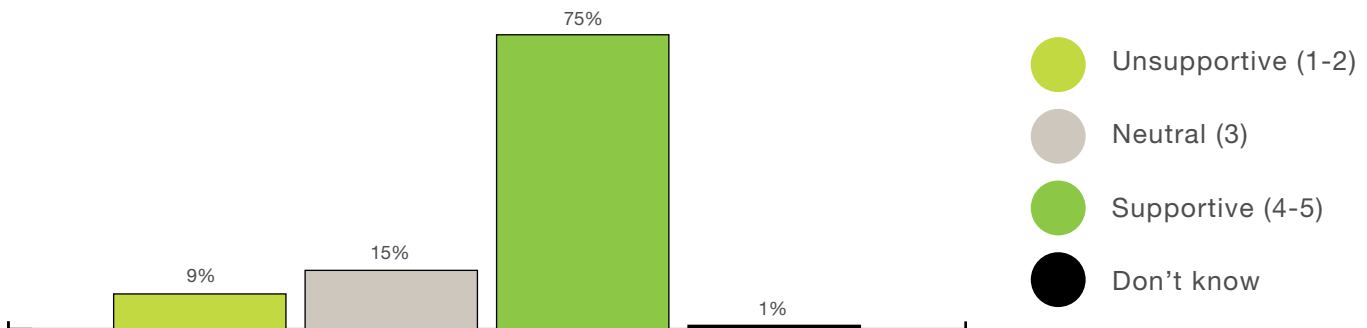


Figure 3: Thinking of nature and culture in the Lake Louise area, how supportive are you of the proposed goals? (n=1,016).

Those **supportive (75%)**, agreed that these goals aligned with their priorities for protecting local wildlife and cultural resources. 40% of supporters mentioned that Parks Canada needs to do more to manage natural areas, and that these goals align with that priority. Those who supported also felt that these goals address their concerns about overcrowding/too many visitors, prioritizing protection for wildlife, and balancing protection and visitor access.

The top reasons given by those **unsupportive (9%)** of these conditions were that they:

- restrict visitor access too severely,
- are not achievable as the area is too crowded and more needs to be done to reduce/limit daily park visitors to achieve them,
- place too much focus on tourism and do not prioritize local residents,

these desired conditions. On a 5-point scale this resulted in a **mean support rating of 4.01 out of 5** (where higher is more supportive).

- do not go far enough to protect, preserve, or manage natural areas/wildlife,
- do not support personal vehicle parking availability in the area.

Those who provided **neutral ratings (15%)** shared themes similar to those who were unsupportive with emphasis around the desired conditions being hard to achieve without changing current levels of visitation.

Many respondents, both more and less supportive of these desired conditions, often mentioned that the preservation of natural and cultural resources is of high importance. They feel increased public education should be a key consideration to helping achieve these goals.



## DRAFT DESIRED CONDITIONS 2

### VISITOR EXPERIENCE

Visitor experience garnered lower ratings of support than any other category of draft conditions with 62% of all respondents supportive. On a 5-point scale, this

resulted in a **mean support rating of 3.68 out of 5** (where higher is more supportive).

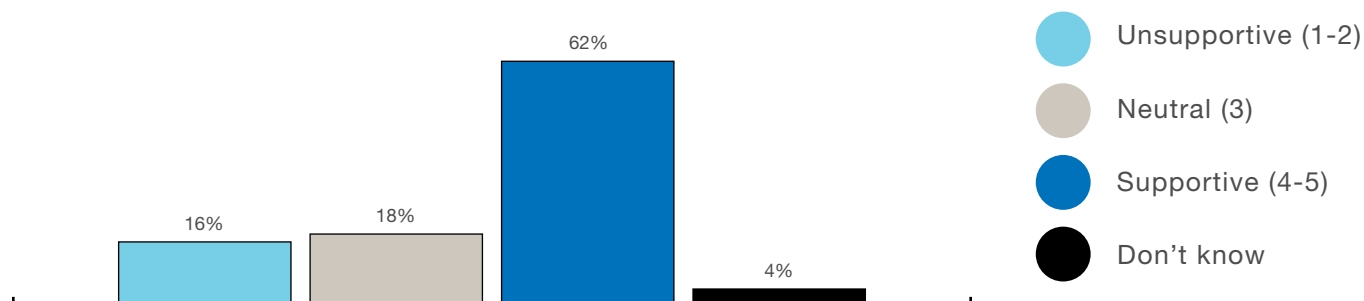


Figure 4: Thinking of visiting the Lake Louise area, how supportive are you of the proposed goals? (n=1,016).

**Supporters (62%)** of these desired conditions most frequently advocated for these goals because they identified the area as overcrowded and believed that the goals would support reductions in visitation and a move towards mass/public transportation as the main mode of transportation in the area. Supporters were interested in reducing traffic congestion on roadways and in parking lots. They feel their actions can help limit or prevent environmental damage. They believe that achieving these desired conditions will also help improve overall visitor experience.

Those **unsupportive (16%)** also mention overcrowding as an issue. 31% indicate the goals do not align with their vision for Lake Louise because the project area is currently too crowded. They feel these visitor experience goals will be hard to meet without reducing visitation or were skeptical about whether the stated goals would help alleviate their concerns. Others were unsupportive because they misunderstood that these are *desired* conditions and not a measure of current conditions. Other top responses provided by those unsupportive indicate goals are:

- too restrictive for visitor access,

- too focused on tourism or does not prioritize local or regional residents,
- too focused on mass transit system as the main mode of transportation— preferences were made in some instances for personal vehicles,
- too vague when discussing a limit on commercial operations/activity.

Respondents who were **neutral (18%)** had similar areas of concern as those who were unsupportive. However, unique to this group were criticisms of and suggestions for improving the shuttle service. Main discussion points centred around the need to reserve too far in advance, the complicated reservation system and a desire for expanded hours of operation. This group also mentioned the desire for additional hiking, walking and cycling trails.

Also noted was an appreciation regarding transparency of acceptable visitation levels.

There was some criticism that these conditions are lacking an emotional component – greater detail or conditions around how visitors should feel when experiencing the area. Some people challenged the distinction between guided and un-guided groups.

## DRAFT DESIRED CONDITIONS 3

### STAFF AND VISITOR SAFETY

Visitor and staff safety related goals received above average support. Many respondents thought these goals were attainable. 72% of respondents were sup-

portive. On a 5-point scale this resulted in a **mean support rating of 4.02 out of 5** (where higher is more supportive).

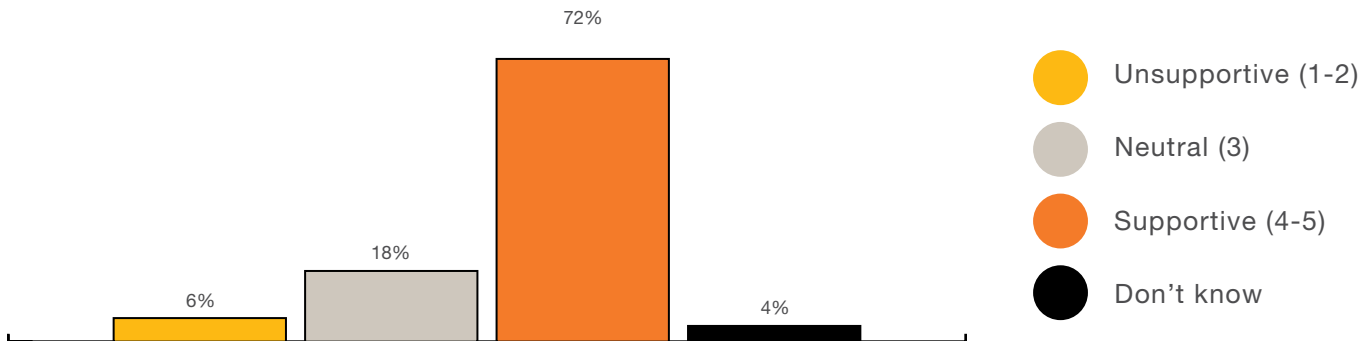


Figure 5: Thinking of human safety in the Lake Louise area, how supportive are you of the proposed goals? (n=1,016).

Those **supportive (72%)** agree that staff and visitor safety is important and well aligned with their goals. They expressed concerns about poor visitor behaviour in the park. Some identified the current conditions of the Lake Louise area as overcrowded and believe this may be leading to visitor safety issues. Others feel these goals can only be achieved if visitors are made more aware of the risks/dangers and expectations of visiting this unique place. They suggested that awareness should be raised through increased education and resources.

Those **unsupportive (6%)** did not necessarily disagree with the desired conditions, however they expressed concern that these goals could not be achieved without a reduction in visitation, increased public education and increased enforcement of park

rules. In some cases, safety was viewed as contradicting other desired conditions by leading to increased access and environmental degradation.

Those who were **neutral (18%)** towards these goals often repeated similar themes as those who were unsupportive. They tended to mention that there should be more focus on protecting wildlife rather than visitor safety. They also identified limitations and feasibility issues such as the need to hire more park staff for enforcement.

Across all levels of support, respondents indicated a desire for greater public education and enforcement of park rules to effectively reach these goals, as well as increased resources online for park visitors.



## DRAFT DESIRED CONDITIONS 4 FACILITIES AND OPERATIONS

Facilities and operations related goals received slightly less support in comparison to human safety or natural and cultural desired conditions. 66% of

respondents were supportive. On a 5-point scale this resulted in a **mean support rating of 3.90 out of 5** (where higher is more supportive).

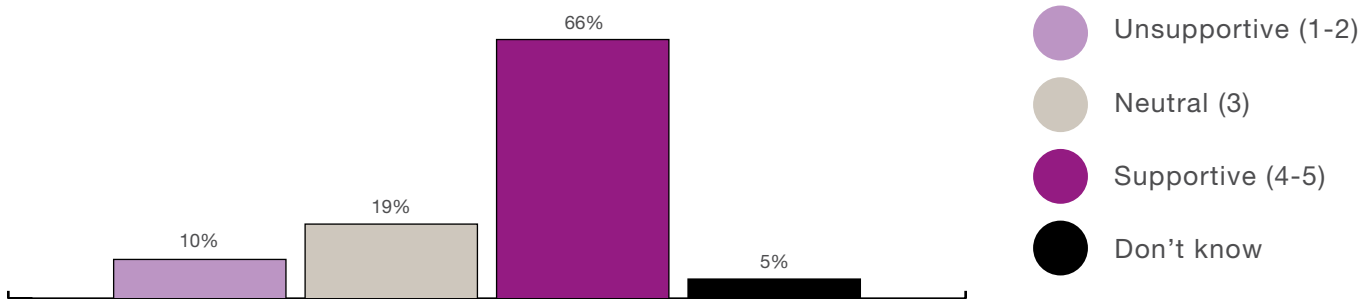


Figure 6: Thinking of park infrastructure in the Lake Louise area, how supportive are you of the proposed goals? (n=1,016).

**Many supportive (66%)** respondents did not state a reason for their support. Those who did, most commonly suggested the need for more and better washroom facilities, and reduced vehicle traffic and visitation volumes to limit environmental damage. Additionally, many within this group, supported increased cycling infrastructure and prioritizing mass/public transportation. Some survey respondents suggested a new goal, specifically that any new or expanded commercial projects should include net new housing to alleviate regional housing pressures.

Those **unsupportive (10%)** of these conditions were split. Some felt the goals should limit daily park visitors and infrastructure growth to prioritize natural spaces. While others felt the goals should be less restrictive of personal vehicles and prioritize more infrastructure and services for personal vehicles including parking.

Respondents wanted to know whether Parks Canada would reduce infrastructure to keep the area as natural as possible or build more of it to accommodate increasing visitation. Additionally, respondents felt Parks Canada could not rely solely on signage to communicate information (i.e. employee ambassadors). Respondents also suggested Parks Canada include trail infrastructure and maintenance in these goals.

**Other observations** – Respondents believe that funding for the operation and improvement of the park does not appear to grow at a rate proportional to visitation and that this would make desired conditions for infrastructure difficult to achieve. They expressed concern that the perceived funding shortfall would inevitably have a negative impact on quality of infrastructure and visitors' ability to access the park. Some respondents also suggested Parks Canada explore and incorporate alternative energy.

# WHAT COULD PARKS CANADA DO DIFFERENTLY?

We asked, “What could Parks Canada do differently to improve access for all visitors to the Lake Louise area including Moraine Lake, while maintaining safety for wildlife and people?”. This question was open-ended, not multiple choice.

## TOP RESPONSES:

1. Limit or reduce the number of daily visitors to the Lake Louise or Moraine Lake area (25%).
2. Increase transit/bus services, stoppages, or routes are needed (12%).
3. Limit personal vehicle access (12%).
4. Improve access for local residents and/or prioritize Canadian citizen visitors (11%).
5. Increase or expand parking space availability (8%).
6. Implement a parking pass/permit system or reserved paid parking spaces (8%).
7. Shuttle buses should run more often (especially during peak times) (5%).
8. Develop a timed entry reservation system or designated window of time for visitors (5%).



## OTHER SUGGESTIONS LESS FREQUENTLY MENTIONED INCLUDED:

- enforcing park rules (4%)
- focusing on environmental protection should be the main goal or priority (4%)
- reduce commercial operators in the area (3%)
- improve or increase public education of park regulations (3%)
- improve or make it easier to use the shuttle reservation system (3%)
- more cycling infrastructure (3%)
- charge higher fees for those who reside outside of Canada (3%)





# CONCLUSION

The draft desired conditions for the Lake Louise area received reasonably high support with 62% to 75% of survey respondents being supportive of these goals (4 or 5 ratings out of 5).

Very few participants, even those unsupportive of these goals, stated that the desired conditions were unnecessary. It was more common for participants to express scepticism that the desired conditions would be achieved, an overall dislike of mass/public transit, or a request for increased/priority access for local residents. Visitors often commented on current conditions and suggested strategies and actions throughout the survey.

## NEXT STEPS

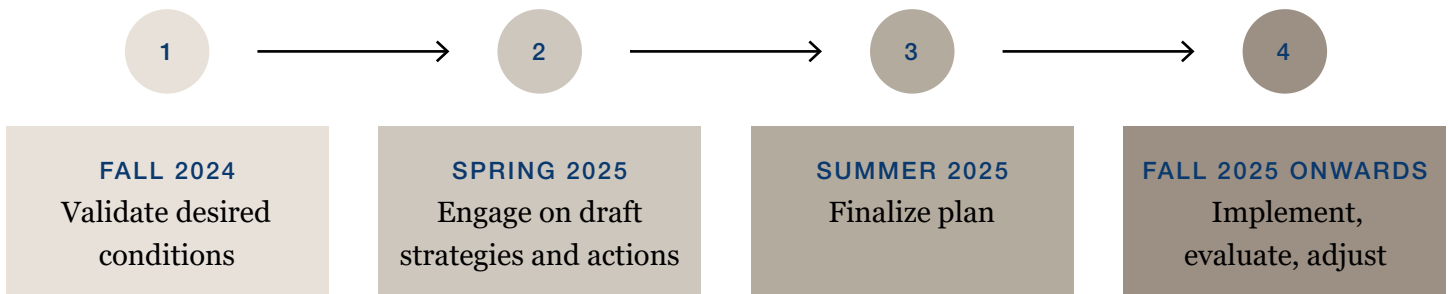
The visitor use management planning process is well underway for the Lake Louise area. Updated desired conditions will be shared during the next phase of engagement, anticipated in spring 2025. That phase of engagement will focus on potential strategies and actions that could be implemented over the next 5 years to close any gaps between current and desired conditions. The list of potential actions will be assessed

for feasibility, viability and desirability. Additional in-person engagement sessions took place with stakeholders and First Nations with ties to the Lake Louise area. The results from these sessions are not presented in this report. Parks Canada will continue to engage with Indigenous partners throughout this process.

Visitor use management planning must align with the direction of the Banff National Park Management Plan, the Lake Louise Area Plan and the Canada National Parks Act, which are the primary accountability tools for Parks Canada. It will consider alignment with the Moving People Sustainably Framework currently in development. The visitor use management process is iterative and adaptive. The final Lake Louise Area Visitor Use Management Plan will also include monitoring and evaluation plans.

## PARKS CANADA THANKS

the more than 1,000+ Canadians who took the time to participate. We look forward to continued participation and feedback in the next round of engagement. Please see [letstalkmountainparks.ca/lakelouisevum](https://letstalkmountainparks.ca/lakelouisevum) for project updates.



**APPENDIX 1:**  
**NATURAL AND CULTURAL RESOURCES**

Desired condition	Where it applies
Visitors have the appropriate knowledge, skills, and attitudes to care for the environment. They have an opportunity to develop a deep understanding and appreciation for the unique ecosystems that exist in the Lake Louise area.	Throughout project area
Humans and wildlife are able to co-exist. Wildlife attractants and habitat fragmentation are minimized. Trail sightlines and footprint of visitor use areas are maintained.	Throughout project area
Water quality in the area's lakes and streams is maintained and supports native aquatic species. Human sources of water pollution are minimized, and the spread of aquatic invasive species is prevented.	Throughout project area
Designated and hardened viewpoints along lakeshore trails exist to provide visitors the opportunity to get close to the water's edge, while protecting sensitive shoreline ecosystems and preventing erosion.	Upper Lake Louise, moraine Lake
The spread of non-native plants is prevented. Native plants thrive away from areas used by people and competition with invasive species is minimized. Visitors understand the importance of remaining on trail.	Throughout project area
Views in the area are dominated by a natural landscape with little visual intrusion of vehicles, roads, or parking lots.	Throughout project area
Greenhouse gas emissions are reduced, and visitors know how to reduce their impact.	Throughout project area
Wary carnivores like grizzly bears have areas to live and feed without being disturbed by humans. These secure habitats are maintained or improved by carefully managing visitor use.	Paradise Valley
The health of the Fairview and Whitehorn wildlife corridors is not further compromised by human activity. Wildlife movement through both corridors is supported by limiting human activity during sensitive periods, traffic mitigation efforts, and wildlife crossing structures.	Transportation corridors
Visitors understand the Indigenous history in the area and the role of Indigenous Peoples as stewards of the area since time immemorial.	Throughout project area
Culturally significant resources are protected, and Indigenous groups can easily access a dedicated space to hold ceremonies or other cultural activities with privacy. Indigenous people can easily obtain information about access and experience an environment where staff, guides, businesses, and contractors are well informed, respectful, and culturally competent.	Throughout project area



## VISITOR EXPERIENCE

Desired condition	Where it applies
Traffic congestion on roadways and within parking areas is minimal and traffic flow remains efficient.	Throughout the project area
Visitors find it simple to plan their trip to the Lake Louise area and have the tools to help them understand how to access their intended destination.	Throughout the project area
Commercial operators help Parks Canada protect the environment while providing positive experiences to visitors. Commercial operators are considered when visitation levels are set. Strategies to manage visitation are clearly communicated to commercial operators in a timely manner.	Throughout the project area
Commercial opportunities do not adversely impact the natural environment or the experience of other visitors. Visitors understand the distinction between Parks Canada and commercial operations.	Throughout the project area
Visitation to the area is managed and remains within sustainable levels. Visitation varies depending on location, season, and time of day. Acceptable visitation levels will be set in a fair and transparent way.	Throughout the project area
The mass transit system in Lake Louise integrates seamlessly with other key nodes in Banff National Park through a regional transportation system.	Throughout the project area
Promotion of the area sets realistic expectation for accessing and visiting the area. Parks Canada National Office, Destination Management Organizations and Provincial Marketing Organizations support this in their promotion campaigns.	Throughout the project area
Mass transit options are the main mode of transportation in the Lake Louise area. The mass transit system is simple to use, convenient, and cost-effective. It provides certainty to visitors about accessing their planned destination and can accommodate people of all ages and abilities.	Throughout the project area
<p>The Lake Louise Park and Ride located at the Ski Area remains the long-term transportation hub for the Lake Louise area. The Park and Ride:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Is easy to find and safe to access from the Trans-Canada Highway.</li> <li>- Meets the needs of shuttle providers.</li> <li>- Has an efficient flow vehicle traffic, while prioritizing the safety of pedestrians and cyclists.</li> <li>- Has sufficient facilities, including washrooms and seating, for the number of people using the transportation hub.</li> </ul>	Lake Louise Park and Ride
There is a convenient and clearly communicated location for visitors to park and bike or walk to Upper Lake Louise or Moraine Lake.	Throughout the project area
Day use in the Paradise Valley does not increase from historic levels. Managed access to Paradise Valley remains easy and convenient for visitors.	Paradise Valley

Safe biking routes and hiking trails encourage cycling and walking throughout the Lake Louise area. The routes and trails do not contribute to additional habitat fragmentation in the wildlife corridors.	Transportation corridors
The area offers a large variety of both frontcountry and backcountry recreational opportunities that suit the desires and skills of a wide variety of visitors.	Throughout the project area
Upper Lake Louise and Moraine Lake continue to support large numbers of visitors during daytime hours. Encounters with other visitors are frequent, however opportunities exist to get away from the crowds at certain times of the day or further into the backcountry.	Upper Lake Louise, Moraine Lake
Guided commercial operators provide visitors with appropriate guided recreational activities, like hiking, mountaineering, and climbing that may be otherwise intimidating or unattainable, with a focus on wilderness values and wilderness safety.	Throughout the project area

## VISITOR SAFETY

Desired condition	Where it applies
Health and safety of staff and visitors is the top priority. Congestion is managed in a manner that does not compromise safety or emergency response.	Throughout the project area
Visitor and staff interactions are pleasant and respectful. Conflicts between visitors or between visitors and staff rarely occur.	Throughout the project area
Visitors understand the knowledge, skills and equipment required for different activities and destinations. This leads to increased responsible behavior and safe decision making.	Throughout the project area

## FACILITIES AND OPERATIONS

Desired condition	Where it applies
Signs throughout the area effectively communicate information. They are seasonally appropriate, clear, and universal.	Throughout the project area
Infrastructure in the Paradise Valley is minimal and is consistent with other backcountry areas of Banff National Park.	Paradise Valley
Roadways support efficient travel throughout the Lake Louise area. They are designed to favour alternative and mass transportation. Roads: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- facilitate smooth traffic flow on streets and in parking lots.</li> <li>- key intersections and day-use areas are reconfigured where required to allow for transit, walking and cycling.</li> <li>- are well-signed and easy to navigate.</li> <li>- prevent vehicle access in active avalanche zones.</li> </ul>	Transportation corridors



Infrastructure in the area supports safe and enjoyable cycling and walking throughout the Lake Louise area.	Throughout the project area
Visitor facilities are clean and adequate for the number of people who use them. Main day-use areas provide an accessible experience to visitors.	Upper Lake Louise, Moraine Lake