



Mill Road Traders' Association Survey Claims Do Not Stand Up To Scrutiny

MRTA Survey Results - Summary

The MRTA use their survey results to associate the bridge 'closure' with a 39.98% reduction in takings for some Mill Road businesses (number not stated), by comparing a week in May 2021 with the same May week in 2019. They give numbers for closed (19), opened (5) and for sale (11) businesses on the street. They state that takings of some businesses in July 2019, when the bridge was closed to all motor traffic for railway related works, were 28.35% lower than in May 2019. They report that a significant majority of the traders who responded would like all motor traffic brought back to the street. The detailed survey [questions](#) and [results](#) are shown below.

We do not challenge traders' opinions, because they are opinions and as such may be freely held. But we must and do ask whether the evidence backs them up.

Our Critique of the Survey

1. In effect the survey asked a binary question: for or against 'closure'.

[As we have set out](#), there are many more and better choices for the future of Mill Road than simply an 'open' or 'closed' bridge. Asking a binary question will get a binary response. Also, the use of the word 'closure' is unhelpful, because it does not accurately describe the current situation.

2. The survey was not conducted independently, we do not know how many businesses responded, and no detailed results are provided.

The officers of the MRTA have been publicly and loudly arguing for the removal of all bridge restrictions from the outset. [The survey questions](#) indicate that the survey was being conducted by the MRTA. This may have affected the responses provided.

The survey [results](#) for 2021 say "154 businesses engaged". But we do not know how many businesses responded. We could assume it was less than 154 – but how many less?

We have not seen any detailed (anonymised trader level) information, for example actual revenue numbers at business level.

3: The reduced trading volumes demonstrate correlation with recent motor vehicle restrictions on Mill Road, but not cause.

Covid-19 was having a significant negative impact in May 2021, both on footfall and high street trading. So it is not possible to say with any certainty how much if any of the reported reduction in trading volume is due to the restrictions on the bridge:

Lockdown restrictions in May 2021

Some social and business restrictions had only just been lifted on May 17, and others remained in place.

Footfall down in central Cambridge in May 2021

[Cambridge BID figures](#) show that footfall in central Cambridge was down by 25.3% between 17 and 23 May 2021 (the week cited in the survey) compared with the same week in 2019.

Online sales remained high in May 2021

[Online sales](#) in the UK made up 27.3% of the total in May 2021 – compared with 18.8% in May 2019.

Less Students in Cambridge in May 2021

Both Romsey and Petersfield contain a high proportion of student rental properties which are under-occupied. [Property consultancy Knight Frank estimate that](#) the UK market has £1 billion of excess stock due to the pandemic. Student accommodation providers [have reported](#) significant reductions in rental income.

Little international tourism in May 2021

According to a [2020 report in the Cambridge Independent](#), Cambridge normally attracts 8.2 million visitors annually, worth about £849 million to the local economy. The visitor economy also accounts for around 22 per cent of jobs in the city. A Visit England survey predicted that the industry would not recover to 2019 levels until 2022 at the earliest.

To what extent do people drive to Mill Road to shop? We are unaware of any figures from the MRTA, any individual trader, or anyone else which quantify the extent to which people used private vehicles to get to Mill Road shops, whether before or after the bridge restrictions. A survey conducted in spring 2015 in Lea Bridge Road Waltham Forest showed that businesses believed that 63% of their customers arrived by car; but only 20% had actually arrived that way. Believing that bridge restrictions have contributed to reduced trade on Mill Road is anecdotal and unverifiable.

4. MRTA's business closure numbers are significantly overstated, and openings understated

MRTA claim that at the time of their 2021 survey, 19 businesses had closed, and 5 new businesses opened. They do not make clear when these closures and openings happened. We surveyed Mill Road on 8th July 2021, and can report:

- 9 businesses have closed since the ETRO¹ was implemented
- 14 new businesses have opened after the ETRO was implemented
- 5 long-term closures predate the ETRO

Our [detailed findings](#) are available below. In stark contrast to many UK high streets, this is not a picture of a street in decline. We do not know which businesses the MRTA figures relate to, as they have not provided any detail.

5. Key differences between May 2019 and July 2019: Gas Works and Holidays.

In July 2019, railway works meant that Mill Road bridge was closed to all motor vehicles, and at times completely. The closure was timed to coincide with the school and university holiday period, with fewer students and parents in Cambridge and spending money on Mill Road. However, the railway works also coincided with major disruption by gas works along the whole length of the street, which made it impossible for anyone to cross the road to get to some shops. Even when the bridge was open to pedestrians and cyclists, the noise and dust of the works was, according to anecdotal evidence, off-putting for potential customers.

Conclusions and Next Steps

This is a very difficult time for high street retail in the UK. We on Mill Road would like to see independent businesses thrive. Experiences from elsewhere in the UK show that low traffic low pollution schemes, implemented in similar high street locations after effective public consultation, can deliver footfall and trading volume increases. We would love to work with Mill Road traders to formulate proposals that benefit everybody on Mill Road, and make Mill Road the envy of Cambridgeshire.

Whatever the way forward, it is important that any decision is based on thorough and representative research. We would like to see an independent survey of Mill Road shops, restaurants and other businesses asking more than a closed question about the 'closure' of the bridge, undertaken as part of a full public consultation into the future of the street. The published survey should detail the methodology employed and include anonymised trader-level statistics. If, as MRTA imply, 87.6% of businesses on Mill Road are losing money, this must be looked at seriously and soon: a deeper investigation must be made into the timing, causation and extent of those losses - assuming, of course, that the claim is accurate. At the moment, however, it is impossible to verify any of the MRTA's claims, as they have not made any of their detailed data public.

Note to editors: [Mill Road – A Street for People](#) is a group of Cambridge residents and business people working on a non-partisan basis to seek consensus to get the best Mill Road for everyone. We want Mill Road to be an attractive, safe and successful shopping street, retaining its unique atmosphere, independent shops, cafés and restaurants, popular and accessible to all residents and visitors. As part of our work we have talked to many traders on Mill Road – and some of our members are Mill Road traders.

¹ Experimental Traffic Regulation Order – the means by which the current restrictions to motor vehicles on Mill Road bridge were implemented.

Mill Road New and Closed Business Survey 8th July 2021

Romsey		New	Closed	Long-term empty unit	Comment
294B	Profad Care Agency	New			
245	Avis Care Rental		Closed		Pandemic-related?
193	Northwood	New			
230	Halikarnas Restaurant	New			
214	Chicken Rush		Closed		Pre-bridge closure
200	?			Empty	Been an empty unit for years
192	Istanbul Barbers	New			Not sure when they opened but was recently
190	Eclipse Bakery	New			
184	Waffle Bar		Closed		
180-182	Harvest	New			
172	Cat Protection		Closed		Unit is currently under offer
160	The Flower Project	New			
139	Ohayo Sushi Bar		Closed		
Total		7	5	1	
Petersfield		New	Closed	Long-term empty unit	Comment
119	Language School		Closed		Possibly pandemic related
112	Elitian		Closed		Owners retired
104A	Golden Stiches & Curtains	New			
?	Royal Fast Food Takeaway		Closed		been closed for some time I believe

96a	?	New			Looks like a new café about to open
94a	Gees			Empty	Fire!
90a	Lloyds Bank			Empty	Closed for years
86	Digital Village			Empty	Closed for years
84	Rubiaceae		Closed		I think, but it's hard to tell!
76	Tiddis	New			
64	Fantasia			Empty	
44a	Co-op	New			
52	The Ladz	New			
22	Kan Zaman	New			
2	Fin Boys Fish Butchery	New			
Total		7	4	4	

Traders Survey Results

Obtained from <https://www.facebook.com/Millroadclosure/posts/306436661175353>

6th July 2021

<h2 style="text-align: center;">Mill Road Traders</h2> <p style="text-align: center;"><u>Weekly Trading 2019 comparison with 2021</u></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Normal Week 17-23 May 2019</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Bridge Work Closure 17-23 July 2019</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Covid Bridge Closure 17-23 May 2021</p> <hr/> <p style="text-align: center;">IN 2020 SURVEY</p> <p style="text-align: center;">168 BUSINESS ENGAGED</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">IN 2021 SURVEY</p> <p style="text-align: center;">154 BUSINESS ENGAGED</p> <p style="text-align: center;">IN 2021 SURVEY</p> <p style="text-align: center;">19 BUSINESSES HAVE CLOSED DOWN</p> <p style="text-align: center;">-----</p> <p style="text-align: center;">5 NEW BUSINESSES HAVE OPENED</p> <p style="text-align: center;">-----</p> <p style="text-align: center;">11 BUSINESSES ARE FOR SALE</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><u>2020 response</u></p> <p style="text-align: center;">86.9% in favour of Reopening the bridge</p> <p style="text-align: center;">-----</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Only 4.8% in favour of Closure</p> <p style="text-align: center;">-----</p> <p style="text-align: center;">8.3% Do Not Mind</p> <hr/> <p style="text-align: center;"><u>2021 response</u></p> <p style="text-align: center;">87.6% in favour of Reopening the bridge</p> <p style="text-align: center;">-----</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Only 3.9% in favour of Closure</p> <p style="text-align: center;">-----</p> <p style="text-align: center;">8.5% Do Not Mind</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Suffered or Benefitted?</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><u>2019/2021 comparison</u></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Normal Week - 17-23 May 2019</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Bridge Work Closure 17-23 July 2019</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Covid Bridge Closure 17-23 May 2021</p> <hr/> <p style="text-align: center;">17-23 July 2019 Compared to 17-23 May 2019</p> <p style="text-align: center;">-----</p> <p style="text-align: center;">75% Suffered</p> <p style="text-align: center;">-----</p> <p style="text-align: center;">3% Benefitted</p> <p style="text-align: center;">-----</p> <p style="text-align: center;">18.5% Same</p> <p style="text-align: center;">-----</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Average 28.35% Loss</p> <hr/> <p style="text-align: center;">17-23 May 2021 Compared to 17-23 May 2019</p> <p style="text-align: center;">-----</p> <p style="text-align: center;">73.9% Suffered</p> <p style="text-align: center;">-----</p> <p style="text-align: center;">3.3% Benefitted</p> <p style="text-align: center;">-----</p> <p style="text-align: center;">19.6% Same</p> <p style="text-align: center;">-----</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Average 39.98% Loss</p>

Trader Survey Questions



TRADERS' ASSOCIATION

We the undersign Members of Mill Road Traders Association are supportive of this survey and are happy for the results to be published.

NAME	SHOP NAME	ADDRESS	SIGNATURE
PETERSFIELD		ROMSEY	
BRIDGE CLOSURE	SUPPORT	AGAINST	DON'T MIND

FINANCIAL	SUFFERED	BENEFITED	CANNOT TELL
	18/05/2019	18/07/2019	18/05/2021
TAKINGS			
(%)			
	WEEK 17-23 MAY 2019	WEEK 17-23 JULY 2019	WEEK 17-23 MAY 2021
TAKINGS			
(%)			