

Plain Language 2025-2028 Accessibility Strategy

Prepared by:

Melissa Myers
Office of Diversity & Inclusion/ANSAIO
May 14th 2025



HALIFAX

Table of Contents

Welcome & CAO Message.....	3
Executive Summary.....	4
People with Disabilities	5
Disabilities in Nova Scotia	6
Prevalence of Disability Types among Nova Scotians with Disabilities	6
Nova Scotia Accessibility Act.....	7
Why we made the 2025-2028 Accessibility Strategy	8
Accessibility Strategy.....	9
Accessibility Strategy: Our Progress	9
2024 Accessibility Strategy Review.....	11
Recommendations from the 2024 Public Accessibility Consultations	12
Employee Feedback	13
Surveys	13
Accessibility Strategy Open House.....	13
Accessibility Strategy Task Force Consultations	13
Findings	14
Accessibility Strategy Recommendations & Timeline	15
Transportation & Transportation Infrastructure	15
Built Environment.....	16
Information & Communications	16
Goods & Services	17
Employment.....	17

Welcome & CAO Message

Being accessible means giving everyone a fair chance to join in, no matter what. It's something we all need to think about in everything we do. This includes places, people, work, play and travel.

We are working hard to make places more welcoming for everyone and fixing things that are not yet fair. This Strategy lists actions we are taking. Every year, we check how much progress we've made and keep getting better as we learn.

We promise to remove barriers and create a place where everyone feels included. This plan will help us do that.



Cathie O'Toole

Chief Administrative Officer

Halifax Regional Municipality





Executive Summary

Making sure everyone can take part in life is important for all people in Nova Scotia, whether they have disabilities or not. Nova Scotia has the most people with disabilities in Canada, so we need to work hard to make things better.

Nova Scotia was the third province in Canada to make rules about accessibility. These rules help people with disabilities. The municipality made a plan called the *Accessibility Strategy* and it was approved in May 2021. Some good changes have been made, like in buildings, buses and places to play, but there are still many things we need to make better. We will review and update the plan every three years. This is the first time the plan has been updated.

The new plan for 2025 to 2028 has 30 ideas, which we call “recommendations,” to help make life easier for people with disabilities. These ideas will be worked on in the next three years, as the rules included in the provincial *Accessibility Act* say we must do. Each year, we will share updates to show how much progress we are making.

People with Disabilities

Our community includes people from different races, cultures and backgrounds. This also includes people who have disabilities.

A "disability" can mean many things. It can impact the body, mind or learning. It could also affect senses, like hearing or seeing. Barriers can stop people with disabilities from joining in activities. The words we use are "persons with disabilities." Some people like to use the word "disabled" instead. Some people use different words to describe themselves for different reasons.

It's also important to think about how different parts of a person's identity work together. For example, their gender or the color of their skin can also shape their experiences. We call this "intersectionality." We can do a better job of helping people facing challenges in the region by thinking about this.



Disabilities in Nova Scotia

In 2022, a survey found that about 37.9 per cent of people in Nova Scotia who are older than 15 have a disability. This is the highest number of people with disabilities in any province in Canada. The average for all of Canada is 27 per cent. This survey does not include people living in institutional residences, on Canadian Armed Forces bases, on First Nations reserves or those living in other collective dwellings.

Prevalence of Disability Types among Nova Scotians with Disabilities (2022)

- Unknown disability type: 2.4%
- Developmental: 4.7%
- Memory: 17%
- Learning: 22.5%
- Dexterity: 20.5%
- Hearing: 24.4%
- Seeing: 25.9%
- Mental health-related: 41%
- Mobility: 42.3%
- Flexibility: 44.1%
- Pain related: 65.7%.

Nova Scotia Accessibility Act

In 2015, Nova Scotia asked people to share their thoughts on making rules to help people with disabilities. In April 2017, they made the *Accessibility Act*. This made Nova Scotia the third province in Canada to have rules about accessibility. The Act says that each city or town must have an accessibility plan and a committee. They made rules in these six important areas.



Built Environment



Education



Employment



Goods & Services



Information & Communication



Public Transportation & Transportation Infrastructure

Nova Scotia is making new rules to make buildings easier for people to use. They are also working on rules to help people who want jobs, and to make goods and services more accessible. When these rules are ready, cities and towns will have three years to follow them.



Why we made the 2025-2028 Accessibility Strategy

The goal of the Strategy is to help make our region easier for everyone to use. We want everyone to feel like they belong. By including and respecting everyone, we can remove barriers and make our municipality better for all. To make our region more accessible, we need to keep improving things like buses, jobs and buildings.

When we made this plan, we made sure we included all people. We listened to what people in the community had to say to make sure our plan meets their needs. We worked with municipal employees in many different jobs to get their ideas on how to make the municipality more accessible.

Accessibility Strategy

This plan follows the Nova Scotia *Accessibility Act*. It includes ideas from the community, municipal employees, the Accessibility Strategy Task Force and the Accessibility Advisory Committee.

We want to remove barriers for people with disabilities. The plan focuses on making it easier for people with disabilities to do what they want to do. It helps the Office of Diversity & Inclusion/African Nova Scotian Affairs Integration Office (ANSAIO)'s goal to reduce barriers and create chances for everyone.

The *2025-2028 Accessibility Strategy* has 30 recommendations. The Accessibility Strategy Task Force will make sure the municipality follows them.

Accessibility Strategy: Our Progress

Over the past three years, we have made the Halifax Regional Municipality more accessible. We share updates with Regional Council every year. You can find the latest update on the [Accessibility Strategy page on halifax.ca](https://www.halifax.ca/accessibility).

Here are some highlights of what we have done so far:

- In July 2022, we started Extra Care Taxi, an accessible taxi service. Now there are 10 taxis in Halifax.
- We built a new JumpStart playground at the George Dixon Community Centre in the North End of Halifax. It is for everyone to use.
- In 2023, we opened a new public pool at the Halifax Common. The pool has accessible changerooms, a pool lift and an aquatic wheelchair. It has been awarded Rick Hansen Foundation Accessibility Gold Certification™ (RHFAC).



- In 2023, we finished a big renovation of the Woodside Ferry Terminal. It now has single-stall all-gender washrooms and two accessible barrier-free washrooms. It is the first Halifax Transit building to meet the new Standards for Universal Access to Municipal Facilities.
- Public Works put in over 1,700 Tactile Walking Surface Indicators (TWSIs).
- Regional Council decided that all buildings in the Cogswell District Redevelopment Project must get RHFAC. This is the first project in Canada to aim for this high level of accessibility.
- We updated the [halifax.ca](https://www.halifax.ca) website to make the Accessibility tab easier to find. The tab has information about accessibility, including municipal services and recreation programs.





2024 Accessibility Strategy Review

Cities and towns must update their plan every three years. Halifax needed to update its plan in 2024.

To decide what changes to make, the municipality checked how well the plan was working. They talked to people in the Halifax region and municipal employees. The next section shows the main points from these talks. This plan will guide the municipality's accessibility until 2027.

Recommendations from the 2024 Public Accessibility Consultations

In the spring of 2024, we completed 10 public consultations in the municipality. The bullet points below are the four key themes:

Transportation



The municipality should make it easier to book Access-A-Bus. We should get more buses and make them run for more time.



Built Environment

The municipality should make sure things do not block the sidewalk. This includes scooters, snow and signs.



Communication

Municipal employees should make information easier to understand. A lot of people do not use the internet, so we should make sure people can call to get information.



Training

Municipal employees need more training to help people with disabilities. This includes bus drivers and people who answer 311 calls.

Employee Feedback

During the *Accessibility Strategy* review we talked with a lot of people who work for the municipality. We asked them what they are doing and what they will do in the future. We did two surveys: one for municipal leaders and one for the employees. We also had an open house where all municipal employees could come and share their ideas. We also met with the Accessibility Strategy Task Force.

Surveys

The survey for municipal leaders had five questions about what the municipality should do to be more accessible. We sent the survey to 19 people and 17 people answered it.

The employees' survey asked questions about the Strategy. The leaders picked employees who work on accessible projects and asked them to do the survey. This survey had 14 questions about what the municipality is doing, including the Strategy. It asked what we should have in the new Strategy. Twenty-five people answered the employees' survey.

Accessibility Strategy Open House

In fall 2023, the Office of Diversity & Inclusion/ANSAIO had an open house at City Hall for all municipal employees. They put up poster boards with different ideas around the room. Over 400 employees put ideas for the new Strategy on these boards. They came up with 24 ideas.

Accessibility Strategy Task Force Consultations

In winter 2024, the Accessibility Advisor met with the Accessibility Strategy Task Force. They talked about ideas for making the Halifax region more accessible. They asked these questions:

- Is this idea still important for the future needs of our municipality?
- Is this idea easy to do?
- Should we add any new ideas to match what municipal employees are doing?

- What part of accessibility, like buildings or sidewalks, is missing from these ideas?

This helped them understand what needs to be done to make the municipality better for everyone.

Findings

Municipal employees thought a lot of the ideas in the old strategy should be in the new one too. We made a lot of improvements, but we could not finish all the recommendations. Municipal employees said we should focus on housing, training and community. We made a report on everything we learned in the surveys and the open house.



Accessibility Strategy

Recommendations & Timeline

The *2025-2028 Accessibility Strategy* has 30 ideas to make the municipality better for everyone. These ideas are separated into three groups based on how long they will take to do. Short-term ideas will take one year. Medium-term ideas will take two years. Long-term ideas will take three years.



Transportation & Transportation Infrastructure

Short Term

- Make a survey to ask people how well the accessible services are working.
- Share information with different groups about clearing snow for people with disabilities.
- Look at the rules for who can use Access-A-Bus and see if they need to change.

Medium Term

- Set up a website where people can book Access-A-Bus rides.
- Share information with newcomers and immigrants on how to use Access-A-Bus.
- Change municipal rules to make sure paths for walking are accessible.

Long Term

- Share information with people about where accessible parking spots are.
- Check all bus shelters to find any problems and suggest ways to fix them.
- Make a campaign to tell people how to safely park and ride e-scooters.

- Change the municipality's design rules (Municipal Design Guidelines) to make buildings and places more accessible.

Built Environment



Medium Term

- Make sure construction sites have clear signs. This will make them safer for people trying to move around them.

Long Term

- Make sure future buildings follow rules (CSA B651-23) to be as accessible as possible. They should be built to get a Gold Level from the Rick Hansen Foundation. This level means the building is very accessible.
- Make existing buildings follow rules (CSA B651-18) so they are as accessible as possible.
- Look at up to 100 buildings, parks, playgrounds and trails to see how we can make them accessible.
- Make sure park paths, playgrounds, beaches and sports areas are as accessible as they can be.
- Improve up to 25 bus stops to make sure they follow accessible rules. The bus stops should have space for a ramp so people can get on the bus from the sidewalk.

Information & Communications



Short Term

- Give municipal employees access to a guide that helps them write in plain language.

Medium Term

- Create design rules for making documents that everyone can understand.

Long Term

- Give municipal employees more training on how to help people with disabilities.
- Make a plan to make our municipal website more accessible. The websites should follow the WCAG 2.2 rules.
- Look into and set up new ways to make 311 easier to use for everyone. This might mean adding live chat.

Goods & Services



Long Term

- Get more gym equipment that everyone can use. This means buying new equipment or replacing old equipment in municipally owned and operated gyms. Also, make rules for what kind of gym equipment is good for everyone.
- Include 10 per cent more people at summer inclusion programs over the next three years.
- Measure how much support we give to people at programs in the fall, winter and spring over the next three years. This includes swimming.

Employment



Short Term

- Make a clear process so all employees know how to ask for accommodation if they need it.
- Teach hiring managers about the rules (Duty to Accommodate) for accommodating workers with disabilities.

Long Term

- Find out how many people say they have a disability when they apply for a job and compare it to how many of them get hired.

- Make a plan to encourage students with disabilities to apply for work placements.
- Make sure job descriptions and postings are easy to understand and accessible. Make rules so all future job postings are accessible.
- Work with up to nine groups that help people with disabilities find jobs.