

Plain Text 2025-2028 Accessibility Strategy

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HALIFAX

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Welcome & CAO Message

This Strategy represents an important step in our commitment to becoming a more accessible region. In alignment with the provincial Accessibility Act, it outlines our approach to identifying, removing and preventing barriers for persons with disabilities.

Accessibility means giving people of all abilities equal opportunity to take part. It is a collective responsibility that must be considered in all aspects of our work. This includes our workplaces, parks, recreation facilities, transit system, streets and sidewalks, and in all municipal programs and services.

As an organization, we're working diligently to create more inclusive spaces and address gaps through the action items outlined in this Strategy. We report annually on our progress and will continue to evolve over time as we learn and improve.

Through conscious planning and effort – and with this Strategy as our guide – we commit to reducing barriers and fostering an inclusive region for all.



Cathie O'Toole

Chief Administrative Officer

Halifax Regional Municipality

Executive Summary

Accessibility is an issue which concerns Nova Scotians of all ages, both with and without disabilities. Disability is a broad term of self-identification for many people, describing a variety of needs. With Nova Scotia having the highest rates of disability across Canada, action is needed to improve accessibility.

Nova Scotia was the third province to enact accessibility legislation and, in alignment with the Provincial Government, the Halifax Regional Municipality (the municipality) created the Accessibility Strategy, which was approved by

Regional Council in May 2021. Although there have been important steps taken in the built environment, transportation and recreation; both the public and municipal business units have identified key areas for improvement and future focus. As required by the Accessibility Act, the municipality reviews and updates the Accessibility Strategy every three years. This is the first revised version of the Accessibility Strategy.

The 2025-2028 Accessibility Strategy outlines 30 recommendations for improving accessibility and representation for individuals with disabilities. The recommendations are to be implemented over a three-year period, as prescribed by the Accessibility Act. We will publish annual updates outlining our progress on meeting the recommendations within the Strategy.

Individuals with Disabilities

As an organization, the municipality is fortunate to have representation from various ethnicities, cultures and backgrounds – including individuals with disabilities.

The word “disability” has a broad definition: a physical, mental, intellectual, learning or sensory impairment that, in interaction with a barrier, hinders an individual’s participation in society. The municipality uses the term “persons with disabilities” in accordance with the Nova Scotia Accessibility Directorate. We recognize that many individuals prefer the term “disabled”. Persons with disabilities use diverse terms to describe their identities and this language is regularly changing and evolving.

It is also important to understand accessibility through an intersectional lens. Intersectionality refers to the ways in which individuals’ experiences are shaped by intersecting aspects of their identity, including gender and race, such that one aspect of an individuals’ identity cannot be understood in isolation from another. In adopting this approach, we can better recognize and address the barriers facing individuals in our communities.

Disabilities in Nova Scotia

According to the Canadian Survey on Disability 2022, approximately 37.9 per cent of Nova Scotians over the age of 15 have a disability. Nova Scotia has the highest provincial population of individuals with disabilities, with the Canadian average being 27 per cent. This survey does not include individuals 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, the Province of Nova Scotia conducted public consultations on the creation of a Nova Scotia Persons with Disabilities Act. The Accessibility Act was passed in April 2017, resulting in Nova Scotia becoming the third Canadian province to adopt accessibility legislation.



Although the Act only prescribes the creation of an Accessibility Advisory Committee and an accessibility plan per city or municipality, the accessibility legislation is to be followed by the enactment of standards related to six key areas:

1. Built Environment
2. Education
3. Employment
4. Goods & Services
5. Information & Communication
6. Public Transportation & Transportation Infrastructure

The Province of Nova Scotia is set to release the Built Environment Accessibility Standard. An Employment Accessibility Standard and a Goods and Services Accessibility Standard are under development. Once the standards are released, municipalities have three years to comply with the standard requirements.

A Vision for the 2025-2028 Accessibility Strategy

The vision of this document is to help unite the public and the municipality in a common goal; to increase accessibility in the municipality. Every resident should feel that they are a valued member of the community. By valuing diversity and inclusion, we can work towards eliminating barriers to create a more inclusive and accessible municipality for everyone. As we work towards a more accessible municipality, we must continue to make improvements in all areas, including transportation, employment and infrastructure.

Two key values in drafting this Strategy were representation and accountability. We drew insight from community members through public consultation, to ensure that recommendations within the strategy reflected the needs of the community. In collaboration with municipal business units,

we were able to draft recommendations that were actionable and measurable, and thus more accountable to community partners.

Accessibility Strategy

This Strategy aligns with five of the six categories outlined in the Nova Scotia Accessibility Act: Public Transportation & Transportation Infrastructure, Built Environment, Information & Communications, Goods & Services and Employment. It also takes into consideration the community consultations that were held in early 2024, as well as detailed input from business units on their current plans for accessibility and areas for improvement.

A key goal is to reduce or remove barriers, whether they be systemic, attitudinal or structural. As such, the Strategy focuses on key areas in improving how individuals with disabilities interact with the municipality. The Strategy supports the Office of Diversity & Inclusion/African Nova Scotian Affairs Integration Office (ANSAIO)'s mission: "to remove barriers and create opportunities for the full participation of all Halifax residents and municipal employees."

We want to acknowledge the contributions that led to this updated 2025-2028 Accessibility Strategy, including the disability community, members of the Accessibility Strategy Task Force, other municipal staff and the municipality's Accessibility Advisory Committee.

The 2025-2028 Accessibility Strategy contains 30 recommendations, which are implemented by the Accessibility Strategy Task Force, an internal committee responsible for actioning the recommendations set out in the Strategy.

Accessibility Strategy: Our Progress

Over the past three years, we've made progress toward improving accessibility in our region. Annual updates were made to Regional Council each year since the Accessibility Strategy's approval in 2021. The most

recent update report is available on the Accessibility Strategy page on halifax.ca

Below are some highlights of our achievements so far:

- Extra Care Taxi, an accessible taxi service, was introduced in July 2022. Currently there is a fleet of 10 taxis in the Halifax region.
- A new, all-inclusive JumpStart playground was built at the George Dixon Community Centre in the north end of Halifax.
- A new public pool with accessible features at the Halifax Common was constructed and officially opened in 2023. The pool has accessible universal changerooms and offers adaptive equipment such as a pool lift and aquatic wheelchair. The pool has been awarded Rick Hansen Foundation Accessibility Gold Certification™ (RHFAC).
- In 2023, a major renovation of the Woodside Ferry Terminal was completed. Accessible features were incorporated throughout the facility, including single-stall all-gender washrooms and two accessible barrier-free washrooms. The Woodside Ferry Terminal is the first Halifax Transit facility to meet the municipality's new Standards for Universal Access to Municipal Facilities.
- Public Works installed over 1,700 Tactile Walking Surface Indicators (TWSIs).
- Regional Council has passed a motion that all properties created during the Cogswell District Redevelopment Project are required to achieve Rick Hansen Foundation Accessibility Gold Certification™ (RHFAC). This is the first project in Canada of its nature working towards this level of certification.
- We updated the Halifax.ca website to feature the Accessibility tab more prominently. The tab includes relevant accessibility information, including municipal services and recreation programs.

2024 Accessibility Strategy Review

As per the Accessibility Act, all prescribed public sector bodies must update their accessibility plan every three years. The Halifax Regional Municipality was due to update the Accessibility Strategy in 2024.

The municipality took a multi-faceted approach to determine what updates should be made to the Accessibility Strategy. From 2023-2024, the municipality reviewed progress on the Accessibility Strategy thus far and consulted with community members and business units. Highlights from the consultation sessions are outlined in the following section. The 2025-2028 Accessibility Strategy serves as a guiding framework to improve accessibility in the Halifax Regional Municipality until the end of 2027.

Recommendations from the 2024 Public Accessibility Consultations

In the spring of 2024, we completed 10 public consultations in the municipality. Summarized below are four key themes that came from the Halifax Accessibility Strategy Public Consultations: Final Report.

- Transportation: Public transportation is not accessible for many people. The municipality should take steps to improve Access-A-Bus services, including booking services, hours of operation and number of vehicles.
- Built Environment: The municipality should make sidewalks more accessible by lowering the impact of physical objects (e.g. scooters and signage), as well as snow.
- Communication: Municipal employees need to consider accessibility (e.g. screen reader usage) when creating digital materials. Non-digital services such as phone lines should remain available where possible.
- Training: Municipal employees, particularly transit operators and 311 customer contact centre agents, need more training about accessibility and people with disabilities.

Business Unit Consultations

During the 2023-24 review of the municipality's Accessibility Strategy, business units were extensively consulted on their current accessible initiatives and future plans. Steps taken to consult business units included two surveys: one for municipal leadership and one for employees, an open house for all municipal staff and individual meetings with the Accessibility Strategy Task Force.

Surveys

The purpose of the leadership survey was to obtain high-level feedback about the Accessibility Strategy and municipal accessibility needs from directors and executive directors. Five questions collected information about municipal accessibility priorities, resource needs and considerations for future recommendations. Out of 19 distributed surveys, a total of 17 responses were collected.

The purpose of the employee survey was to obtain feedback about the Accessibility Strategy recommendations from municipal employees. This survey was sent to employees who were identified by leadership as working on accessibility initiatives in the municipality. Fourteen questions collected information about: beliefs around the municipality's progress on accessibility initiatives, challenges to implementing Accessibility Strategy recommendations, relevance of the recommendations for the 2025-2028 Accessibility Strategy, possible future recommendations, and municipal accessibility priorities. A total of 25 responses were collected from the employee survey.

Accessibility Strategy Open House

In the fall of 2023, the Office of Diversity & Inclusion/ANSAIO held an open house event for all municipal staff at City Hall. Poster boards with each recommendation were placed around the room; staff were invited to apply stickers to those they felt were still relevant to the 2025-2028 Accessibility Strategy. Staff also had the opportunity to provide written feedback at each poster board station. In total, 409 stickers were placed on poster boards across 24 recommendations.



Accessibility Strategy Task Force Consultations

The Accessibility Advisor met with the Accessibility Strategy Task Force in the winter of 2024. The current Accessibility Strategy recommendations were reviewed, and feedback was collected from the following questions:

- Is this recommendation still relevant to the future accessibility needs of the municipality?
- Is this recommendation practical to implement?
- Any recommendations that could be added to align with business unit initiatives?
- What aspect of accessibility [within a category, e.g. built environment] is missing from these recommendations?

Findings

Overall, municipal employees felt that the current recommendations are still relevant for the updated Accessibility Strategy. Although staff noted accessibility improvements made over the past three years, resource and lack of staffing capacity was cited as a challenge to implementing the recommendations. Considerations for future new recommendations relate to housing, additional training and connecting with community.

Survey and open house results were compiled into a thematic analysis in the What We Heard: Internal Consultations for the 2024 Accessibility Strategy Update Report.

Accessibility Strategy Recommendations & Timeline

There are 30 recommendations included in the 2025-2028 Accessibility Strategy. These recommendations are broken down into three timeframes: short-term (one-year), medium-term (two-year) and long-term (three-year).

Transportation & Transportation Infrastructure

1. Procure and implement an online system for booking Access-A-Bus within the Halifax region. (Medium Term)

2. Develop a passenger survey to assess the effectiveness of accessible services. (Short Term)
3. Increase public awareness of accessible parking spaces within the region. (Long Term)
4. Increase targeted public awareness about snow removal for the disability community through distribution of information circulars to different groups. (Short Term)
5. Review the eligibility criteria for using Access-A-Bus. (Short Term)
6. Audit accessibility of all transit shelters to identify any physical barriers and make recommendations for their removal. (Long Term)
7. Develop a newcomers and immigrants Access-A-Bus education campaign that focuses on how to apply for, book and use Access-A-Bus. (Medium Term)
8. Create a public awareness campaign about e-scooters, addressing parking and rider safety. (Long Term)
9. Update the Municipal Design Guidelines CSA standard B-651 2023 (to be revised when Provincial regulations tied to the Accessibility Act are finalized) for accessibility in the built environment. (Long Term)
10. Update municipal policy/standards documentation for CSA standard B-651 2023 (i.e. the HRM Temporary Workplace Traffic Control Manual Supplement, transportation capital works tender specifications and the Construction Site Management Administrative Order) for accessible pedestrian paths. (Medium Term)

Built Environment

11. Apply CSA B651-23 standards for future municipal infrastructure to the greatest extent possible. Buildings will be designed and constructed to meet Rick Hansen Foundation Accessibility Certification™ (RHFAC) Gold Certified level. (Long Term)

12. Apply CSA B651-18 standards for major renewal to current municipal infrastructure to the greatest extent possible. (Long Term)
13. Audit up to 100 buildings, public facilities, recreation parks/playgrounds and trails to assess when repairs or upgrades are needed to maintain accessibility. (Long Term)
14. Ensure that park walkways and equipment for parks (playgrounds, beaches, sport courts, playing fields, etc.) and recreational facilities are accessible for individuals with disabilities to the greatest extent possible. (Long Term)
15. Complete a legal and cross-jurisdictional review of municipally mandated traffic/temporary worksite control signage within Canada (and internationally where appropriate) to improve safety for pedestrian and other non-motor vehicle road users. (Medium Term)
16. Upgrade up to 25 bus stops within the urban transit service boundary to ensure they follow accessible standards, where the ramp can be deployed; the bus stop has a concrete landing pad (minimum size 1.5 m x 2.5 m) with access to a sidewalk. (Long Term)

Information & Communications

17. Increase training for municipal employees on how to serve/accommodate persons with disabilities. (Long Term)
18. Develop Accessible Design Guidelines used by Corporate Communications for production of marketing materials accessible to individuals with disabilities. (Medium Term)
19. Conduct an assessment and build an action plan that enables the municipal internet and intranet websites and web content to achieve Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.2 (Minimum Level AA) conformity. (Long Term)

20. Provide employees with access to the Corporate Communications Writing & Style Guide, which includes standards for plain language. (Short Term)
21. Conduct research and implement alternative channels such as live chat to enhance digital accessibility with 311 service. (Long Term)

Goods & Services

22. Increase the amount of accessible gym equipment, either by purchasing new equipment or replacing existing equipment across municipally operated facilities. Create internal guidelines for accessible gym equipment in municipally owned and/or operated recreation facilities to support this recommendation. (Long & Short Term)
23. Increase the capacity by 10 per cent over three years in summer recreation inclusion programs. (Long Term)
24. Establish a baseline and measure growth of inclusion support offered in fall/winter/spring recreation programs (including Aquatics programs) over the next three years. (Long Term)

Employment

25. Collect data on the number of candidates who choose to self-identify, at the time of application, as having a disability versus the number of candidates hired who self-identify as having a disability. (Long Term)
26. Develop and promote a process so that all employees are aware of how to request an accommodation. (Short Term)
27. Develop corporate training which educates hiring managers about the Duty to Accommodate Policy. (Short Term)
28. Develop a process within Human Resources to encourage students with disabilities to apply for work placements. (Long Term)



29. Establish guidelines to assist with reviewing job descriptions and postings from an accessibility lens and implement these guidelines into the staffing and job description process on a go-forward basis. (Short & Long Term)
30. Complete up to nine engagements with groups that support individuals with disabilities seeking employment. (Long Term)

Glossary

Accessibility Act: Also known as Bill 59, the Nova Scotian legislation passed in April 2017, which aims to make the province inclusive and barrier-free by 2030.

Accessibility Advisory Board: A board which was established under the Accessibility Act that works to address barriers in the province for individuals with disabilities. Under the Act, the majority of board members must be persons with disabilities.

Accessibility Advisory Committee: A municipal committee consisting of residents and Council members, which advises and assists with municipal policies, programs and services for persons with disabilities.

Accessible Gym Equipment: Equipment that is designed to accommodate individuals with and without disabilities.

Accommodations: Modifications which have been made to facilities, objects, environments or systems that enable persons with disabilities to be on an equal level to other individuals.

CSA B651-18 & B651-23: A set of standards, released by the Canadian Standards Association (CSA), which outlines a set of technical recommended requirements for accessible design within built environments including sidewalks, buildings, signposts, etc.

Construction Site Management Administrative Order: Specifies the requirement for a Nova Scotia licensed engineer to prepare a Construction Management Plan to mitigate disruptions as well as setting a minimum standard for work within or immediately adjacent to the public right-of-way or public facilities.

Disability: A physical, mental, intellectual, learning, or sensory impairment, including an episodic disability that, in interaction with a barrier, hinders an individual's full and effective participation in society. It is important to note that there are varying definitions of disability. Persons with disabilities use diverse terms to describe their identities and language is always changing and evolving.



Duty to Accommodate Policy: The Duty to Accommodate Policy reinforces the municipality's commitment to fostering an inclusive workplace that is free from employment discrimination in a manner consistent with its legal obligations under the Nova Scotia Human Rights Act.

Municipal Design Guidelines: Sets guidelines to provide consistency in design and construction practices among developers, consultants and contractors. These specifications are used as the minimum standards to be met in the design of streets, drainage, street trees, lighting and associated municipal infrastructure.

Municipal Infrastructure: Municipal infrastructure includes municipal owned/occupied facilities or leased premises, streets, sidewalks, parks, playgrounds, buses and parking lots.

Plain Language: Ensuring that writing is clear, concise, well-organized and able to be properly understood by a diverse group of individuals, regardless of their intellectual or educational backgrounds.

Rick Hansen Foundation Accessibility Certification™: A rating system provided by the Rick Hansen Foundation (RHF) which uses trained professionals to evaluate the meaningful access of commercial, institutional, and multiunit residential buildings and sites. Rick Hansen Foundation Accessibility Certification™ (RHFAC) is recognized Canada-wide.

Systemic Barriers: Obstacles that exclude groups or communities of people from full participation in, and the benefits of, social, economic and political life. They may be hidden or unintentional but are built into the way society works. Existing policies, practices and procedures, as well as assumptions and stereotypes, reinforce them.

Tactile Walking Surface Indicators: A system of textured ground surface indicators found on footpaths, stairs, bus stations platforms and more to assist pedestrians who are visual impaired.

Temporary Workplace Traffic Control Manual Supplement: Provides additional requirements for work on municipal right-of-way and supports applications of the Nova Scotia Traffic Control Manual for Temporary Work Sites.

Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.2: Guidelines which outline recommendations for making web content more accessible to a wide range of individuals with disabilities including blindness, low vision, deafness, hearing loss, etc. Recommendations include easily read fonts, simpler layout for website content and making all functionality available from a keyboard.