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Item No. 15.1.3

Halifax Regional Council
February 11, 2025

TO: Mayor Fillmore and Members of Halifax Regional Council

SUBMITTED BY: Cathie O'Toole, Chief Administrative Officer

DATE: January 9, 2025

SUBJECT: 2025-2028 Accessibility Strategy

ORIGIN

In 2017, the Province of Nova Scotia passed the *Accessibility Act*. The Act recognizes accessibility as a human right and sets a goal of increasing accessibility in Nova Scotia by 2030. The Act prescribes public sector bodies such as municipalities, post-secondary educational institutions, and Crown corporations to update their accessibility plan every three years.

May 18, 2021 Halifax Regional Council Item 11.1.6:

MOVED by Councillor Deagle Gammon, seconded by Councillor Mancini

THAT Halifax Regional Council:

1. Adopt the Accessibility Strategy as set out in Attachment 1 of the staff report dated April 19, 2021;
2. Direct the Chief Administrative Officer to carry out the actions contained in the Accessibility Strategy as part of the multi-year budgeting and business planning process; and
3. Request that the Chief Administrative Officer provide annual progress reports on the implementation of the Accessibility Strategy to Regional Council.

MOTION PUT AND PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Halifax Regional Municipality has had the Accessibility Strategy in place for three years. As per the Accessibility Act, municipalities must update their plans every three years. The 2025-2028 Accessibility Strategy is a revised plan, including 30 recommendations, with some previously included in the original Accessibility Strategy, as well as some new recommendations that were drafted through input from internal and public consultations, as well as the Accessibility Strategy Task Force. The 2025-2028 Accessibility Strategy focuses on how we can improve accessibility within HRM, focusing on five key focus areas: Transportation & Transportation Infrastructure, Built Environment, Information & Communications, Goods & Services and Employment. Within these five focus areas, there are 30 recommendations, each to be completed prior to the next update in three years.

RECOMMENDATIONS ON PAGE 2

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Halifax Regional Council:

1. Repeal the Accessibility Strategy and adopt the revised 2025-2028 Accessibility Strategy as set out in Attachment 1 of this report, subject to budgetary availability and approval;
2. Direct the Chief Administrative Officer to include the recommendations contained in the Accessibility Strategy in the proposed 25/26 budget and as part of the budget and business planning process in each year required as per the strategy; and
3. Direct the Chief Administrative Officer to provide annual progress reports on the implementation of the Accessibility Strategy to Halifax Regional Council.

BACKGROUND

In May 2021, Regional Council approved the following motion:

1. Adopt the Accessibility Strategy;
2. Direct the Chief Administrative Officer to carry out the actions contained in the Accessibility Strategy as part of the multi-year budgeting and business planning process; and
3. Request that the Chief Administrative Officer provide annual progress reports on the implementation of the Accessibility Strategy to Regional Council.

Following the approval of the Accessibility Strategy by Regional Council, the Office of Diversity and Inclusion/ANSAIO formed the Accessibility Strategy Task Force. The Task Force is comprised of municipal staff representing all business units, and the goal of the Task Force is to oversee the implementation of the Accessibility Strategy recommendations.

Since the adoption of the Accessibility Strategy, annual update reports were sent to Regional Council in May of each year, totaling three update reports.

DISCUSSION

The Accessibility Strategy consists of 30 recommendations. The recommendations are situated under five categories: Public Transportation and Transportation Infrastructure, Built Environment, Information & Communication, and Goods & Services, and Employment. The revised Accessibility Strategy sets out to achieve the recommendations within a three-year timeframe.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The recommendations outlined in the table below have new costs that have been included in the proposed 25/26 budget.

Recommendation	Business Unit	Description	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28
23	Parks & Recreation	Recurring increase in program funding each year for next 3 years	\$ 21,000	\$ 21,000	\$ 21,000
26	Human Resources	One-time consulting	\$ 10,000	\$ -	\$ -
		Total	\$ 31,000	\$ 21,000	\$ 21,000

All other recommendations are expected to be able to be completed with existing operating, existing project budgets or within the proposed 4-year capital plan with a number of the project budgets listed below:

- Accessibility – HRM Facilities (implementing Rick Hansen standards)
- Bus Stop Accessibility/Improvements
- Paratransit Technology
- 311 Contact Centre Telephony Accessibility Enhancements
- Park Recapitalization
- Park Development New
- Regional/Wilderness Park Development
- Shoreline Improvements/Water Access

Recommendations that are found to have funding requirements outside of what has been outlined in this report due to fluctuations in estimates or better understanding of the requirements will be brought forward for consideration in future budget and business plans or with annual progress reports.

RISK CONSIDERATION

Considering the process adopted in the revision of the Accessibility Strategy including internal consultations and external community engagements, the realization that this Accessibility Strategy is being revised in alignment with Provincial regulations, risks associated with not accepting the proposed strategy, particularly reputational and non-compliance with provincial legislation, may exceed any associated risks with accepting the recommendations.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Internal consultations were conducted in Fall 2023, and community engagements were conducted throughout Spring 2024. The Office of Diversity & Inclusion/ANSAIO consulted employees and leadership across business units about the Accessibility Strategy through the distribution of two surveys (one for employees and one for leadership), and an open house event was held for all municipal staff. The aim of the leadership survey was to obtain high-level feedback about implementing accessibility initiatives in the municipality, whereas the employee survey gathered more detailed feedback specific to the Accessibility Strategy. Feedback was compiled into a What We Heard: Internal Consultations for the 2024 Accessibility Strategy Update report (Attachment 2). The report details municipal staff feedback around the need for wording changes of recommendations or omission due to recommendation completion or lack of relevance. Considerations for future new recommendations relate to housing, additional training and connecting with community.

An external facilitator was hired to host a series of 10 engagement sessions (6 in-person, 4 virtual) from April to May with HRM citizens, which brought in nearly 100 participants. Three of the ten sessions were catered to specific communities in HRM (newcomers, African Nova Scotians, and the Indigenous community). From those engagements, four themes emerged:

- 1) Public transportation in Halifax is not accessible for many people. HRM should take steps to improve Access-A-Bus services, including booking services, hours of operation, and number of vehicles.
- 2) HRM should make sidewalks more accessible by mitigating the impact of physical objects (e.g., scooters and signage), as well as snow.
- 3) HRM staff 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 so that those who cannot access digital materials are still able to utilize said resources.
- 4) HRM employees, particularly transit and 311 operators, need more training about accessibility and people with disabilities.

Following the engagements, a report (Attachment 3) was written to summarize the results of the engagements and the feedback that was received.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

No environmental implications were identified.

ALTERNATIVES

The Halifax Regional Council:

1. Refuse to adopt the revised Accessibility Strategy. This is not recommended as the Nova Scotia *Accessibility Act* requires all municipalities to update their accessibility plan every three years.

LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY

Accessibility Act, SNS 2017, c 2:

39 (1) Every public sector body shall prepare and make publicly available an accessibility plan within one year of the coming into force of this Act.

(2) A municipality, university or organization shall prepare and make publicly available an accessibility plan within one year of being prescribed as a public sector body.

...

42 A public sector body shall update its accessibility plan every three years and make it publicly available.

Halifax Regional Municipality Charter, SNS 2008, c 39:

34 (1) The Chief Administrative Officer is the head of the administrative branch of the government of the Municipality and is responsible to the Council for the proper administration of the affairs of the Municipality in accordance with the by-laws of the Municipality and the policies adopted by the Council.

...

(3) The Council shall provide direction on the administration, plans, policies and programs of the Municipality to the Chief Administrative Officer.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1: 2025-2028 Accessibility Strategy

Attachment 2: What We Heard: Internal Consultations for the 2024 Accessibility Strategy Update

Attachment 3: Halifax Accessibility Strategy Public Consultations: Final Report

A copy of this report can be obtained online at [halifax.ca](https://www.halifax.ca) or by contacting the Office of the Municipal Clerk at 902.490.4210.

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2025–2028 Accessibility Strategy

Creating an inclusive environment for individuals with disabilities within the Halifax Regional Municipality

Office of Diversity & Inclusion/ANSAIO
November 2024



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”.¹ 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.



¹ Government of Canada. (2024). *A Way with words and images: Guide for communicating with and about persons with disabilities.* canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/disability/arc/words-images.html

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.²

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

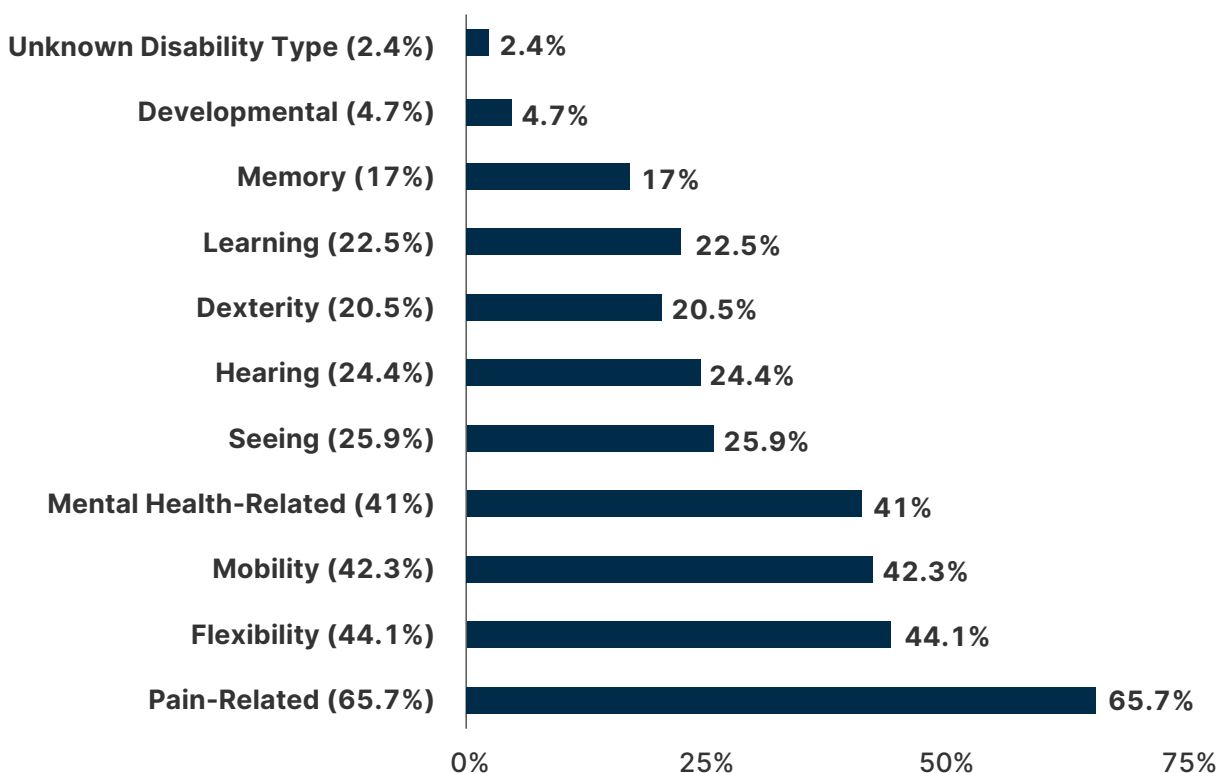


Figure 1. Prevalence of Disability Type in Nova Scotia from the 2022 Canadian Survey on Disability

² Statistics Canada (2022). Canadian survey of disabilities (CSD). 23.statcan.gc.ca/imdb/p2SV.pl?Function=getSurvey&SDDS=3251

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.³

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:



Built Environment



Goods & Services



Education



Information & Communication



Employment



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.

³Department of Justice (2018). *Access by design 2030: Achieving an accessible Nova Scotia*.
novascotia.ca/accessibility/access-by-design/



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.



Removing systemic barriers and creating opportunities for the full participation of all Halifax residents and municipal employees.

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 (Attachment 3)⁴.



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.

⁴ Office of Diversity and Inclusion (2024) Halifax Accessibility Strategy Final Report. Halifax: Halifax Regional Municipality

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* (Attachment 2).



Accessibility Strategy Recommendations

TRANSPORTATION & TRANSPORTATION INFRASTRUCTURE



1. Procure and implement an online system for booking Access-A-Bus within the Halifax region.
2. Develop a passenger survey to assess the effectiveness of accessible services.
3. Increase public awareness of accessible parking spaces within the region.
4. Increase targeted public awareness about snow removal for the disability community through distribution of information circulars to different groups.
5. Review the eligibility criteria for using Access-A-Bus.
6. Audit accessibility of all transit shelters to identify any physical barriers and make recommendations for their removal.
7. Develop a newcomers and immigrants Access-A-Bus education campaign that focuses on how to apply for, book and use Access-A-Bus.
8. Create a public awareness campaign about e-scooters, addressing parking and rider safety.
9. Update the *Municipal Design Guidelines CSA standard B-561 2023* (to be revised when Provincial regulations tied to the *Accessibility Act* are finalized) for accessibility in the built environment.
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.

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.
12. Apply CSA B651-18 standards for major renewal to current municipal infrastructure to the greatest extent possible.
13. Audit up to 100 buildings, public facilities, recreational parks/playgrounds and trails to assess when repairs or upgrades are needed to maintain accessibility.
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.
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.
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.

INFORMATION & COMMUNICATIONS



17. Increase training for municipal employees on how to serve/accommodate persons with disabilities.
18. Develop Accessible Design Guidelines used by Corporate Communications for production of marketing materials accessible to individuals with disabilities.
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.
20. Provide employees with access to the Corporate Communications Writing & Style Guide, which includes standards for plain language.
21. Conduct research and implement alternative channels such as live chat to enhance digital accessibility with 311 service.

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.
23. Increase the capacity by 10 per cent over three years in summer recreation inclusion programs.
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.

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.
26. Develop and promote a process so that all employees are aware of how to request an accommodation.
27. Develop corporate training which educates hiring managers about the *Duty to Accommodate Policy*.
28. Develop a process within Human Resources to encourage students with disabilities to apply for work placements.
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.
30. Complete up to nine engagements with groups that support individuals with disabilities seeking employment.

Recommendation 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).

Recommendation	Timeline
1. Procure and implement an online system for booking Access-A-Bus within the Halifax region.	Medium
2. Develop a passenger survey to assess the effectiveness of accessible services.	Short
3. Increase public awareness of accessible parking spaces within the region.	Long
4. Increase targeted public awareness about snow removal for the disability community through distribution of information circulars to different groups.	Short
5. Review the eligibility criteria for using Access-A-Bus.	Short
6. Audit accessibility of all transit shelters to identify any physical barriers and make recommendations for their removal.	Long
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
8. Create a public awareness campaign about e-scooters, addressing parking and rider safety.	Long
9. Update the <i>Municipal Design Guidelines CSA standard B-561 2023</i> (to be revised when Provincial regulations tied to the <i>Accessibility Act</i> are finalized) for accessibility in the built environment.	Long
10. Update municipal policy/standards documentation for CSA standard B-651 2023 (i.e. the <i>HRM Temporary Workplace Traffic Control Manual Supplement</i> , transportation capital works tender specifications and the <i>Construction Site Management Administrative Order</i>) for accessible pedestrian paths.	Medium
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
12. Apply CSA B651-18 standards for major renewal to current municipal infrastructure to the greatest extent possible.	Long
13. Audit up to 100 buildings, public facilities, recreational parks/ playgrounds and trails to assess when repairs or upgrades are needed to maintain accessibility.	Long

Recommendation	Timeline
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
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
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
17. Increase training for municipal employees on how to serve/accommodate persons with disabilities.	Long
18. Develop Accessible Design Guidelines used by Corporate Communications for production of marketing materials accessible to individuals with disabilities.	Medium
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
20. Provide employees with access to the Corporate Communications Writing & Style Guide, which includes standards for plain language.	Short
21. Conduct research and implement alternative channels such as live chat to enhance digital accessibility with 311 service.	Long
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
23. Increase the capacity by 10 per cent over three years in summer recreation inclusion programs.	Long
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
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

Recommendation	Timeline
26. Develop and promote a process so that all employees are aware of how to request an accommodation.	Short
27. Develop corporate training which educates hiring managers about the <i>Duty to Accommodate Policy</i> .	Short
28. Develop a process within Human Resources to encourage students with disabilities to apply for work placements.	Long
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
30. Complete up to nine engagements with groups that support individuals with disabilities seeking employment.	Long



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 multi-unit 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.



2025–2028 Accessibility Strategy

Appendices



HALIFAX

Appendix A:

Contacts & Community Organizations

Appendix A: Contacts & Community Organizations

Organization	Contact Information
Autism Nova Scotia	info@autismns.ca 902-446-4995 autismnovascotia.ca
Alzheimer Society Nova Scotia	alzheimer@asns.ca 902-422-7961 alzheimer.ca
Arthritis Society Atlantic Region	info@ns.arthritis.ca 902-429-7025 arthritis.ca
Brain Injury Association of Nova Scotia	info@braininjuryns.com 902-422-5000 braininjuryns.com
Canadian National Institute for the Blind	info@cnib.ca 902-453-1480 cnib.ca
Canadian Paraplegic Association (Nova Scotia)	halifax@sci-ns.ca 1-902-423-1277 thespine.ca
Canadian Mental Health Association	cmhahal@ns.alianzinc.ca 902-455-5445 cmhahalifaxdartmouth.ca
Caregivers Nova Scotia	Info@caregiversns.org 1-877-488-7390 caregiversns.org
Cystic Fibrosis Canada Atlantic Office	atlanticregion@cysticfibrosis.ca 647-797-5811 cysticfibrosis.ca
Easter Seals Nova Scotia	joannebernard@easterseals.ns.ca 902-453-6000 ext. 222 easterseals.ns.ca

Epilepsy Association of the Maritimes	info@epilepsymaritimes.org 902-429-2633 epilepsymaritimes.org
Halifax Association for Community Living	halifaxcommunityliving@gmail.com 902-414-9452 halifaxacl.com
Halifax NS Down Syndrome Society	info@halifaxnsdss.ca 1-800-883-5608 (Canadian Down Syndrome Society) halifaxnsdss.ca
Immigrant Services Association of Nova Scotia	Info@isans.ca 902-423-3607 isans.ca
Inclusion NS	inform@inclusionns.ca 1-844-469-1174 inclusionns.ca
Independent Living Nova Scotia	ilnsadmin@ilns.ca 902-453-0004 ilns.ca
March of Dimes Canada	902-444-1090 marchofdimes.ca
Multiple Sclerosis Society	info@mscanda.ca 1-800-268-7582 mscanada.ca
Nova Scotia League for Equal Opportunities	info@nsleo.com 902-455-6942 nsleo.com
Society of Deaf and Hard of Hearing Nova Scotia	1-902-488-5457 sdhhns.org
Special Olympics Nova Scotia	902-429-2266 specialolympicsns.ca
YWCA Halifax	s.pineda@ywcahalifax.com ywcahalifax.com/

Appendix B:

Employment Organizations



HALIFAX

Appendix B:

Employment Organizations

Some organizations have more experience with supporting individuals with disabilities, but all are mandated to assist with employment services for all citizens.

Organization	Contact Information
Building Futures	contact@buildfutures.ca 902-865-1797 buildfutures.ca
Dartmouth Adult Services Centre	info@dasc-ns.ca 902-468-6606 dasc-ns.ca
Job Junction	contact@jobjunction.ca 902-455-9675 jobjunction.ca
LakeCity Works	info@lakecityworks.ca 902-465-5000 lakecityworks.ca
Neil Squire Society	ns.info@neilsquire.ca 902-240-1538 neilsquire.ca
Nova Scotia Works	employmentopportunitiespartnership.ca/
Prescott Group	info@prescottgroup.ca 902-454-7387 prescottgroup.ca
reachAbility	info@reachability.org 902-429-5878 reachability.org
Ready, Willing, & Able	lcarter@autismns.ca readywillingable.ca
TEAM Work Cooperative	(902) 422-8900 teamworkcooperative.ca
YMCA of Greater Halifax and Dartmouth	ymcahfx.ca/contactus



What We Heard:

Internal Consultations for the 2024 Accessibility Strategy Update

Prepared by:

Melissa Myers
Office of Diversity & Inclusion/ANSAIO
December 2023



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Background

The work of the Halifax Regional Municipality has been guided by the Accessibility Strategy since it was approved by Halifax Regional Council in May 2021. As prescribed by the provincial *Accessibility Act*, the municipality is required to update the Accessibility Strategy every three years, with the next update taking place by the end of 2024. To help inform this update, the Office of Diversity & Inclusion/ANSAIO (D&I/ANSAIO) conducted internal consultations with municipal employees and leadership throughout fall 2023. Consultation included:

- a digital survey targeting directors;
- a digital survey targeting employees;
- an open-house event in November 2023 for all municipal employees to learn more and share their thoughts on the Accessibility Strategy; and
- a review of strategy action items by the Accessibility Strategy Task Force, a group comprised of subject-matter experts from across municipal business units (BUs) who are directly involved in the implementation of respective action items.

The feedback from each consultation is summarized below.

Directors and Executive Directors Survey Results

Overview

The purpose of the directors and executive directors survey ([Appendix A](#)) was to receive high-level feedback on the Accessibility Strategy, accessibility initiatives and implementation barriers within the Halifax Regional Municipality. The survey was open from October 3 to November 3, 2023. The following feedback was gathered from 17 directors and executive directors across 12 BUs who completed the survey.



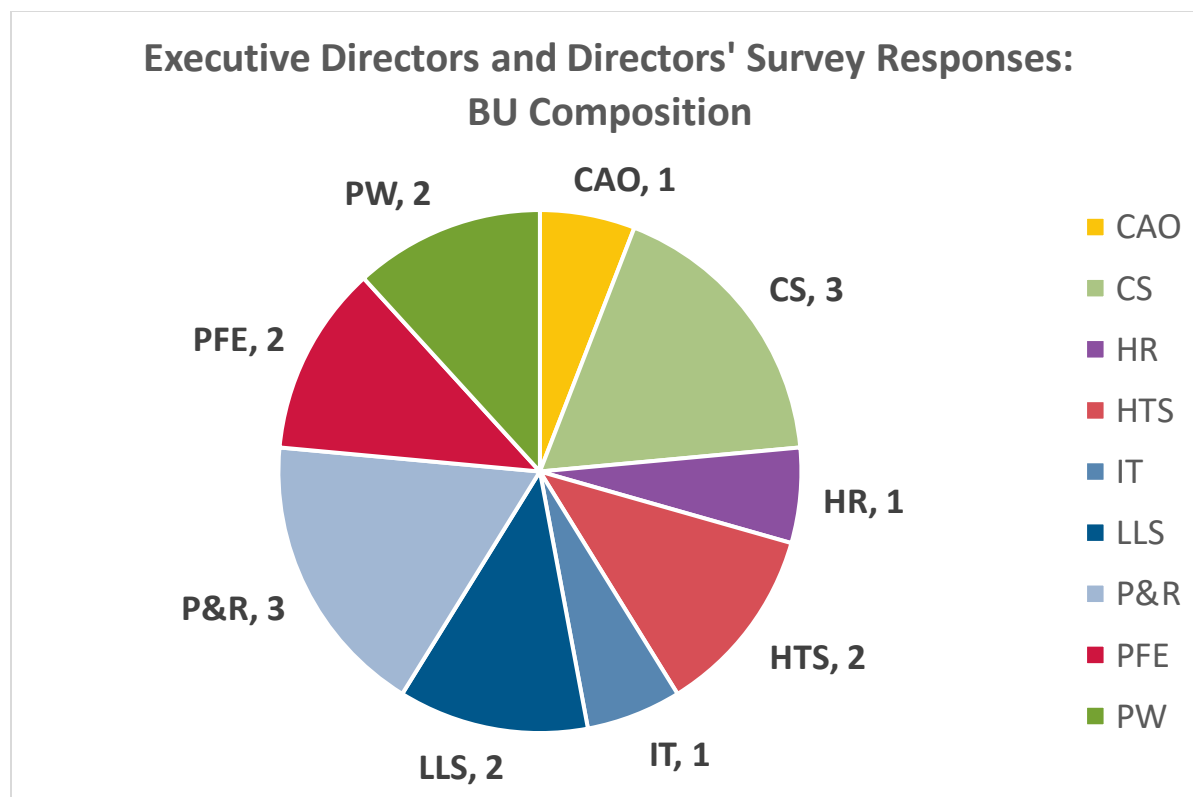


Image Description: A pie chart displaying the composition of BU responses from the director and executive director survey. The amounts are Chief Administrative Office (CAO), 1; Community Safety (CS), 3; Human Resources (HR), 1; Halifax Transit Services (HTS), 2; Information Technology (IT), 1; Legal & Legislative Services (LLS), 2; Parks and Recreation (P&R), 3; Property, Fleet and Environment (PFE), 2; Public Works (PW), 2.

Findings

Current priorities

Directors and executive directors were asked about the top accessibility priorities for their BU. The initiatives that were identified fell under several categories in the strategy, including the built environment, information and communications and employment.

Accessibility priorities in the built environment pertained to interior and exterior built forms, including facilities, playgrounds, streetscapes and bus



stops. One response indicated their focus was on increasing the accessibility of aging facilities. Notably, accessible spaces for community engagement was mentioned as a top priority. One submission emphasized that accessible housing should be a priority; specifically, the accessibility of the upcoming tiny home building initiative.

- *“Accessible facilities where many aging facilities are not accessible.”*
- *“As we explore public safety in all its many facets, we need it to be accessible and safe. A safe experience or option is not acceptable if it’s not accessible. I know the housing team is working on tiny homes etc., with the province. Will they be accessible? Will we choose not to participate if they are not accessible? Will we take a stand?”*

Accessibility priorities pertaining to information and communication related to both our online presence and through printed materials. Specifically, the accessibility of our communications channels, including halifax.ca, was mentioned. The availability of translated materials, both online and in printed form, was identified. Another priority related to better understanding where specialized equipment and software are needed within the municipality. Emergency communications planning was noted as something that should be incorporated as a priority in the updated Accessibility Strategy.

- *“Translated materials for residents, more programming for emergency preparedness for newcomers, and all materials to be translated including online.”*

One submission related to accessible employment. Specifically, the accessibility of job postings was mentioned as a priority, as well as supporting hiring managers to understand the need for accessibility in the hiring process.

Looking ahead

Several key themes were identified when directors and executive directors were polled for identifying their BU needs for implementing the strategy recommendations, and for identifying what items should be included in the

updated strategy. These themes include the need for more financial, employee and training resources.

Financial resources were most significantly noted as a need for successful implementation of recommendations. A key-word search of responses yielded 11 instances of funding-related content. The need for increased funding either pertained specifically to the built environment, the provision of accessible communications, or did not specify the need for funding. Several submissions noted the financial unfeasibility of the recommendations as they are approved by Regional Council.

- *“The SOGR [State of Good Repair] funding does not match the deterioration of existing infrastructure, let alone upgrading that infrastructure. Funding should be secured, specific to increasing accessibility with staff dedicated to this role.”*
- *“Appropriate funding to allow provision of specialized equipment and software.”*
- *“Finances and resource capacity to complete upgrades to row infrastructure.”*
- *“Budget will require up to an additional \$500k per park.”*
- *“... However, to achieve as written/approved in the strategy, resources and costs are not fully estimated, but are likely close to a billion dollars. Both staff and the industry are not capable of achieving this.”*

Training and education were also mentioned as needs to successfully implement strategy recommendations. A key-word search of responses yielded six instances of content related to training and education. Several responses indicated that more industry-specific training is required to understand the wide scope of accessibility covered within a recommendation.

- *“Education on needs of individuals and where standard-issue computer equipment and/or software do not meet their needs.”*

- *“It would be a benefit if there were internal resources to assist in bridging language barriers.*
- *“Continued training in how to assist in the development of policies that reflect the Accessibility Strategy.”*

Employee resources were also mentioned as a need for successful implementation of strategy recommendations. A key-word search of responses yielded five instances of content pertaining to employee resources. Two aspects of employee resource needs were identified – one pertained to the need for more employees on-the-ground to be able to feasibly complete the work required to reach the 2030 goal; the other pertained to having embedded employee(s) with the appropriate expertise related to BU-specific strategy recommendations.

- *“... Once some recommendations begin activation, there will be demands placed on Corporate Communications that will require increased resources (time, and potentially employees and/ or funding).”*
- *“Ability to contact and work with an Accessibility Advisor.”*
- *“We need a point person that is an expert within PW.”*

Several submissions highlighted notable outliers. It was suggested that accessibility needs to be a “tangible commitment from Executive Leadership.” Although the municipality claims to be committed to accessibility, there is no evidence that it is a core consideration for every initiative; rather, it is an afterthought. It was recommended that accessibility be adopted in a manner that it is embedded within the foundation of every initiative, so that accessibility is woven into projects rather than being considered at the end stage.

- *“I think we need to include [accessibility] in every planning tool, every project scoping tool, every report back to Council... Executive Leaders should bring it up just like we talk about safety. An understanding of accessibility as so much more than physical issues.”*

- *“It is very clear that HRM likes to say it’s accessible, and do a song and dance, but leadership is not committed to it in a way to make it core to what we do and how we do it.”*
- *“The built environment should contain products/applications chosen to create a streetscape considering their long-term impact on accessibility and cost of maintenance. A beautiful streetscape may not be functional from an accessibility mindset over time, even if all the components are there originally.”*

Employee Survey Results

Overview

The purpose of the employee survey ([Appendix B](#)) was to receive detailed feedback on the Accessibility Strategy, accessibility initiatives and implementation barriers within the Halifax Regional Municipality. The survey was open from October 10 to November 10, 2023.

Findings

The survey was shared with 44 employees. The following themes were identified from feedback gathered from the 25 employees who completed the survey.

Summary of general findings

Twenty-five municipal employees from 10 BUs responded to this survey. The graph below shows the BU composition of responses.

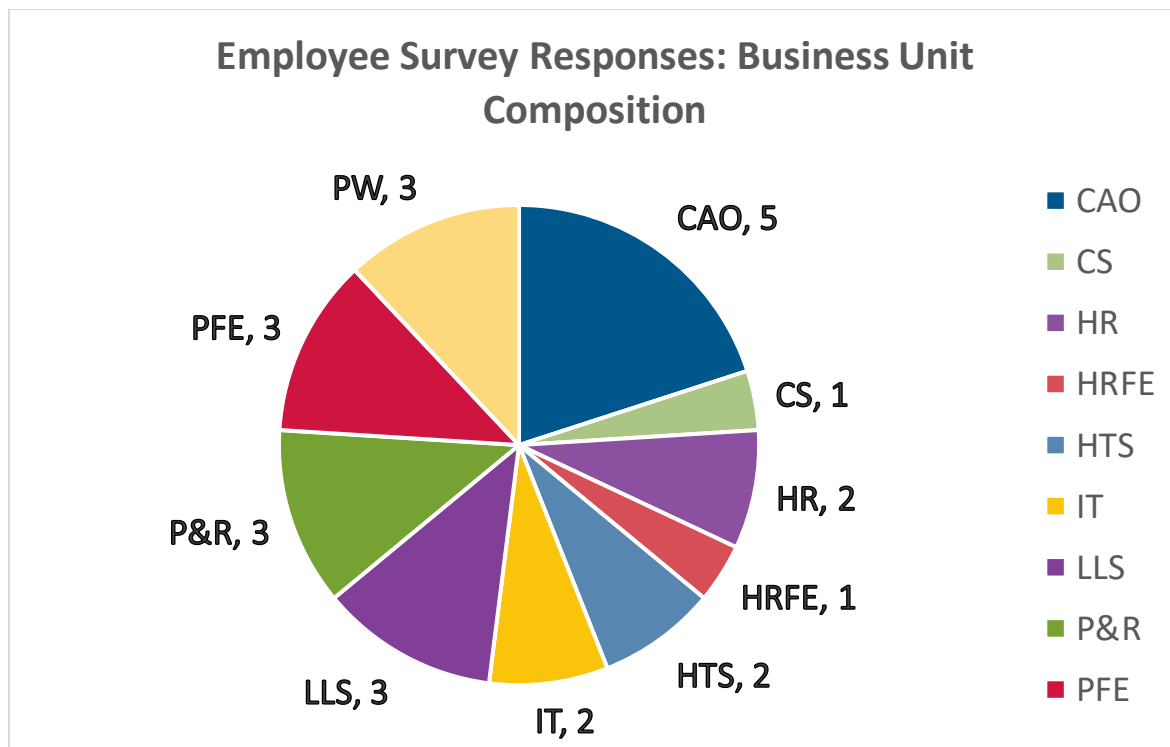


Image Description: A pie chart displaying the BU composition of employee survey responses. Responses include CAO, 5; CS, 1; HR, 2; Halifax Regional Fire & Emergency (HRFE), 1; HTS, 2; IT, 2; LLS, 3; P&R, 3; PFE, 3; PW, 3.

Both leadership (e.g. directors, managers) and employees were identified to be working on accessibility-related initiatives within their BU. The graph below depicts the proportion of responses from leadership and employees.



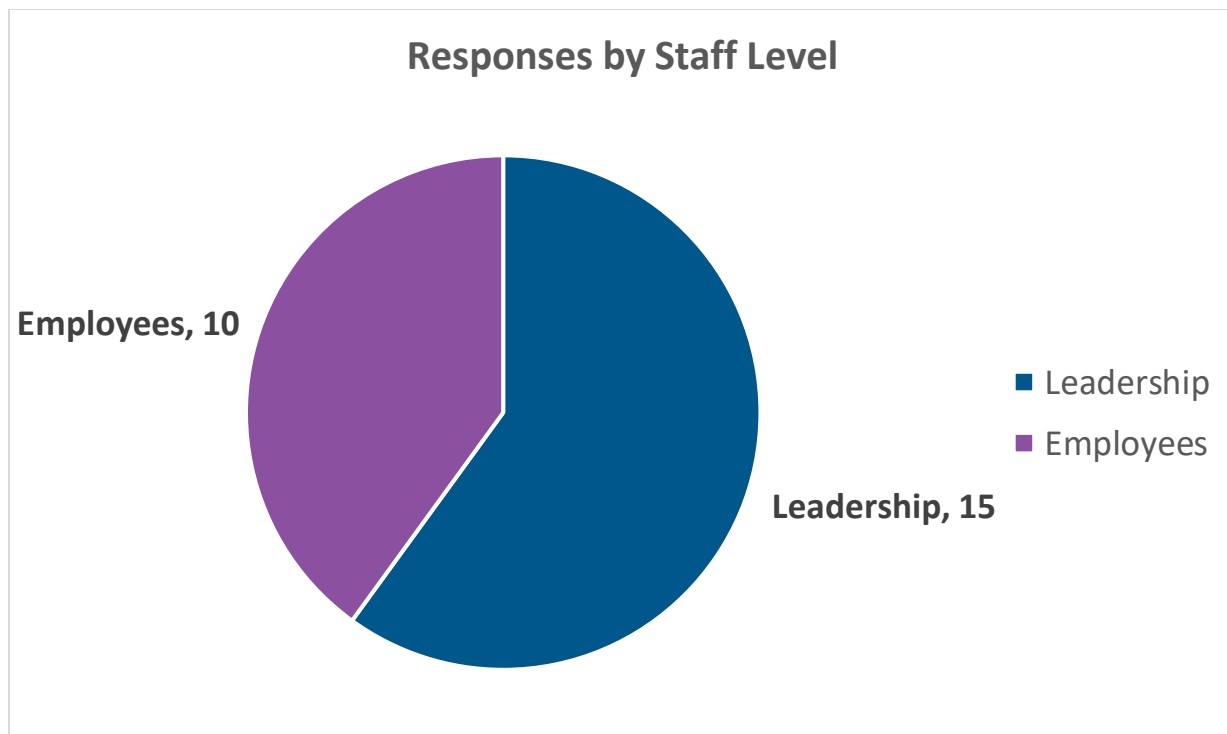


Image Description: A pie chart representing the percent of staff responses broken down by staff level, consisting of: Employees, 40 per cent; Leadership, 60 per cent.

Municipal employees were polled on various aspects of the Accessibility Strategy and accessibility initiatives in the organization. Respondents discussed clear challenges, needs, thoughts on strategy action items and future priorities. Several themes emerged from responses, including resourcing, training and education, consultation and collaboration with expertise and others.

Current State

Employees were asked what we, as a municipality, are doing well and where improvement is needed from an accessibility standpoint. Twenty-two employees responded to this question and several key themes were identified from the responses. Some responses pertained to specific BUs, whereas others reflected more broadly on the organization. Some mixed feedback was received, demonstrating that employees feel differently about the current state of accessibility at the municipality.



Strengths

One or more of the responses mentioned the following general areas where the municipality is excelling in the area of accessibility:

- goal setting
- learning and capacity building
- communicating our progress
- accessibility audits of the built environment
- incorporating accessibility into upcoming projects in the built environment, including street and transportation infrastructure

Although some feedback indicated that the municipality adequately provides accessibility training and conducts accessibility audits, employees also indicated that there are areas where the municipality can improve on these practices.

Where improvements are needed

At least one or more responses mentioned the following areas where HRM needs to improve on with accessibility:

- learning and capacity building
- accessibility auditing
- retrofitting and/or renovating spaces for accessibility
- input and collaboration from subject matter experts
- thinking about the “broader picture” of accessibility
- specific practices within municipal BUs
- time management and accountability
- prioritization of accessibility projects in BU operations

More in-depth descriptions of some feedback are included below.

Learning and capacity building

Although some employees felt that the municipality is doing well with capacity building, others indicated that more is needed in specific areas.

One response indicated that employees need more understanding on what accessibility is, how it impacts people, how to improve it and what individual responsibilities are. Another employee indicated they would like a better understanding of Universal Design Principles. Another response indicated that corporate standards on accessibility are needed to align and guide project managers across divisions.

Accessibility auditing, renovating spaces

Although respondents indicated that the municipality adequately conducts accessibility audits of the built environment, a lack of resources and funding was cited as an area where improvement is needed. Retrofitting and renovating spaces was also mentioned as an area that can only improve with more funding and resources.

Input and collaboration from subject matter experts

Several responses indicated that more input is needed from people who are trained or have lived experience. One response indicated that BUs need to better leverage D&I/ANSAIO's Accessibility Advisor. Two responses suggested that the municipality needs more collaboration and input from residents who are trained in accessibility or have lived experience, especially when decisions are made or new guidelines are adopted.

Specific BU practices

Many responses suggested the need for accessibility improvements to specific BU practices, including:

- accessibility improvements to spaces, including office spaces transit terminals, transit stops and public spaces;
- the municipality's online presence, specifically, navigation, resources on halifax.ca and the accessibility of online Regional Council reports; and

- IT indicated the need to partner with the Accessibility Strategy Task Force to create baseline requirements for hardware and software to allow them to support the accessibility needs of BUs as they arise.

The need for improvement in municipal employment practices related to accessibility was indicated in multiple responses, specifically around hiring, onboarding and supporting employees.

Finally, one respondent mentioned that there has been an increase in media inquiries from residents regarding challenges accessing/using the Access-a-Bus program.

Challenges

Municipal employees were asked about challenges they face with implementing the Accessibility Strategy action items within their BU. Respondents had the opportunity to select any number of items from a list of pre-populated options, including a 'other' option. The 23 responses to this question are displayed in the graph below. In addition to the pre-populated options, employees also indicated a lack of labour/consultant resources, a lack of understanding the needs of community, and a lack of understanding the provincial *Accessibility Act* and associated Accessibility Standards requirements.

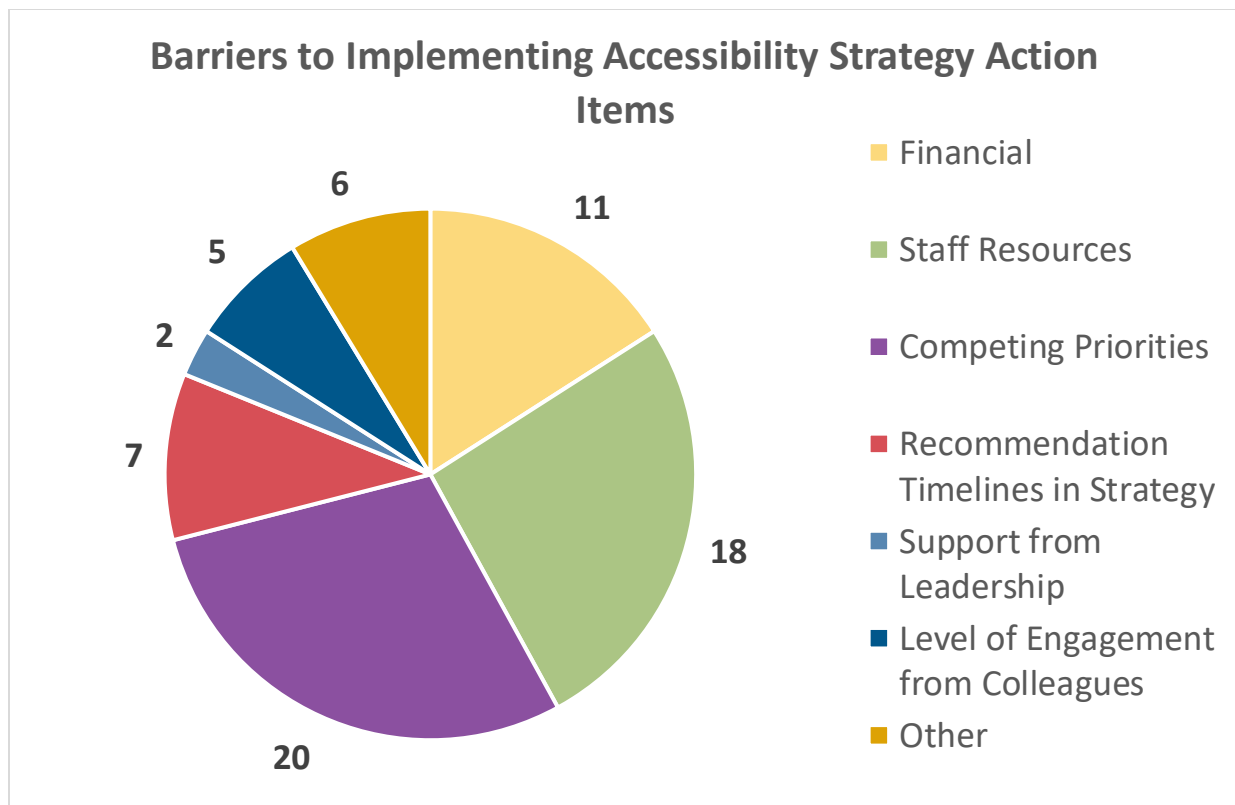


Image Description: A pie chart displaying the breakdown of employee responses to barriers to implementing Accessibility Strategy action items. Responses are as follows: financial, 11; staff resources, 18; competing priorities, 20; recommendation timelines in Accessibility Strategy, 7; support from leadership, 2; level of engagement from colleagues, 5; other, 6.

Employees had the opportunity to describe the challenges they face in more detail. The descriptions are outlined in each section of the graph.

Financial

In the 'Where we need to improve' section, several employees cited a lack of dedicated resources as a reason why the municipality is not further along with certain aspects of accessibility, such as built environment accessibility audits. This factor often appeared in conjunction with employee resources and competing priorities when discussing challenges.



A trend among responses pointed to the action items within the Accessibility Strategy not being costed out as a challenge. Some noted that Regional Council does not have a true picture of the financial magnitude of the action items in the strategy. Another employee cited other strategies, such as *HalifACT*, for their clear and visible costing and how that format benefitted BUs.

Several employees mentioned that acquiring specialist services, such as *Intopia*, for online accessibility checks is expensive. It was emphasized that the current fiscal climate is challenging and many BUs are spread too thin with their budget.

Employee resources

Many respondents cited a lack of available employees as a barrier to implementing action items. It was noted that, although there is motivation to do the work, the available (and knowledgeable) employees are over capacity.

Competing priorities

Competing priorities were identified as the most common challenge employees faced when advancing Accessibility Strategy action items. Employees and funding are spread too thin amongst other priorities. It was also noted that in some circumstances, without a dedicated staff, Accessibility Strategy initiatives become “side-of-the-desk” work that is challenging to balance with other priorities.

- *“Part of the issue of the municipality broadly is competing priorities and/or resources. Staff simply do not have the time to authentically consider accessible solutions if it is not made readily available and easy to complete as part of their regular work.”*

Some employees noted that competing priorities from outside the organization can also pose a challenge. At times, various accessibility advocacy groups may not align with the municipality or supporting institutions on their vision of best practices for accessibility. These

inconsistencies pose a challenge when making decisions on updating infrastructure and may lead to feedback on the inaccessibility of new infrastructure that was intended to be accessible.

- *“There are times when advocate groups are not necessarily in line with representative support institutions, resulting in conflicting “direction” when implementing infrastructure.”*

Recommendation timelines

Several employees noted concerns about the timelines associated with action items set out in the Accessibility Strategy. Some feedback was associated with the unfeasibility of achieving the work within the timeline itself. Other feedback pertained to some of the built environment work already being a part of the BU’s regular maintenance work, but that their timeline differs from what is outlined in the strategy.

Several responses suggested that the Accessibility Strategy action item timelines be re-evaluated, and that relevant employees should be included in that evaluation process so that the work aligns with existing BU goals.

Support from leadership

Two of 23 employees indicated that support from leadership was a challenge faced when implementing strategy action items. One employee identified that although they work on accessibility-related initiatives, they are not always looped in to other accessibility work within their BU, citing that inconsistent communication about progress on accessibility within their BU.

Engagement from colleagues

Five of 23 respondents indicated engagement from colleagues around accessibility was a challenge. One respondent indicated that they would like to see more connection (e.g. being brought to the table) between those actioning the Accessibility Strategy items and those whose work may align or be impacted by the strategy.

Other challenges

Employees noted a lack of technical knowledge, coupled with financial strains of hiring outside support, makes implementation challenging. Others discussed the challenges of increasing accessibility more generally; although they are motivated to make small, everyday changes, even those measures can be too technical for the average person.

Some employees cited a lack of understanding of how the municipal Accessibility Strategy relates to the upcoming release of the provincial Accessibility Standards. Another respondent noted a lack of direction around the requirements outlined in Canadian Standards for Accessibility (CSA) B651-23.

Another factor that makes implementing the action items challenging is the complex nature of determining how to prioritize buildings and infrastructure that require accessibility upgrades. Many factors beyond cost, like the age of the infrastructure, are considered in those decisions.

Finally, ensuring accessibility during short-notice or emergency initiatives was noted as a challenge. For example, some temporary construction zones may be active for less than 24 hours and it is difficult to effectively communicate that within the short timeframe. Communications during emergencies, such as emergency evacuations, was also noted as a challenge.

Training needs

Employees were polled on their awareness of municipal corporate training, *Going from Support to Inclusion*. They also had the opportunity to identify additional training needs that would benefit their ability to implement Accessibility Strategy action items.

All respondents were aware of the corporate accessibility training and identified suggestions for training in the areas of recreation, built environment, communication and others.

Recreation



One respondent suggested that P&R employees would benefit from 'Recreation Programming'-specific accessibility training, citing the unique accessibility considerations associated with supporting both employees with disabilities and participants with disabilities.

Built environment

Several employees noted the need for training on the CSA B651-23 standards. Another employee suggested the need for training on how to incorporate accessibility auditing considerations into their work.

Communications

One respondent indicated that American Sign Language (ASL) training would be beneficial for municipal employees.

Additional suggestions

Several employees noted the benefits of more hands-on training opportunities, especially for those employees whose work directly impacts the how residents with disabilities might navigate the built environment.

- *"[I] would like to see a hands-on multifaceted accessibility training course for all staff who work with [the] public/right of way, [for example:] designer/development/operations/engineers where staff are trained on the difficulties that construction/detours/snow/roadcuts/construction hoardings/etc. causes for residents [with] mobility [devices] to navigate."*

Another employee noted the need for a more accessible approach to training in general:

- *"I think that a more accessible/user-friendly approach to training in general would be helpful (i.e., a learning management system with built in closed-caption software, course tracking and a variety of interactive training approaches for different types of learners)."*

Feedback on Accessibility Strategy action items

Employees were asked which of the strategy's action items were relevant to their BU. They also had the opportunity to provide feedback for future considerations.

Employee responses indicated that many of the action items are relevant to ongoing work in multiple BUs, despite the specific action item typically being actioned by only one or two BUs. This information is useful to determine which BUs may need to be consulted when updating the action items in the Accessibility Strategy. A general overview of BU responses is outlined under each category below, with a more detailed overview in [Appendix C](#).

Two major themes emerged from the employee feedback on the action items across the categories. One theme included the need to reconsider and re-draft the action items to clearly specify goals and desired outcomes. Another theme included the need for consideration of other parallel projects and initiatives within the organization to incorporate respective lenses within those projects. This approach would enrich municipal initiatives and prevent overlapping work.

Transportation

Twenty employees provided responses about action items related to transportation and transportation infrastructure. Employees from three BUs indicated that at least one of the action items was relevant to their BU. This included Community Safety, Halifax Transit and Public Works.

In addition to a need for re-drafting the action items, feedback outlined the need for consideration of all BUs who are either implementing action items or whose work relates to action items. One aspect of this need includes collaboration and consultation with all BUs whose initiatives may relate/parallel with Strategy action items so that work is harmonized and supported across all initiatives. Another aspect relates to the need for a “single source” that multiple BUs and/or divisions can refer to guide infrastructure implementation.

Built environment

Twenty-three employees provided responses about action items related to built environment. Employees from eight BUs indicated that at least one of the action items was relevant to their BU. This included the CAO, CS, HRF&E, HT, L&LS, P&R, PF&E and PW.

One employee noted that other municipal policies that could impact the action items should be considered. For example, the forthcoming Corporate Signage Policy and associated staff report could impact the signage-related action item in the strategy.

Other responses pointed to the need for greater clarification of specific action items:

- *“CSA B651-23 Clarity required for RHFAC - when renovating a floor of a building you may not be able to achieve the Gold Certification because of other base building factors. We have been designing spaces to achieve RHFAC Gold, but determining when and where we apply for the rating would be beneficial.”*

Additional clarity is also needed to help identify accessibility requirements for longer-term projects where accessibility standards may change over the project timeline. It was noted that the built factors of some municipal buildings may prevent a renovation from reaching RHFAC-Gold certification, despite all measures being taken to reach that certification. A need for greater clarification around the approach that should be taken in those circumstances was noted.

Goods and services

Twenty-four employees provided responses about Accessibility Strategy action items that relate to goods and services. Employees from four BUs indicated that at least one of the action items was relevant to their BU. This included HR, L&LS, P&R and PW.

Feedback outlined the need to consider other action items beyond recreation to factor in how other BUs may be able to improve their services and operations.

Information and communication

All 25 employees provided responses about the action items related to information and communications. Employees from all BUs indicated that at least one of the action items was relevant to their BU.

Feedback on these action items aligned with the theme outlined above regarding the need for more specificity in action items.

Employment

Twenty-one employees provided responses for action items related to employment. Employees from all BUs except for CS indicated that at least one of the action items was relevant to their BU.

Feedback emphasized the relevance of these employment-related action items, as all BUs participate in the hiring process. This information is useful when considering who should be involved with future implementation of employment-related action items.

Action items for future consideration

Employees were asked for additional feedback that should be included in the updated Accessibility Strategy. Responses aligned with either built environment, transportation, information and communications or other general responses.

Built environment

Although respondents did not indicate formal action items for consideration, the following general suggestions were made:

- *“Ensure all municipal offices are accessible (including bathrooms, kitchen spaces, meeting rooms, shared spaces, and individual workspaces).”*
- *“Reference to the provincial Built Environment Accessibility Standard [once it is released].”*

Transportation

Although respondents did not indicate formal action items for consideration, the following general suggestion was made:

- *“More focus and resources for the workaround accessible transit terminals and accessible transit stops.”*

Information and communication

The following action item and general suggestion was posed by respondents:

- *“Assess council and committee report templates for accessibility and develop standard templates that are formatted to meet all accessibility requirements (i.e., larger font, accessible headings and font types for screen readers).”*
- *“The guide for municipal promotional materials to make them accessible to individuals with disabilities (2026-2028) should be developed in consultation with Corporate Communications.”*

IT-specific action items were suggested for consideration:

- *“Analyse our digital accessibility maturity - create strategies & action plans, policies that make digital accessibility part of our DNA.”*
- *“Accessibility training sessions to raise awareness, upskill developers and create your own accessibility champions.”*
- *“Talk to the “UX” team about colours, fonts, layout, and interactions.”*
- *“Advise the business analysts about accessibility requirements.”*
- *“Guide the testers as they check the accessibility of the finished product.”*

Other

Although respondents did not indicate formal action items for consideration, the following general suggestions was made:

- *“Need to improve compliance HRM-wide. Consider the easy, every-day items that people could be doing in day to day.”*

- *“All action items need a refresh. Many reflect things BUs are already doing but the goal isn’t quite right.”*
- *“Need more focus on costing and how to move the plan forward.”*
- *“Need BU collaboration (& expertise input) on writing of action items.”*

The municipality’s accessibility priorities

Employees were asked to share their top three accessibility priorities for the next three years. Responses fell under the following categories: planning, education and capacity building, funding and specific priorities that align with the Accessibility Strategy categories.

Planning

One employee indicated a priority to incorporate accessibility into the early planning phase of projects and services.

Education and capacity building

Responses indicated that training and education is an ongoing priority for various BUs. The responses factored in training for employees, leadership and the public. It was specified that training for the public would help them to understand the processes that go into accessibility initiatives. Another response specified that training and capacity building for exterior built assets is a priority.

Funding

Several employees submitted feedback that funding needs to be a priority in the coming years:

- *“Build in funding for some existing & future work to lessen the pressure of competing financial and staff resources.”*
- *“Need a clear direction in the capital budget on % of funds to be allocated to implementing accessibility initiatives within each BU that is new funding. For example, there will be millions required to*



implement accessibility recommendations in parks and some consideration to increasing the capital budget may need to be reviewed.”

- *“Dedicated funding for accessibility projects.”*

Accessibility strategy categories

The following built environment-related priorities were identified by employees:

- *“Assessing how legacy facilities can still achieve RHFAC Gold.”*
- *“Consideration of accessibility at City Hall; mainly, the front door and Council Chambers.”*
- *“Design infrastructure that works for all, including wide enough to enable adequate snow clearing in the winter so that it is accessible.”*
- *“Auditing all existing infrastructure and buildings.”*

No specific employment-related priorities were identified aside from the initiatives in the current action items. One employee emphasized the importance of focusing on the employment-related action items:

- *“Commitment of time, money and staffing resources is essential to move anything forward. Particularly the items under Equitable Employment section are key for us as a municipality as I feel like most of the other recommendations are at least moving forward.”*

The following information and communications-related priorities were identified by employees:

- *“Updating Halifax.ca on where there are accessible exterior assets.”*
- *“Technology advancements (e.g., continue to install Teams rooms).”*
- *“Accessible communications corporately and with residents (including plain language).”*
- *“Ensure residents have the means to positively provide feedback if HRM is not meeting our accessibility responsibilities.”*

The following transportation-related priority was identified by an employee:

- *“Creating a better Transit schedule.”*

Other feedback about the Accessibility Strategy

Employees were asked if they had any other feedback on the Accessibility Strategy. Several themes emerged, including some that were also mentioned in feedback from other questions.

One employee mentioned that the strategy seems to consolidate the current work ongoing in BUs, but that the strategy isn’t “leading” that work. It was also noted that the action items don’t consider the entire breadth of “accessibility.” For example, spaces may be upgraded for physical accessibility but may not factor accessibility for neurodiverse folks. Additional feedback outlined that the Accessibility Strategy does not incorporate other diversity, equity and inclusion factors or consider how they blend in potential action items.

- *“I think there's a risk that we make a space meet Rick Hansen and check a box, but that's only a part of the task, and we need to consider more.”*

Accessibility Strategy Open House

Overview

On November 29, 2023, the Office of Diversity & Inclusion/ANSAIO held an Accessibility Strategy Open House in City Hall. This event was open to all municipal employees.

The event was structured in two components – during the first hour, employees had the opportunity to provide feedback on the Accessibility Strategy; during the last half hour, members from the provincial Accessibility Directorate presented on *Accessibility in the Built Environment*. The room was set up with seven tables around the perimeter with a posterboard listing action items from each category of the Accessibility Strategy (i.e. Transportation & Transportation Infrastructure,



Built Environment, etc.). Action items listed were either in progress or to be implemented in the future. There was one table with printed copies of a feedback survey for employees who opted to submit written feedback. Each posterboard table also had printed prompts for employees to respond to. At least one member from the Accessibility Strategy Task Force sat at each table to assist with questions.

Employees were invited to submit feedback in the following ways:

- review the action items on each posterboard and add a sticker to each item they felt should remain a priority for the 2024 Accessibility Strategy update
- submit written feedback via printed questions at each posterboard station:
 - *Are there any additional items you think should be included in our Accessibility Strategy update for 2024?*
 - *Is there anything you'd like to share with us about the Accessibility Strategy or on accessibility in the region more broadly?*
- submit action item and written feedback via printed surveys

Attendance was not recorded for this event. Overall, there was great uptake across BU and this event was successful at gathering rich information to be considered during the 2024 Accessibility Strategy update. Anecdotally, there was a lot of positive feedback received about the sticker activity.

Overview of Feedback

In total, 409 stickers were placed on posterboards across 24 action items from the following categories: Transportation & Transportation Infrastructure, Built Environment, Goods and Services, Information & Communication, Employment and Other. Responses are outlined in [Appendix D](#).

Transportation & Transportation Infrastructure



There were four action items listed for consideration in this category. A total of 89 stickers were placed across the four action items.

Overall, employees felt all action items must remain a priority to include in the revised Accessibility Strategy. Of the four action items, '*Ensure all bus stops follow accessible standards*' had the highest engagement at 34.8 per cent of the category responses, and 7.6 per cent of all responses.

Built Environment

There were four action items listed for consideration in this category. A total of 84 stickers were placed across the four action items.

Overall, employees felt all action items must remain a priority to include in the revised Accessibility Strategy. Of the four action items, '*Develop review system to audit buildings, public facilities, recreational parks/playgrounds, and trails to assess when repairs or upgrades are needed to maintain accessibility*' had the highest engagement at 33.3 per cent of category responses, and 6.8 per cent of all responses.

Goods and Services

There is presently one action item in this category. Twenty-three employees indicated '*Improve services & operations (e.g., number of recreational support staff) to reflect the demand for accessible recreation*' should remain a priority to include in the Accessibility Strategy update, which comprised 5.6 per cent of all responses.

Information & Communication

There were five action items listed for consideration in this category. A total of 76 stickers were placed across the action items.

Overall, employees felt all action items must remain a priority to include in the revised Accessibility Strategy. Of the five action items, '*Increase training for municipal staff on how to serve/accommodate persons with disabilities*' had the highest engagement at 39.5 per cent of category responses, and 7.3 per cent of all responses.

Employment

There were six action items listed for consideration in this category. A total of 74 stickers were placed across the action items.

Overall, employees felt all action items must remain a priority to include in the revised Accessibility Strategy. Of the six action items, *‘Develop a Workplace Accommodation Policy which outlines a formal process for providing accommodations to job candidates and employees with disabilities.’* had the highest engagement at 31.1 per cent of category responses, and 5.6 per cent of all responses.

Other

There were four action items listed for consideration in this category. A total of 63 stickers were placed across the action items.

Overall, employees felt all action items must remain a priority to include in the revised Accessibility Strategy. Of the four action items, *‘Facilitate relationships between business units and accessibility community stakeholders to improve information sharing regarding municipal services.’* had the highest engagement at 34.9 per cent of category responses, and 5.4 per cent of all responses.

Written Feedback

Eight employees submitted written feedback, which was collected through the prompt questions at each posterboard table or through printed surveys. Detailed responses are listed in [Appendix E](#). Written feedback primarily focused on a need for more connection with the community, rewording of some action items and aspects of the built environment.

Accessibility Strategy Task Force Consultations

Overview

In winter 2024, the Accessibility Advisor met with the Accessibility Strategy Task Force to review the recommendations in the Accessibility Strategy.



Task Force members were asked to consider the following questions while reviewing the recommendations:

- Is this recommendation still relevant to the future accessibility needs of the municipality?
- Is this recommendation feasible to implement?
- Any recommendations that could be added to align with BU initiatives?
- What aspect of accessibility within [category, e.g., Built Environment] is missing from these recommendations?

Findings

Overall, the Task Force found that most recommendations were still relevant and should be included in the updated Accessibility Strategy. Many recommendations will be subject to wording changes for improved clarity, feasibility, alignment with organizational policies and procedures, and alignment with the Nova Scotia Built Environment Standard once it is released. The Accessibility Strategy Task Force Subcommittees (Built Environment, Employment, Information & Communications) will engage in the process of wordsmithing recommendations at the Accessibility Advisor's discretion.

Some recommendations have components that are either complete or in progress. The Task Force suggested dividing them into at least two separate recommendations, with the completed aspects to be omitted from the updated Accessibility Strategy.

The Task Force recommended that several recommendations be omitted from the updated Accessibility Strategy. Reasons for omission include the recommendation being complete, lack of relevance, or the actions associated with that recommendation are now integrated into ongoing practices.

Conclusion

The Accessibility Advisor held comprehensive internal engagements with municipal employees and leadership. Overall, findings from these engagements supported the relevance and inclusion of most recommendations presently in the Accessibility Strategy. Feedback emphasized the need for wording changes of recommendations or omission due to recommendation completion or lack of relevance. Considerations for future new recommendations relate to housing, additional training and connecting with community.



Appendix A: Accessibility Strategy Review: Survey for Directors and Executive Directors

Background

In 2021, Regional Council passed the [Accessibility Strategy](#). The Accessibility Strategy aligns with the provincial [Accessibility Act](#) and contains 30 recommendations that support the goal of achieving an accessible municipality in five key areas: employment, built environment, transportation and transportation infrastructure, information and communications, and goods and services. To support the implementation of these recommendations, an Accessibility Strategy Task Force was created, which is comprised of representatives from various business units. Task Force members engage with specific recommendations depending on the scope of their business unit and required completion date. Currently, the municipality is engaged with 19 recommendations. Since adoption of the Accessibility Strategy in 2021, there have been two annual progress reports ([2022](#) & [2023](#)).

As required by the Accessibility Act, the Accessibility Strategy is due for a review and update in 2024. To support this process, staff are conducting internal business unit engagement in fall 2023, and public engagement in 2024. Upon completion of engagement, feedback will be reviewed to inform the updates made to the Accessibility Strategy. The revised Strategy will then be sent to Regional Council for approval.

The purpose of this survey is to gather your feedback in the following areas:

- Accessibility initiatives and implementation barriers within the Halifax Regional Municipality
- Improvements to the Accessibility Strategy
- Omissions from the Accessibility Strategy

This survey will be open from Tuesday, October 3 to Friday, November 3, 2023.

The survey should take 10-15 minutes to complete.

Responses from this survey will help inform the 2024 update of the Accessibility Strategy.

In accordance with Section 485 of the Municipal Government Act (MGA), any personal information collected in this survey will only be used by municipal staff and, if necessary, individuals and/or organizations under service contract with the Halifax Regional Municipality for purposes relating to processing the Accessibility Strategy Update survey results.

If you have any questions about the collection and use of this personal information, please contact the Access and Privacy Office at 902.943.2148 or privacy@halifax.ca.

Questions

Should you have any questions or wish to engage with the Accessibility Advisor directly, please contact:

Melissa Myers

Accessibility Advisor, Office of Diversity & Inclusion/ANSAIO

myersme@halifax.ca

(902) 292-4574

The following section contains questions about accessibility in the municipality and the Accessibility Strategy. Action items that may impact your business unit are included for your consideration. Please answer the following questions with as much detail as possible.

1. Business unit or organization

- ☐ Chief Administrative Office
- ☐ Community Safety
- ☐ Finance & Asset Management
- ☐ Halifax Regional Fire & Emergency
- ☐ Halifax Transit
- ☐ Human Resources
- ☐ Information Technology (IT)



- Legal & Legislative Services
- Parks & Recreation
- Planning & Development
- Property, Fleet & Environment
- Public Works

- 2. What resources and/or support does your business unit need to implement Accessibility Strategy recommendations?**
- 3. Are there any items you think should be included in our Accessibility Strategy relevant to your business unit?**
- 4. What are your business unit's top accessibility priorities?**
- 5. Please identify the representative(s) responsible for any accessibility initiatives within your business unit. A more detailed survey will be sent to them.**

Thank you for your time and consideration with filling out this questionnaire. Please reach out if you have any questions, concerns, or wish to discuss accessibility in your business unit further.

MELISSA MYERS

ACCESSIBILITY ADVISOR

OFFICE OF DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION/ANSAIO



Appendix B: Accessibility Strategy Review: Employee Survey

Background

In 2021, Regional Council passed the [Accessibility Strategy](#). The Accessibility Strategy aligns with the provincial [Accessibility Act](#) and contains 30 recommendations that support the goal of achieving an accessible municipality in five key areas: employment, built environment, transportation and transportation infrastructure, information and communications, and goods and services. To support the implementation of these recommendations, an Accessibility Strategy Task Force was created, which is comprised of representatives from various business units. Task Force members engage with specific recommendations depending on the scope of their business unit and required completion date. Currently, the municipality is engaged with 19 recommendations. Since adoption of the Accessibility Strategy in 2021, there have been two annual progress reports ([2022](#) & [2023](#)).

As required by the Accessibility Act, the Accessibility Strategy is due for a review and update in 2024. To support this process, staff are conducting internal business unit engagement in fall 2023, and public engagement in 2024. Upon completion of engagement, feedback will be reviewed to inform the updates made to the Accessibility Strategy. The revised Strategy will then be sent to Regional Council for approval.

The purpose of this survey is to gather your feedback in the following areas:

- Accessibility initiatives and implementation barriers within the Halifax Regional Municipality
- Improvements to the Accessibility Strategy
- Omissions from the Accessibility Strategy

This survey will be open from Tuesday, October 10 to Friday, November 10, 2023. The survey should take 10-15 minutes to complete.

Responses from this survey will help inform the 2024 update of the Accessibility Strategy.

In accordance with Section 485 of the Municipal Government Act (MGA), any personal information collected in this survey will only be used by municipal staff and, if necessary, individuals and/or organizations under service contract with the Halifax Regional Municipality for purposes relating to processing the Accessibility Strategy Update survey results.

If you have any questions about the collection and use of this personal information, please contact the Access and Privacy Office at 902.943.2148 or privacy@halifax.ca.

Questions

Should you have any questions or wish to engage with the Accessibility Advisor directly, please contact:

Melissa Myers

Accessibility Advisor, Office of Diversity & Inclusion/ANSAIO

myersme@halifax.ca

(902) 292-4574

The following section contains questions about accessibility in the municipality and the Accessibility Strategy. Action items that may impact your business unit are included for your consideration. Please answer the following questions with as much detail as possible.

1. Name

2. Business unit or organization

- ☐ Chief Administrative Office
- ☐ Community Safety
- ☐ Finance & Asset Management



- Halifax Regional Fire & Emergency
- Halifax Transit
- Human Resources
- Information Technology (IT)
- Legal & Legislative Services
- Parks & Recreation
- Planning & Development
- Property, Fleet & Environment
- Public Works

3. Your title and division within your business unit

4. Consider accessibility within various aspects of the municipality (for example, transportation, built environment, employment, communications, etc.). What are we doing well? What do we need to improve on?

5. What challenges do you face with implementing the Accessibility Strategy action items within your business unit? Check all that apply.

- Financial
- Staff resources
- Competing priorities
- Recommendation timelines set out in the Strategy
- Support from leadership
- Level of engagement from colleagues
- Other (please specify)

5a. Please explain any identified challenges in as much detail as possible.

6. Please identify if any of the following action items in the Accessibility Strategy under “Transportation and Transportation Infrastructure” are relevant to initiatives within your business unit (check all that apply):



- Implement Mobile Data Computer Software, online booking, and automatic fare systems to improve Access-a-bus booking service. (2020-2022)
- Develop system for booking accessible transportation within the Halifax region (i.e. accessible taxis, Access-A-Bus, regular bus, ferries) (2024-2030)
- Develop a passenger survey regarding accessible services to measure success (2022-2024)
- Ensure all bus stops follow accessible standards (e.g., well-maintained shelters) (2020-2030)
- Increase public awareness to the disability community around snow removal (2020-2028)
- Increase number of accessible taxis and/or have an alternative provider for accessible cabs in the Halifax region (2020-2030)

6a. Do you think there is anything else we should be adding, or any new action items?

7. Please identify if any of the below “Built Environment” action items from the Accessibility Strategy are relevant to initiatives within your business unit (check all that apply):

- Use Rick Hansen gold certification and CSA B651-18 standards for future infrastructure in the Halifax region (e.g., Rick Hansen curb cuts, public washrooms, CSA standards for accessible parking spaces) (2020-2030)
- Adopt Rick Hansen gold certification and CSA B651-18 standards for current infrastructure, including street infrastructure, owned by HRM (2020-2030)
- Develop review system to audit buildings, public facilities, recreational parks/playgrounds, and trails to assess when repairs or upgrades are needed to maintain accessibility (2020-2024)
- Ensure that all signage (including new signage templates), walkways, and equipment for beaches, parks, playgrounds, and recreational facilities (e.g., proper gymnasium flooring for para sports) are accessible for individuals with disabilities (2020-2030)



- N/A

7a. Do you think there is anything else we should be adding, or any new action items?

8. Please identify if the below “Goods and Services” action item from the Accessibility Strategy is relevant to initiatives within your business unit (Yes/No):

- Improve services & operations (e.g., number of recreational support staff) to reflect the demand for accessible recreation (2022-2026)
(Yes/No)

8a. Do you think there is anything else we should be adding, or any new action items?

9. Please identify if any of the below “Information and Communication” action items from the Accessibility Strategy are relevant to initiatives within your business unit (check all that apply):

- Increase training for municipal staff (e.g., recreation, fire, police, librarians) on how to serve/accommodate persons with disabilities (2022-2026)
- Develop guide for municipal promotional materials which make them accessible to individuals with disabilities (2026-2028)
- Make the municipal internet and intranet websites and web content conform to the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.1 format (Minimum Level AA- including job postings on Brass Ring and GIS mapping) (2024-2028)
- Ensure plain language and clear format, for all municipal communications (2024-2026)
- Update accessibility page on Halifax.ca to provide information on accessibility in the municipality (2024-2026)
- N/A



9a. Do you think there is anything else we should be adding, or any new action items?

10. Please identify if any of the below “Equitable Employment” action items from the Accessibility Strategy are relevant to initiatives within your business unit (check all that apply):

- ☐ Collect and maintain information from employment equity reports which indicates the number of individuals employed by the municipality who self-identify as having a disability (2020-2022)
- ☐ Establish hiring procedures which requires defining accommodations for individuals with disabilities on job postings within the municipality, including accommodations available through the interview process (e.g., if a scribe is needed, etc.) (2020-2022)
- ☐ Compile internal list of accommodations provided to employees with disabilities (e.g., visual, physical, neurodevelopmental, etc.) (2022-2026)
- ☐ Develop a Workplace Accommodation Policy which outlines a formal process for providing accommodations to job candidates and employees with disabilities. (2022-2026)
- ☐ Develop corporate training which educates hiring managers about workplace accessibility (2024-2028)
- ☐ Establish partnerships with external partners (e.g., universities and colleges) to provide municipal work placements and internships that are available for students with disabilities (2022-2024)
- ☐ Review current hiring practices and ensure that they are providing employment to individuals with disabilities (2024-2028)
- ☐ Develop a procedure to share municipal job postings with agencies who support individuals with disabilities seeking employment (2022-2024)
- ☐ N/A

10a. Do you think there is anything else we should be adding, or any new action items?

11. Are there any additional items you think should be included in our Accessibility Strategy update for 2024?



12. Are you aware of HRM's corporate accessibility training, *Going from Support to Inclusion: Accessibility Training*? (Yes/no)

12a. Are there other accessibility training opportunities you would like to see corporately or within your business unit?

13. From your perspective, what are three top priorities for the municipality to advance accessibility in the next three years?

14. Is there anything else you'd like to share with us about the Accessibility Strategy or on accessibility in the region more broadly?

Thank you for your time and consideration with filling out this questionnaire. Please reach out if you have any questions, concerns, or wish to discuss accessibility in your business unit further.

MELISSA MYERS

ACCESSIBILITY ADVISOR

OFFICE OF DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION/ANSAIO



Appendix C: Action Items Relevant to Initiatives Within Business Units

Transportation	CAO	CS	HRFE	HTS	HR	IT	LLS	P&R	PFE	PW
Implement Mobile Data Computer Software, online booking, and automatic fare systems to improve Access-a-bus booking service.				✓						
Develop system for booking accessible transportation within the Halifax region (i.e. accessible taxis, Access-A-Bus, regular bus, ferries)				✓						
Develop a passenger survey regarding accessible services to measure success		✓		✓						
Ensure all bus stops follow accessible standards (e.g., well-maintained shelters)		✓		✓						✓
Increase public awareness to the disability community around snow removal				✓						✓
Increase number of accessible taxis and/or have an alternative provider for accessible cabs in the Halifax region				✓						





Built Environment	CAO	CS	HRFE	HTS	HR	IT	LLS	P&R	PFE	PW
Use Rick Hansen gold certification and CSA B651-18 standards for future infrastructure in the Halifax region (e.g., Rick Hansen curb cuts, public washrooms, CSA standards for accessible parking spaces) (2020-2030)		✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓
Adopt Rick Hansen gold certification and CSA B651-18 standards for current infrastructure, including street infrastructure, owned by HRM (2020-2030)		✓	✓	✓				✓	✓	✓
Develop review system to audit buildings, public facilities, recreational parks/playgrounds, and trails to assess when repairs or upgrades are needed to maintain accessibility (2020-2024)		✓	✓	✓				✓	✓	
Ensure that all signage (including new signage templates), walkways, and equipment for beaches, parks, playgrounds, and recreational facilities (e.g., proper gymnasium flooring for para sports) are accessible for	✓	✓	✓	✓				✓	✓	



individuals with disabilities (2020-2030)										
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Goods and Services	CAO	CS	HRFE	HTS	HR	IT	LLS	P&R	PFE	PW
Improve services & operations (e.g., number of recreational support staff) to reflect the demand for accessible recreation					✓		✓	✓		✓

Information and Communications	CAO	CS	HRFE	HTS	HR	IT	LLS	P&R	PFE	PW
Increase training for municipal staff (e.g., recreation, fire, police, librarians) on how to serve/accommodate persons with disabilities (2022-2026)	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓



Develop guide for municipal promotional materials which make them accessible to individuals with disabilities (2026-2028)	✓		✓	✓			✓		✓	
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	CAO	CS	HRFE	HTS	HR	IT	LLS	P&R	PFE	PW
Make the municipal internet and intranet websites and web content conform to the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.1 format (Minimum Level AA- including job postings on Brass Ring and GIS mapping) (2024-2028)	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Ensure plain language and clear format, for all municipal communications (2024-2026)	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓



Update accessibility page on Halifax.ca to provide information on accessibility in the municipality (2024-2026)	✓		✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	
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Employment	CAO	CS	HRFE	HTS	HR	IT	LLS	P&R	PFE	PW
Collect and maintain information from employment equity reports which indicates the number of individuals employed by the municipality who self-identify as having a disability (2020-2022)			✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
Establish hiring procedures which requires defining accommodations for individuals with disabilities on job postings within the municipality, including			✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓



accommodations available through the interview process (e.g., if a scribe is needed, etc.) (2020-2022)										
Compile internal list of accommodations provided to employees with disabilities (e.g., visual, physical, neurodevelopmental, etc.) (2022-2026)			✓		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
Develop a Workplace Accommodation Policy which outlines a formal process for providing accommodations to job candidates and employees with disabilities. (2022-2026)			✓		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓

	CAO	CS	HRFE	HTS	HR	IT	LLS	P&R	PFE	PW
Develop corporate training which educates hiring managers about workplace accessibility (2024-2028)	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
Establish partnerships with external partners (e.g., universities and colleges) to provide municipal work placements and internships that are available for students with disabilities (2022-2024)			✓		✓		✓	✓	✓	
Review current hiring practices and ensure that they are providing			✓		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓



employment to individuals with disabilities (2024-2028)										
Develop a procedure to share municipal job postings with agencies who support individuals with disabilities seeking employment (2022-2024)			✓		✓		✓	✓	✓	



Appendix D: Accessibility Strategy Open House Feedback

Transportation & Transportation Infrastructure	Number of Responses	% Response by Category	% Response Overall
Implement Mobile Data Computer Software, online booking, and automatic fare systems to improve Access-a-bus booking service.	18	20.2	4.4
Develop system for booking accessible transportation within the Halifax region (i.e. accessible taxis, Access-A-Bus, regular bus, ferries)	22	24.7	5.4
Develop a passenger survey regarding accessible services to measure success	18	20.2	4.4
Ensure all bus stops follow accessible standards (e.g., well-maintained shelters)	31	34.8	7.6



Built Environment	Number of Responses	% Response by Category	% Response Overall
Use Rick Hansen gold certification and CSA B651-18 standards for future infrastructure in the Halifax region (e.g., Rick Hansen curb cuts, public washrooms, CSA standards for accessible parking spaces) (2020-2030)	19	22.6	4.6
Adopt Rick Hansen gold certification and CSA B651-18 standards for current infrastructure, including street infrastructure, owned by HRM (2020-2030)	18	21.4	4.4
Develop review system to audit buildings, public facilities, recreational parks/playgrounds, and trails to assess when repairs or upgrades are needed to maintain accessibility (2020-2024)	28	33.3	6.8
Ensure that all signage (including new signage templates), walkways, and equipment for beaches, parks, playgrounds, and recreational facilities (e.g., proper gymnasium flooring for para sports) are accessible for individuals with disabilities (2020-2030)	19	22.6	4.6

Goods and Services	Number of Responses	% Response by Category	% Response Overall
Improve services & operations (e.g., number of recreational support staff) to reflect the demand for accessible recreation	23	N/A	5.6



Information and Communications	Number of Responses	% Response by Category	% Response Overall
Increase training for municipal staff (e.g., recreation, fire, police, librarians) on how to serve/accommodate persons with disabilities (2022-2026)	30	39.5	7.3
Develop guide for municipal promotional materials which make them accessible to individuals with disabilities (2026-2028)	12	15.8	2.9
Make the municipal internet and intranet websites and web content conform to the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.1 format (Minimum Level AA- including job postings on Brass Ring and GIS mapping) (2024-2028)	19	25.0	4.6
Ensure plain language and clear format, for all municipal communications (2024-2026)	25	32.9	6.1
Update accessibility page on Halifax.ca to provide information on accessibility in the municipality (2024-2026)	20	26.3	4.9



Employment	Number of Responses	% Response by Category	% Response Overall
Establish hiring procedures which requires defining accommodations for individuals with disabilities on job postings within the municipality, including accommodations available through the interview process (e.g., if a scribe is needed, etc.) (2020-2022)	14	18.9	3.4
Develop a Workplace Accommodation Policy which outlines a formal process for providing accommodations to job candidates and employees with disabilities. (2022-2026)	23	31.1	5.6
Develop corporate training which educates hiring managers about workplace accessibility (2024-2028)	18	24.3	4.4
Establish partnerships with external partners (e.g., universities and colleges) to provide municipal work placements and internships that are available for students with disabilities (2022-2024)	22	29.7	5.4
Review current hiring practices and ensure that they are providing employment to individuals with disabilities (2024-2028)	19	25.7	4.6
Develop a procedure to share municipal job postings with agencies who support individuals with disabilities seeking employment (2022-2024)	15	20.3	3.7



Other	Number of Responses	% Response by Category	% Response Overall
Develop an accessibility policy and procedures to align with the provincial Accessibility Act (2026-2030)	19	30.2	4.6
Develop municipal procedures for accessible business unit consultations with the public (2026-2030)	14	22.2	3.4
Establish dialogue between Accessibility Directorate and the municipality regarding accessibility in the Halifax region and compliance with the provincial Accessibility Act (2020-2030)	8	12.7	2.0
Facilitate relationships between business units and accessibility community stakeholders (e.g., CNIB, Autism Nova Scotia, etc.) to improve information sharing regarding municipal services (2024-2030)	22	34.9	5.4



Appendix E: Accessibility Strategy Open House

Written Feedback

Are there any additional items you think should be included in our Accessibility Strategy update for 2024?

- Accessibility to be factored into all new office builds for HRM staff.
- Some recommendations could be reworded. For example:
 - *“Review current hiring practices and ensure that they are providing employment to individuals with disabilities (2024-2028).”*
 - Might be more effective to say the practices don’t create unnecessary barriers, or ensure equal access to opportunities.
- Regular check-ins with the community/surveys.
- Is Rick Hansen the appropriate/best standard to adopt? How does this compare to US standards & guidelines updated in 2023 such as PROWAG? We buy most products from the US so when it comes to these items there may be more available that fit US guidelines.
- Re: an Action Item: Librarians are not HRM staff – maybe reference Transit instead.
- Communicating accessible standards to community.
- Look at current [Access-a-Bus] AAB booking – is it not working or not accessible?
- Improve bus stop signage to be more clear (improved wayfinding).
- Provide improved wayfinding tools at major hubs (e.g., Scotia Square, as the Cogswell project evolves.)
- Toolkit of marketing/promotional materials for business units to customize to share how they are promoting the Strategy, and/or how they are making their services more accessible.

Is there anything you’d like to share with us about the Accessibility Strategy or on accessibility in the region more broadly?

- Strategy is excellent.



- Where is engineering design & planning dep't? Accessibility is a part of planning, community design, active transportation, design standards. Review systems should be integrated into existing review processes. Jurisdictional scan – Important that we have consistency with other North American cities. Look to the leaders, do not re-invent the wheel.

Do you have any questions about the Accessibility Strategy?

- Is this Strategy posted publicly?





Halifax Accessibility Strategy Public Consultations: Final Report

May 2024



**To the attention of:
Halifax Regional
Municipality,
Office of Diversity,
Inclusion/ANSAIO**

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Introduction

Barrier-free accessibility within society is a fundamental component to inclusion and equitable participation in one's community and municipality. As a municipality that is continually aspiring to make progress in accessibility improvements, Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM) developed an Accessibility Strategy which was approved in May of 2021. To meet the current requirements of the Nova Scotia Accessibility Act, HRM is seeking to update this strategy based on feedback from residents with disabilities in Halifax. HRM engaged with Left Turn Right Turn (LTRT) to help them conduct engagement activities with community members to seek out relevant feedback and develop recommendations for the updated version of the strategy.

This report will provide detailed information about how we conducted the community consultations, a high-level overview of major themes in the feedback we received, and LTRT's recommendations for the next version of the strategy. The appendices that follow this report contain all the feedback that was received through the consultations. These appendices will serve as a record of the specific points that community members raised in the different pillar areas of the Halifax Accessibility Strategy (categorized by the following topics: Public Transportation and Transportation Infrastructure, Built Environment, Goods and Services, Information and Communication, Employment, and other feedback).

Note that throughout this report, we will use the term "residents with disabilities" to refer to the collective group of people whose expertise and opinions we sought during consultation. We have chosen to use this term to reflect Person First Language¹ and to be as inclusive as possible.

Engagement Plan and Methodology

LTRT worked collaboratively with HRM's Accessibility Advisor to collaborate on a consultative approach and the logistics on a series of community engagement sessions. Through these discussions we developed a communications plan that outlined our approach to facilitating sessions, documented the communications materials for the

¹ <https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/accessible-canada-regulations-guidance/consultation/inclusive-language.html#h2.7>

engagements (i.e. handouts, power point etc.), and detailed the logistics of running the sessions, including considerations of accessibility and technology for each of the sessions. The full communication plan and facilitation guide can be found in [Appendix A](#).

LTRT facilitated a total of 10 consultation sessions, four virtual consultations and six in-person consultations. All consultations were held during the period of April 17 to May 2, 2024.

HRM chose the locations for the consultations as well as the dates and times for each location. We ensured that there was a diversity of locations throughout the HRM region as well as diversity of times of day to account for different schedules. Locations, times, and number of people in attendance can be found in the table below:

Location	Time	Attendance
Virtual	April 17, 1-3 pm	21
Alderney Gate	April 17, 6-8 pm	4
Immigration Services Association Nova Scotia	April 18, 6-9 pm	13
Mi'kmaw Native Friendship Centre	April 24, 1-3 pm	6
Halifax Central Library	April 24, 1-3 pm	5
Virtual	April 25, 6-8 pm	8
Virtual	May 1, 1-3 pm	7
AKOMA Bauld Centre	May 1, 6-8 pm	2
Virtual	May 2, 1-3 pm	14
Halifax Central Library	May 2, 6-8 pm	7

We ensured that each location and consultation activities, offered various accessibility features for participants. For in-person sessions, we made sure that the physical locations were physically accessible, and that microphones and sound amplification was used at all times. All in-person and virtual sessions had real time captioning (CART) as well as American Sign Language (ASL) interpreters. Participants were also given the option of providing their feedback in multiple ways, including live, in written paper feedback forms (for in-person sessions), in the virtual platform's chat window (for virtual sessions), or e-mailing their feedback. For one session, at the Immigration Services

Association Nova Scotia (ISAN), a variety of multi-language interpreters were also provided. Participants were welcome to contact us in advance and request additional accommodations, however none did so. Each consultation session was scheduled for two hours, with the exception of the consultation at ISAN, which was scheduled for three hours to account for extra time for translation/interpretation.

Overall responses were collected from 95 participants via virtual, in-person, and through follow up emailed responses. Given the number of consultations sessions offered (10), this is a relatively low participation rate and was lower than what both HRM and LTRT anticipated. LTRT's analysis of why the participation number was low can be found in the [Recommendations for Community Engagement](#) section of this report.

High Level Summary of Feedback

Across the 10 consultations that we completed, residents of HRM shared a variety of feedback, concerns, and suggestions. In this section we provide an overview of the most common feedback we heard and will also highlight some particularly important feedback related to safety and equity. A complete list of feedback/concerns and recommendations that were shared by participants can be found in the [appendices B-G](#) of this report.

Frequently Mentioned Feedback

The most frequent feedback shared by participants across all consultations was related to transportation, transportation infrastructure, and the built environment. The most frequently mentioned concerns are outlined in the following list:

- **Limited or unequal access to Access-A-Bus services:** Many participants mentioned that it can be hard to book a ride, that trips must be booked far in advance, that there are long wait times to get through the phone booking system, and that frequently they are put on a waitlist or not given a ride at all. In some cases, riders are offered a ride to a location, but not to return. Many people also mentioned that the Access-A-Bus service is limited in terms of serviceable locations within HRM as well as time of day restrictions.

- **Objects blocking sidewalks:** Objects blocking the path of travel on city sidewalks was cited frequently. Participants mentioned that temporary construction signage and business advertising (i.e. sandwich boards) were frequently placed on sidewalks or in unexpected locations. Ride-share style scooters (operated by a private business) are frequently left in the middle of sidewalks or otherwise blocking paths of travel. Signs, scooters, and other street furniture that blocks the path of travel on sidewalks can be an inconvenience for mobility device users who may not be able to maneuver around them. These objects in the street can also pose a safety hazard for people who are blind or have low vision and can be a tripping hazard as well.
- **Snow removal is inadequate and slow:** Snow removal was mentioned at many of the consultations. Participants talked about how snow is sometimes not cleared at bus stops, and residents must climb over large snowbanks to board the bus. This is a safety hazard for all riders but can be particularly dangerous for some people with disabilities. Large snowbanks at bus stops would also prevent some mobility device users from boarding the bus at all. Residents also mentioned that snow removal around community mailboxes is often delayed, which can leave some people with disabilities without access to their mail for days at a time. It was also mentioned that in some cases, snow on sidewalks is cleared in such a narrow way that mobility devices cannot traverse through the path. Participants also reacted negatively to the language of the current Accessibility Strategy that focuses on communicating to residents with disabilities about snow removal rather than improving the removal.
- **Concerns that moving to all digital services will exclude some people:** While many participants felt positively toward the adoption of new technologies to improve accessibility, frequent concerns were raised concerning any plans to move towards “online-only” services. Some participants also raised concerns that the current website and applications that are used by the city are not accessible to people who use screen readers, and thus people who are blind are not able to access the technology. Participants generally agreed that having the option to

book Access-A-Bus online is a positive step, but urged the city to make sure that phone-based booking would remain an option. Similarly, many participants shared ideas about how HRM could use app-based technology to improve accessibility (e.g. developing an app that pushes notifications about sidewalk closures), but stressed the importance of having the information available in many ways. This is particularly important when considering newcomers, individuals who do not speak English, seniors, people with disabilities facing barriers to technology, and people who do not have internet or technological access for financial reasons. It is also extremely important to retain non-technology-based options while HRM's current apps or websites are inaccessible to people who use screen readers.

- **City employees need more training about accessibility and people with disabilities:** In general, most participants agreed that more training for city employees would be of benefit. Participants mentioned that they would feel safer and more welcomed participating in recreational activities if there were specially trained staff to assist them. Participants also mentioned that sometimes 311 operators or other city staff could be rude or not understanding of a person's disabilities or needs. It was frequently cited that bus drivers and other conventional transit staff do not know how to properly assist people with disabilities or how to properly secure mobility devices on the buses. Barriers to accessibility on the website and some apps were also cited, implying there may be a need for digital accessibility training. Participants agreed that all city employees should have a basic level of accessibility and disability awareness training and that more targeted training should be applied for certain positions (i.e. transit operators). Participants also encouraged HRM to utilize (and properly compensate) people with disabilities to conduct and lead these trainings.

Important Feedback on Safety and Equity

While all the feedback shared by residents is important, some of the feedback related to safety and equity especially warrants highlighting. The feedback listed in this section was not necessarily the most frequent, and some of it does not have a direct tie to

HRM's Accessibility Strategy. However, due to the sensitive nature of this feedback, it should be highlighted and shared with HRM employees and departments and prioritized appropriately:

- **Transit routes have excluded some communities and activities:** Participants mentioned that some communities (for example, East Preston) have very limited access to transit. Other participants mentioned that bus routes do not take residents to certain recreational destinations, such as beaches and other outdoor activities. This is of particular concern because of the equity of access to transit in the city. Members of certain minority groups (e.g. Black Nova Scotian community) and people with disabilities who are less likely to drive a private vehicle do not have the same access to city amenities as people from the majority group, and this should be highlighted as a concern.
- **Safety concerns with taxis:** Some participants mentioned that they have experienced or heard stories of racist remarks and sexual assault from drivers when travelling in Taxis throughout HRM. This should be investigated.
- **Safety concerns with the conventional transit system:** Many participants reported feeling unsafe on the transit system. Some of these reports were related to more general safety concerns, such as being threatened by other passengers. Participants also mentioned dimly lit bus stops and waiting areas that can pose both a safety and accessibility barrier. A few participants mentioned safety issues specific to being a person with a disability riding on the conventional system. For example, participants mentioned that crowded buses make it difficult to find a seat and bus drivers will not assist a rider unless you are using a wheelchair. Participants also mentioned that drivers do not know how to properly tie down mobility devices on the buses and this could be a major safety concern in the event of a crash.
- **Concerns of being stranded by Access-A-Bus:** Some participants mentioned that they had been stranded by Access-A-Bus and left without a way to travel to their destination. This could sometimes happen because of a booking mix-up, or because the driver is unable to locate the passenger (sometimes because it is

unclear where the passenger is supposed to wait for pick up). It can also happen if a person's mobility equipment breaks or is damaged and then drivers refuse to transport the equipment. We also heard of concerns from people who needed rides in emergency circumstances (e.g. getting home from the hospital after a visit to the emergency room) who are unable to book them because it is not far enough in advance or because the ride needed is outside of Access-A-Bus operation times.

- **Concerns from people who are visually impaired about the increased use of electric vehicles and scooters:** People who are blind or who are visually impaired rely on audio cues in the environment to keep themselves safe. The increasing use of both electric vehicles and electric scooters poses a safety hazard to them because they cannot hear the vehicle approaching or accurately gauge the flow of traffic. Increasing use of hop-on-hop-off electric scooters also poses a safety risk because inexperienced riders drive fast on streets and sidewalks and residents with visual impairments cannot hear them coming.

Analysis and Application to the HRM Accessibility Strategy

The goal of this project was to get feedback from the public to inform the update of HRM's 2024 Accessibility Strategy. The following section of this report will provide LTRT's analysis of what is missing from the strategy as well as our recommendations for future iterations of the strategy. Recommendations stem from suggestions made by participants in the consultations, and from LTRT's experience and expertise in designing accessibility plans and strategies.

Feedback about the Strategy

A consensus among participants was that the action items listed in the strategy would be helpful, however there is skepticism that HRM will accomplish the targets and goals laid out in the strategy. This skepticism seems to stem from resident's perceptions that they have previously or historically provided feedback to the city that was never acted on. Another commonly shared sentiment was that while the current strategy would be helpful (if implemented) it does not go far enough and does not adequately address

some of the major concerns that residents with disabilities have (see next section on [What is Missing from the Strategy](#)).

While many participants had concerns about HRM's ability to operationalize the plans laid out in the strategy, some did have positive feedback about various aspects of the Accessibility Strategy. Positive feedback received about the current strategy is summarized in the following list:

- A proactive system to check and remedy accessibility barriers in parks and outdoor spaces would be far improved over the current complain and response-based system.
- An online booking system for Access-A-Bus would be very helpful, although participants stressed that the system needs to be fully accessible (especially for screen reader users) and to ensure that telephone booking options remain for individuals who face barriers to technology.
- More recreation staff would be helpful, particularly for people who need more specialized access or instruction. Participants stressed that these new hires need to have the right kind of training to be able to properly assist people with disabilities.
- Evaluation of the current hiring system could be useful to identify gaps or barriers for job seekers with disabilities. Participants encouraged HRM to examine where people are dropping out of the system and to interview candidates who did not get hired along with candidates who did.
- A passenger survey could be helpful in identifying additional barriers for transit users. Participants emphasized that the survey should also be distributed to people who don't currently access transit, either due to location, inaccessibility, or because they do not qualify for the Access-A-Bus service.
- Most participants felt that partnering with schools to increase employment or internship opportunities for youth with disabilities was a great idea.

What is Missing from the Strategy

During the consultations, we asked participants if there was anything they felt was missing from the strategy. While a few participants shared some concrete examples of what might be missing, most of the feedback we received was not tied directly to the strategy and was instead related to experiences that people have had living in HRM with a disability. To identify what is currently missing from the strategy, LTRT considered frequently mentioned concerns and barriers from the consultations, in relation to the current action items in the strategy. We used this data, as well as direct suggestions and comments from participants to develop the following list of topics or initiatives that we propose is currently missing from the strategy:

- **Nothing in the current strategy will address the strain on the Access-A-Bus service:** While the strategy currently has some plans to make the Access-A-Bus service easier to book, there is nothing in the current strategy that will address the strain on the system and the perception from residents that there are not enough buses or divers to meet demand. Participants spoke at length about how it can be difficult to book a ride, the challenges with needing to book a week ahead to secure a ride, and shared stories of being put on the waitlist or offered a ride only in one direction. These comments demonstrate that the current system does not have enough resources to adequately meet the needs of HRM residents with disabilities, and there is nothing in the current strategy which addresses this problem.
- **No mention of barriers to travel on sidewalks:** As discussed in the previous section, many of the comments received during consultations were in relation to objects blocking the path of travel on sidewalks and in other public places. These barriers include sandwich boards and other advertising signage from businesses, signage about construction and road closures, electric scooters being abandoned in the path of travel etc. Despite being a topic of concern at most of the consultations nothing in the currently HRM strategy deals with this issue.
- **Education about snow removal does not adequately address the barriers:** Many participants noted that the only mention of snow in the Accessibility

Strategy was related to providing education to residents with disabilities. While education related to all municipal services is important, this education would not address barriers that people face. In particular, there is nothing in the Accessibility Strategy that would improve the speed, quality or consistency of snow removal. This goal garnered the most specific negative attention as participants interpreted it as a way to deny that there is a problem with snow removal.

- **Goods and services section lacks detail or mention of a variety of municipal services:** The Goods and Services section of the Accessibility Strategy lists only one goal, related to increasing service to reflect demand for accessible recreation. This goal, while a positive step, does not provide any details of what the city plans to do. Participants agreed that the one example provided (increasing recreation support staff) would be a positive step, however participants had difficulty imagining other feedback to give us in this section because of the lack of specificity. There is no mention in the strategy of any services outside recreation (for example permitting, ticketing, payment processing, emergency services, 311). This implies to the reader that there are no accessibility barriers in these services or that the city is not interested in addressing those barriers.

Recommendations for Future Iterations of the Accessibility Strategy

Most of the feedback from participants about the Accessibility Strategy was related to how it is written and how HRM will operationalize it, rather than specific comments about the goals or initiatives within it. Participants mentioned that some parts of the strategy were not specific or detailed enough to fully understand what actions HRM will be taking.

Some participants pointed out that the way the Strategy is written would make it difficult to fully evaluate whether HRM was accomplishing its objectives. This was in part because some of the goals are too vague to be measurable. One example of this is the objective listed under Good & Services to: “Improve service & operations to reflect the demand for accessible recreation”. This goal, and HRM’s commitment to it, is

unmeasurable as written. Participants at the consultations expressed that when they see goals written like this, they assume that the city will take no action, as HRM has not committed to any specific goal or action. Residents of the city will not be able to measure whether demand increased or not, or by how much, and therefore will not be able to truly evaluate whether HRM followed through on this commitment from the strategy. The vagueness of the phrasing “improve services & operations” could also mean any number of things. It does not provide HRM with any specific targets to strive towards, any indication of how much improvement is anticipated (e.g. 1%) and does not provide residents with any way to monitor HRM’s progress on this initiative.

Finally, some participants pointed out that they would like to see dates, deadlines, and firm targets set by HRM related to when these initiatives will be started or completed. It should be noted that the HRM Accessibility Strategy does include date ranges for various initiatives, but these dates were not included in the consultation materials on the advice of the HRM project staff. The reason for that decision is that HRM does not consider these firm deadlines or targets. Some participants were confused about how many iterations of this strategy there have been previously and contemplated whether new versions of the strategy had the same initiatives and targets as previous iterations. This led some participants to wonder if the city has taken any actions at all to improve accessibility in the last few years. Having clearly defined goals and timelines or deadlines for when initiatives will start and end, will better help residents monitor the progress of the Accessibility Strategy.

In addition to the feedback we received from the consultations, LTRT considered our experience and expertise in planning and writing accessibility plans and strategies to generate a series of recommendations. These recommendations should be considered when creating a new or updated version of the Accessibility Strategy as they reflect best practices in accessibility planning as well as the opinions and desires of residents of HRM.

Develop Action Items in the Strategy as SMART Goals

SMART goals are Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time Bound.

Employment and Social Development Canada have developed guidance for plans

under the Accessible Canada Act that recommends using SMART goals². By writing the strategy using the framework of a SMART goal, you will be telling residents exactly what action HRM will take, and by when.

For example, rather than stating: “Ensure all bus stops follow accessibility standards” you might have multiple smaller goals such as: “By 2026 all bus stops will have safety lights installed” or “starting in 2025 bus stops will be checked once per month to make sure that there are no accessibility barriers”. By writing goals in this format, HRM will be signalling a specific commitment to the residents of HRM, and those residents in turn will be in a better position to evaluate whether HRM met their goals and targets.

Break Down Larger, Vague Goals into Smaller, Realistic Targets

Many of the initiatives and goals listed in the strategy involve a bold overall vision, but with very little information of how this goal will be achieved. For example, “Increasing public awareness to residents with disabilities around snow removal”. While increased awareness is good, this target as written does not provide any information for how that will happen. Residents are then left to wonder what this means in practice. Will HRM make a social media post once a year about snow removal? Or will HRM staff be going to community events to provide literature and answer questions about snow removal on a regular basis? These are vastly different actions with different levels of effort; however, both could be considered “Increased awareness”.

We would recommend breaking down this goal into smaller, tangible steps that HRM will take. For example: “By the end of 2025 we will develop an accessible handout about snow removal for individuals with disabilities and make it available on the Halifax.ca website” and “By the end of 2026, we will launch a social media campaign about snow removal for people with disabilities” etc.

Only Include Goals and Initiatives that HRM is Committed to Completing and has the Resources Available

Many of the participants at the consultations expressed concerns that HRM will not action the items in this strategy. We can presume that at least part of this skepticism

² <https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/accessible-canada-regulations-guidance/accessibility-plans/section4.html>

comes from the way that the strategy is written. Without clear actions and targets listed in the strategy, residents expressed concerns that the city would be able to avoid putting any resources to the strategy and can choose in the future how, or even if any of these plans get operationalized. Some of the initiatives listed in the strategy seem to be written in a vague way because HRM has not decided what action to take, or because HRM is hesitant to commit to a particular action or assign budget to it.

For example, one of the goals listed under the Information & Communication subheading is to “increase training for municipal staff... on how to serve/accommodate persons with disabilities”. Most participants agreed that this was important, but had follow up questions about the nature, frequency, and quality of that training. Residents also do not know what training staff currently have, and so there will be no way for them to evaluate whether this training has “increased”, “decreased” or “stayed the same” since the publication of the strategy.

Because the strategy does not include any details about how this training will be rolled out, when, or by whom, there is skepticism about whether HRM will do anything at all. HRM could roll out a comprehensive yearly training plan to all employees or ask some employees to complete a one time 10-minute online training. Both actions would technically meet the goal as currently outlined by HRM (i.e. to increase training), but the impact of these two activities would be very different. Residents want to know exactly what will happen and how, and otherwise they assume that HRM will do the bare minimum needed to report back to the community.

We recommend that HRM commits to specific actions, with at least a vague idea of how that work will be resourced, before including the initiatives in the Accessibility Strategy. This may result in a future version of the Accessibility Strategy that has less goals, or smaller, more contained goals, however having a smaller strategy with more specific actions will help increase trust between HRM and residents with disabilities. In LTRT’s experience developing accessibility plans, and consulting people with disabilities about those plans, we have found that people with disabilities would prefer a more “bare bones” plan with specific action items and targets rather than a plan with lofty goals and no roadmap to achieve them. People with disabilities recognize that many initiatives to

improve accessibility require both budgetary and staff resources, and therefore will be skeptical of any plan that has not taken these factors into consideration. In years where the budget for accessibility is extremely tight, residents with disabilities would prefer to see a short list of action items that can be achieved, rather than a plan that does not acknowledge the resource implications needed to complete it. This is key to building trust and confidence. As an example, the staff training goal mentioned above could be broken down into subgoals such as: “In 2025 we will research options for staff training and create a plan for how to train all of our employees”, “Starting in 2026 we will implement once a year training for all employees. This training will be developed and delivered by people with disabilities”.

Develop a Plan to Monitor, Evaluate, and Report on the Strategy

Participants frequently mentioned that they did not trust HRM to take action on the action items listed in the strategy. Additionally, many participants had questions about progress so far, and how they will be able to monitor progress in the future. Based on this feedback, LTRT recommends that HRM develop a strategy for how they will monitor, measure, evaluate and report on progress back to the public. Ensuring that goals are written in such a way to be measurable and time-lined will be of assistance in setting up this monitoring, evaluation and reporting plan. Employment and Social Development Canada has developed guidelines about evaluating and documenting accessibility plans which may be useful to HRM³.

Recommendations for Community Engagement

Throughout the consultations, some participants shared feedback and suggestions for how to conduct consultations in the future. In addition, LTRT and HRM were able to learn some lessons about community engagement in Halifax through the process of this project and conducting these consultations.

As mentioned in the methodology section of this report, the participation in these consultations was lower than anticipated. LTRT hypothesizes that there may be two main reasons for this low attendance: not enough lead of up and lack of trust from the

³ <https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/accessible-canada-regulations-guidance/accessibility-plans/section5.html>

community. Some participants expressed that they would have appreciated more warning and advertising about the consultations in the lead up to them occurring. Many participants seemed to only learn about the consultations at the last minute which implies that other community members never heard about them. Many people with disabilities need ample notice to make arrangements with personal support workers and transportation providers to attend.

We also suspect that a lack of community trust contributed to low participation. Many participants expressed that they felt as though their voices are not being heard and their feedback is not being actioned, which has led many to “give-up” and stop providing feedback to the city. For example, they expressed that the same feedback had been given to HRM repeatedly, with no changes.

Some residents mentioned that they would have preferred to hear more about the progress the city has made. Participants also expressed that they would like more frequent opportunities for consultation and ability to interact with city staff to ask questions and share their concerns and suggestions.

During our time in Halifax, LTRT noticed that residents with disabilities seem highly skeptical of HRM and HRM’s dedication to improving accessibility in the city. While this is a complex issue to tackle and is likely based on historical interactions between the city and the community, improving community consultation practices can help to alleviate this skepticism and divide between the city and its residents. The following list of recommendations include ideas for future iterations of large-scale consultations (such as the ones conducted in this project) as well as ideas to make consultation more frequent and casual.

Advertise Consultation Activities Much Further in Advance

As mentioned previously, attendance at these consultations was lower than expected. There could be a few reasons for this but one of them that was cited was that there was not enough lead-up and advertising time to properly inform the community about the consultation activities. This was further solidified through comments from community members about how they hadn’t heard of the consultations until the last minute. We began advertising these consultations approximately 1 month in advance, but in the

future, we would recommend that advertisement begin at least 3 months in advance and active efforts continue until the time of the consultations.

Create a Detailed and Specific Advertisement Plan

This plan should include timelines for the advertisement, and specific strategies for how to reach the right audiences. This will likely involve attending community events and researching the best ways to find, access, and share information with specific disability communities as well as other groups (i.e. indigenous people with disabilities, newcomers with disabilities etc.). We recommend that this plan be a continuously updated to provide short- and long-term projections on when consultations activities will occur and what types. This will help with ensuring that advertising of the activities can be started long in advance.

Find Opportunities for More Frequent Consultations

Participants expressed that it can feel as though the city organizes consultations, and then residents don't hear anything else for years until the next round of official consultations. This leaves residents feeling disconnected from the activities happening at the city and can leave them feeling like the city is not being honest with them or has something to hide.

We recommend seeking opportunities to hold more frequent consultations activities so that the city can monitor the types of feedback and concerns they are receiving over time, and also as a way of building connection with residents who have disabilities.

Diversify the Types of Consultations Conducted

The organized, pre-planned, and formal consultations that were conducted as part of this project are very useful to help take a "pulse" on the communities' current experiences at one moment in time or garner feedback on a particular topic. However given the effort and resources needed to mount these large-scale consultations, they can only happen infrequently. In addition to holding consultation activities like this at infrequent intervals, we recommend engaging in other styles of consultations that can happen more frequently and in a more informal way.

We recommend instituting a plan for “pop-up” style consultations. In this style of consultation, HRM employees would go to community events or central locations and speak to residents as they come and go.

For example, you might send an HRM employee to an event at a senior’s centre, or to an adapted sports tournament, who can set up a small booth or table and speak to people who are there. Staff could also do this in frequently visited locations that are not disability specific, for example in a library or community centre. The staff could ask certain questions, but also collect suggests and answer questions that residents have. These consultations do not require a large expense, advertising, or any resources other than staff time. Having frequent pop-up consultations of this type will help increase the presence of HRM with the community and will lead to better trust and transparency.

Share Progress with Residents

Some participants expressed that they wanted to hear more from HRM about progress that has been made. This was particularly important for residents who had read earlier versions and iterations of the Accessibility Strategy. Residents expressed that they are just as, if not more, interested in hearing about what the city has done, rather than what it plans to do. This is likely related to the skepticism that the community seems to have about whether HRM will complete the actions from the Strategy or not.

We recommend that each time you conduct consultations, either formal or pop-up style consultations, HRM is prepared to talk about what has been actioned or accomplished recently. This should be included in any presentations, and staff who conduct informal or pop-up conversations should be prepared to answer questions about what has been started and accomplished.

We also recommend that HRM consider holding a public webinar or presentation with residents to report on the results of these consultations and the content of this report. That webinar should focus on decisions that will stem from the feedback received and HRM’s plans for the Accessibility Strategy moving forward.

Conclusion

We commend HRM for engaging in this process and for seeking out feedback from residents and the people who will be impacted most by the Accessibility Strategy. Although community consultations come with many challenges, we learned a lot from residents about their accessibility priorities and about their relationship to the city's Accessibility Strategy and accessibility plans.

We also want to thank the residents of Halifax who took time to attend these consultations and share their feedback. The feedback and concerns that they shared are extremely important for HRM to collect, analyze and consider when designing a Strategy that will directly impact them. We encourage HRM to return frequently to the appendixes of this report, which contain details about all the feedback that was shared with us. This information will be important to guide the next version of the Accessibility Strategy, but it can also serve to help the city identify barriers they may not have been previously aware of. Participants also shared a variety of interesting suggestions for how HRM could improve accessibility in the future, and these suggestions should be consulted whenever new version of the Accessibility Strategy are being drafted.

We hope that the recommendations in this report can provide a roadmap for future iterations of the city's Accessibility Strategy. Although some of the residents of Halifax are skeptical that HRM will accomplish its accessibility goals, LTRT believes that increasing communication with and transparency to the community can begin to repair some of that skepticism. We encourage HRM to continue listening to and learning from the wide breath of experience that is held by residents with disabilities.

Appendix A: Communications Plan

This communications plan was developed before the planning for consultations began and was refined throughout the course of the consultations.

1. Purpose of Engagement

Meaningful, authentic, and accessible public engagement is critical to all diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility work. Public engagement is also at the foundation of the Nova Scotia Accessibility Act (NSAA). Quality engagement will strengthen the outcomes of the resulting Accessibility Strategy and will increase confidence and buy-in for the strategy among marginalized and equity-deserving communities in the Halifax region. Engagement needs to be inclusive of the variety of perspectives of residents with disabilities and provide opportunities for meaningful feedback. To build trust, strengthen confidence, and empower residents through reflective goals, the communication strategy must be purposeful and focused on the objectives of the HRM strategic goals as informed by groups and individuals within the region.

Purpose of engagement:

To review and update HRM's Accessibility Strategy by ensuring it aligns with community perspectives and changing social patterns.

To provide an opportunity to residents to give input about the strategy, progress made, or their experiences of accessibility as a resident of HRM.

To strengthen the quality of the resulting Accessibility Strategy and the effectiveness of the accessibility initiatives therein.

Increase confidence and buy-in for the strategy among marginalized and equity-deserving communities in HRM.

The LTRT and client project teams understand that it is important to identify stakeholder groups early on whose perspectives need to be heard through the engagements. It was determined that the key stakeholders for this work include:

- Individual residents and visitors living with disabilities:
 - Individuals with various disabilities

- Children with disabilities and their families
- Older adults
- People with disabilities with other intersecting identities
- General public.
- Disability Support Organizations.
- Municipal representatives of the Halifax Regional Municipality.
- Indigenous and racialized residents.
- Newcomer residents.



As this is a living document, the list of stakeholders identified may change over time as we delve further into the project work and as new challenges and opportunities arise. The remainder of this document will focus on the communications and engagement strategies for residents and visitors with disabilities, the public, and individual community groups since our understanding is that the internal municipal feedback from municipal staff has already been compiled and will be shared to LTRT.

2. Public Engagement Strategy

Public engagement can take many forms and can heavily shape the process and outcomes of any project. As part of the core strategy and to ensure that the feedback is

representative of as many community members as possible, LTRT will use a multi-modal approach to engagement strategy to connect with groups and residents in ways that meet them where they are. The online and in-person engagement methods will allow residents to engage when and how they see fit. We will bundle the engagement activities to maximize awareness in the community and build off the existing municipal feedback so as not to duplicate work and fatigue residents through over consultation.

This plan will go over roles discussed to date, like HRM producing engagement event advertising to spread messaging of consultation efforts, however this plan will also iterate current and future planning in event organizing and approach so that intentions can easily stay within sight and referenced. Reference sections going over the steps of participant recruitment, location considerations, and event type and scheduling will follow along with recommendations for event promotion and engagement session outline and content guidance.

3. Recruitment of Participants

Although HRM has noted that it will be responsible to advertise and promote community engagement sessions, LTRT is more than happy to provide feedback on any promotions drafted. In terms of outreach to potential participants, advertising in print, website, and social media should be consistent across all mediums with event details and contact information offered in plain language.

For targeted outreach, we recommend that groups like the Disability Rights Coalition of Nova Scotia, the Atlantic Provinces Special Education Authority, and Club Inclusion be invited to participate along with groups listed in the existing HRM Accessibility Strategy. Disability support organizations and groups can circulate invitations to participate in the public sessions as well. Invitation details to these groups should provide clear wording so that these groups can pass on to their respective networks. Any drafted emails to offer direct invitations can also be repurposed by HRM staff for use by local city councillors to further spread the word out to their constituents.

4. Location Considerations for Engagement

HRM has chosen venues and confirmed location information to LTRT for scheduling and logistic set up of community engagement. These locations were chosen based on proximity for ease of attendance, openness to public, accessibility, and based on garnering participation from residents that have intersectionality with other cultural identities present in the region like in the Indigenous community, newcomer community, and other communities that have been historically racialized like the Black Nova Scotian community.

5. Schedule of Engagements

A schedule for public engagements has been set between a mix of in-person “townhall” style formats and online web engagements hosted by LTRT. For the in-person forums, these will be led by LTRT and supported by HRM staff for wayfinding at the venues. The scheduling for these events is found below.

Digital Engagements

LTRT’s project team will host web-based consultation sessions as part of a multifaceted approach to engaging community feedback to provide flexibility for participants who are not able to attend in-person sessions. Through these sessions we will work with the Municipality and their respective communications staff to provide links for promotional materials and to respond to any concerns that staff may bring up related to HRM’s advertising messaging for the community engagement. We have a firm schedule of 4 web hosted engagements with ASL interpretation and CART service available which are outlined below:

- Apr.17th: 1 pm – 3 pm via Microsoft Teams facilitated by Natalie Rose
- Apr.25th: 6 pm – 8 pm via Microsoft Teams facilitated by Cara Wilkie
- May 1st: 1 pm – 3 pm via Microsoft Teams facilitated by Cara Wilkie
- May 2nd: 1 pm – 3 pm via Microsoft Teams facilitated by Chris Rootsaert

LTRT will provide the registration links to HRM for advertising upon creation of the web forums on Microsoft Teams and will share digital presentation materials to guide online participants in the virtual sessions.

In Person Consultations

In person consultations are a great way to engage the public in a way that meets the public where they are. We have a firm schedule for 6 in-person engagements outlined below:

- Apr.17th: Alderney Gate 6 pm – 8 pm facilitated by Natalie Rose
- Apr.18th: Immigration Services Assoc. NS 6 pm - 9 pm facilitated by Natalie Rose
- Apr.24th: Mi'kmaw Native Friendship Ctr.1 pm – 3 pm facilitated by Cara Wilkie
- Apr.24th: Halifax Central Library 6 pm – 8 pm facilitated by Cara Wilkie
- May 1st: AKOMA Bauld Centre 6 pm – 8 pm facilitated by Natalie Rose
- May 2nd: Halifax Central Library 6 pm – 8 pm facilitated by Natalie Rose

Our LTRT team will facilitate these in-person consultations and prepare engaging informational materials to guide residents through the feedback process. We will refine questions with you to ask of attendees to prompt discussion and feedback at the events.

6. Promotion and Recruitment Recommendations

Although HRM will be responsible for promoting and advertising these consultations, LTRT will provide support for those activities. As part of that support, we have compiled a list of recommendations that we have seen be successfully implemented for similar engagements. Those recommendations include:

- Promotions for the digital and in-person engagement should be included in all event promotions to display alternative opportunities to the public. For example, if people are unable to participate in in-person engagements at that time, they could go to the digital platform instead. This will also support the cross-promotion of engagement activities.

- Public engagement advertisements such as news ads, community posters, and social media posts, should be in the form of a single plain language advertisement that is consistent across all media formats.
- The advertisement should contain the date, time, and location of all events, both in-person and online, along with notification of the registration link for online attendance.
- Advertising should also offer contact information for individuals that may require further accommodations to attend such as ASL interpretation.
- Reiterating contact information for the engagement events on the registration webpage that is the same as advertised will be important for centralizing communications and lessening confusion with the public.
- Further detailed information on conventional and para-transit options, venue accessibility, and restrooms present on the in-person locations is recommended to be provided on the HRM registration webpage so that this information does not need to be specifically requested by the public.

7. Event Facilitation Recommendations

Note: Further guidance support and points to consider on facilitation will also be provided in the facilitation guide.

- Communications from the public can also be sent by American Sign Language video to the event contact email and LTRT can translate to record the feedback.
- Post engagement questions in advance for individuals to have the opportunity to craft their feedback responses prior to events for accessibility reasons.

Supplement Section A: Session Engagement Agenda

A framework agenda for applicable for public engagement agendas has been provided below.

1. Introductions, Land Acknowledgement, and Affirmation

(5 Minutes)

2. Session Preface and Intentions

(5 Minutes)

- High Level Background on Strategy and Act
- Areas of responsibility between different levels of government
- Accomplishments in accessibility to date made by HRM
- Session general overview and intentions

3. Questions on Accessibility in the areas of:

- Transportation- simple overview and questions (20 Minutes)
- Built Environment- simple overview and questions (20 Minutes)
- Goods and Services- simple overview and questions (20 Minutes)
- Information and Communication- simple overview and questions (20 Minutes)
- Employment- simple overview and questions (20 Minutes)

4. Open Feedback

(5 Minutes)

5. Wrap-Up

(5 Minutes)

Supplement Section B: HRM Accessibility Strategy-Facilitation Guide

Introductions

Hi everyone, we have a small agenda to talk about here for the flow of today:

- We will start with introductions (provide, name and position, pronouns, and provide visual descriptions).
- Followed by these brief housekeeping notes:
 - (For virtual sessions- accessibility keyboard shortcuts, ASL & CART services, and note about asking questions in ASL and enabling video feed)
 - (For in-person sessions- ASL & CART services, emergency exits and restroom locations, large print handouts)
- We'll also be doing a Land Acknowledgement followed by an Affirmation before we go into some structure and background of the HRM Accessibility Strategy.
- From here, we go into the main goals sections followed by questions for each.
- And then we will conclude things with some final questions and post the email address for follow-up feedback.
- But for now, we will take a little time to start things off in a good way with the Land Acknowledgement.

Land Acknowledgement

- The Halifax Regional Municipality and our work here is located in Mi'kma'ki, the ancestral and traditional lands of the Mi'kmaq people. We acknowledge the Peace & Friendship Treaties signed in this Territory and recognizes that we are all Treaty People.
- We also recognize that here, and in many nations across the country, that there is a hard history and a current truth that really impacts a lot of the accessibility that we will be discussing today. We hope to support changes that can serve and help all Treaty People.

African Nova Scotian Affirmation

- We would also like to affirm that we are in the Decade for People of African Descent. African Nova Scotians are a distinct founding people in our community who have been a key part of Nova Scotian culture and history. We acknowledge that African teachings, strength and perseverance continue to challenge and inspire our community.

Structure of the consultation

- As a reminder for today's talk, we have ASL and CART available for what we say but also for questions later.
- We will first speak about some of the background of the Accessibility Strategy and the talk about each main part of the Strategy with its own goals and questions for each part.
- We also have different ways you can provide your thoughts and ideas:
 - You can e-mail us later if you would like more time to think about an idea.
 - We also have large print forms that you can fill out with answers to our questions. (*in-person only)
 - And lastly, we have staff that will be here to write down your feedback one-on-one or to help fill out the answers.

Content Introduction

In 2021 Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM) published an Accessibility Strategy. That strategy has 30 action items to help improve accessibility and representation for people with disabilities. With this consultation we want to hear the public's additional input on 21 of these action items. We want to know if you think the action items are still relevant and if you think they will help improve accessibility in HRM. We also want to know if there is anything missing from this strategy. Your input will help us decide if we need to change the strategy.

For this consultation today, we will only be talking about things that the Halifax Regional Municipality has control over. We will be talking about:

- Public transportation (like buses) and transportation infrastructure (like roads, sidewalks, bus stops, and some parking lots).
- Buildings and Infrastructure that HRM owns or operates (like City Hall, community centres, parks)
- Good and services provided by HRM (like recreational programs)
- Information and Communication (Like the HRM website and HRM promotional materials)
- Employment practices at HRM (such as hiring and requirement for jobs at the city, and accommodations for HRM employees with disabilities).

Today we will not be talking about things that are controlled by the provincial or federal government. We will not be talking about education, healthcare, air or railway travel.

Public Transportation and Transportation Infrastructure

Public Transportation refers transportation around HRM, including buses, taxis, and Access-A-Bus.

Transportation infrastructure refers to things that are related to transportation, such as roads, pedestrian crossings and bus stops. It also refers to maintenance of bus stops, sidewalks and roads.

The HRM strategy to improve accessibility of public transportation and transportation infrastructure includes the following actions:

- Create a system where people can book Access-A-Bus online and create an automatic fare system to make Access-A-Bus service better.
- Create a system for booking all types of accessible transportation within Halifax region (for example, taxis and Access-A-Bus)
- Create a passenger survey on accessible transportation services to learn about what works and what doesn't.
- Make sure all bus stops are accessible and well maintained.
- Provide more information to residents with disabilities about snow removal.

Questions:

- What kinds of barriers do you experience with public transportation or transportation infrastructure?
- Do you think that the actions HRM has listed will remove the barriers that you experience? Why or why not?
- Do you have any ideas for how public transportation and transportation infrastructure could be improved?

Built Environment

The built environment refers to buildings and locations that HRM either owns, controls or operates. This could include buildings like City Hall and community centres, and recreational facilities, as well as outdoor spaces like parks and playgrounds.

The HRM strategy to improve accessibility of the built environment includes the following actions:

- Make sure that all the future infrastructure we build or buy (buildings, parks, city owned streets etc.) meet a high-level standard of accessibility (Rick Hansen Gold Certification and CSA B651-18 standards).
- Make sure that all our current infrastructure (buildings, parks, city owned streets etc.) meet a high-level standard of accessibility (Rick Hansen Gold Certification and CSA B651-18 standards).
- Create a system to check buildings, parks, playgrounds, and trails to make sure areas stay accessible.
- Make sure all signs, walkways, and equipment for beaches, parks, playgrounds and recreational facilities is accessible for people with disabilities.

Questions:

- What kinds of barriers do you experience with in HRM buildings or outdoor spaces?
- Do you think that the actions HRM has listed will remove the barriers that you experience? Why or why not?
- Do you have any ideas for how the built environment of HRM could be improved?

Goods and Services

Goods and Services refers to the things that HRM does for the public. This includes recreational programming, information services, permitting, parking tickets payments, and all the other services offered by the city.

The HRM strategy to improve the accessibility of goods and services includes the following action:

- Improve services for accessible recreation to reflect increasing demand (for example, hiring more recreational support staff).

Questions:

- What kinds of barriers do you experience when trying to obtain municipal goods and services?
- Do you think that the actions HRM has listed will remove the barriers that you experience? Why or why not?
- Do you have any ideas for how accessibility of goods and services could be improved?

Information and Communication

Information and communication refers to HRM's technology and also how they communicate with the public and HRM employees. This includes the accessibility of the HRM's websites, social media platforms, promotional materials and other communications with the public.

The HRM strategy to improve the accessibility of goods and services includes the following actions:

- Have more training for municipal staff on how to serve and accommodate people with disabilities.
- Create a guide for the city's promotional materials (commercials, posters etc.) to make sure that all of them are accessible for people with disabilities.

- Make sure that our public websites and internal websites (for our employees) meet a high-level of standard for accessibility (Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.1, Minimum Level AA).
- Make sure to use plain language and a clear format for all our public communications.
- Provide more info on the Halifax.ca website about accessibility and make sure that the information is updated regularly.

Questions:

- What kinds of barriers do you experience with HRM in the information and communications that they share publicly?
- Do you think that the actions HRM has listed will remove the barriers that you experience? Why or why not?
- Do you have any ideas for how the accessibility of information and communication at HRM could be improved?

Employment at HRM

Employment here refers to the practices that HRM uses to recruit and hire new employees. It also includes practices that HRM uses with their current employees, for example the process of accommodations.

The HRM strategy to improve the accessibility of employment includes the following actions:

- Collect and track information about how many municipal employees self-identify as having a disability.
- Make sure that all municipal job postings list what kind of accommodations are available for the job and during the hiring process.
- Make sure that our managers receive training about workplace accessibility.
- Establish partnerships with schools to provide work placements and internship opportunities for students with disabilities.

- Review our current hiring practices to make sure that we are providing equitable employment opportunities for people with disabilities.
- Develop a system to make sure that we are sharing job postings with agencies who support job seekers with disabilities.

Questions:

- What kinds of barriers do you experience when seeking employment with HRM?
- Do you think that the actions HRM has listed will remove the barriers that you experience? Why or why not?
- Do you have any ideas for how HRM's employee and employment practices could be improved?

Conclusion and Final Questions

- Based on everything we have talked about today, do you have any other feedback that you want to provide?
- Is there anything that we didn't talk about today that you think should be part of HRM's Accessibility Strategy?
- Is there anything else that you want the city to know?

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this consultation today. We will be passing along all of your feedback and thoughts to HRM and they will use your feedback to update the Accessibility Strategy. If you have any questions or would like to provide any more feedback after this session, you can e-mail accessibility@halifax.ca.

Thank you again for your time and providing your valuable expertise on accessibility.

Appendix B: Public Transit and Transportation Infrastructure Feedback

The following points show the compiled feedback from community consultation participants on the topic of public transit and transportation and the further suggestions and ideas that were raised:

- Bus stops and shelters are not cleared of snow fast enough, meaning people have to climb over snow piles to board the bus.
- Public transit does not service all areas of HRM including certain neighbourhood areas, beaches, outdoor and recreational spaces.
- Some areas of the city lack sidewalks, which means that accessible bus stops cannot be offered.
- There are not enough accessible parking spaces.
- There is not enough enforcement for parking in accessible spaces.
- Some accessible parking spaces lack vertical signage which causes a visibility issue, particularly in winter.
- Many areas require long walks to get to bus stops.
- Buses can be a difficulty sensory experience for some neurodiverse people due to noise, lighting, and crowding.
- There are challenges booking Access-A-Bus if you don't speak English or otherwise have difficulty communicating on the phone.
- There are concerns about people who are blind being safe around increasing use of electric cars.
- The requirement to book Access-A-Bus a week in advance is a barrier as it is difficult to make last minute plans.

- There is lack of clearly marked signage for designated taxi or Access-A-Bus drop off and pick up stops. This can lead to people missing their ride because they do not know where to wait.
- Some bus routes do not run at all on the weekends which limits access for certain HRM areas.
- Sometimes stop announcements on buses are turned off, broken, or the volume is turned down making it hard or impossible to know when to get off.
- There are a lot of times people get waitlisted for rides on Access-A-Bus, or they get offered a ride only one way.
- There are limited hours for Access-A-Bus and conventional transit which creates a non-equitable situation.
- Bus stops have varying levels of accessibility with some stops not having any accessibility at all.
- Bus stops are not always clearly marked.
- Some people have difficulty walking but are not eligible for Access-A-Bus and find themselves stranded.
- The names of bus stops and locations is not always clear.
- There is a long wait time to get through on the Access-A-Bus booking line.
- Buses are difficult to board and ride during busy periods due to crowding.
- Buses do not show up on time or are not predictable. The bus routes often change as well, which further contributes to challenges in predictability. This can be confusing for seniors, elders, children, and people with cognitive disabilities.
- Drivers on the conventional system do not help passengers with disabilities unless they are using a wheelchair.
- Bus drivers do not all know how to secure wheelchairs in buses and some of the tie down spots are dangerous or not operational.

- There is not enough help provided from Access-A-Bus drivers. For example, the drivers do not help teach people how to put on their seatbelts or tell passengers when it is their stop.
- Transfer based rides add considerable time to trips and can be more confusing for people with disabilities.
- Bus terminals can be confusing, and it is hard to know where to go.
- Some bus stops are dimly lit. This is a safety issue and can also be a problem for people with low vision.
- There have been situations where conventional taxis have refused to accept mobility devices in their trunks.
- Sometimes bus stops go out of service, and individuals who are blind cannot see the signage to indicate this.
- Access-A-Bus drivers do not look for their passengers, meaning that people who are blind might often miss their ride because they can't see where the bus is or do not know where to meet.
- Sometimes people get stranded when Access-A-Bus drivers will not pick them up due to broken mobility equipment or booking mix-ups.
- In some places, particularly on Spring Garden Road, there are benches next to the bus stops that prevent the bus ramps from being deployed.
- Access-A-Bus drivers and booking agents are not always nice and can sometimes be experienced as rude.
- The existence of Access-A-Bus, with information about how to sign up and use it, is hard to find as there should be more advertising.

Suggestions and Ideas

- Some neurodiverse people find that the volume of bus radios and announcements should be lower although this could cause barriers for others that are hard of hearing.
- Bus stops should be announced both inside and outside of the buses.
- Provide translators for Access-A-Bus booking other than in English.
- Have an emergency phone number and an accessible transport vehicle that can be called or accessed when people are stranded or in emergencies.
- HRM should buy more Access-A-Buses and hire more bus drivers.
- HRM should use taxis more strategically, for example, for newcomers who may be confused about the bigger buses and their routes.
- Provide simple education about the Access-A-Bus service, including that taxis might be the vehicles that arrive instead.
- Ensure all drivers have training in using the accessibility features of their transport and how to provide accessible customer service which is sensitive.
- There should be a standard or coding system implemented to name bus stops and locations.
- There should be a live-chat feature to book Access-A-Bus rides for people who cannot talk on the phone.
- There should be better signage and wayfinding for transit infrastructure.
- The buses should have signs that say where they are going.
- There should be free bus passes for people with disabilities who are less likely to be able to drive and more likely to live in poverty.
- The people who plan bus routes should be required to ride those routes.

- Give the public more information about what bus drivers are, and are not allowed to do (i.e. they are not allowed to help people on or off the bus unless the person is using a wheelchair etc.).
- Offer travel training to people with disabilities so they can feel confident riding the conventional transit system.
- It would be helpful to have a text line to find out when the next bus is coming.
- Include tactile markers to indicate that a bus stop is out of service or have a service that people can opt into that will alert of such closures.
- Contract taxi companies to supplement Access-A-Bus.

Appendix C: Built Environment Feedback

The following points show the compiled feedback from community consultation participants on the topic of the built environment and the further suggestions and ideas that were raised:

- Better maintenance of accessibility features is needed. For example, automatic doors, escalators, and elevators are often broken. Many sidewalks are in disrepair and audio signals at crosswalks are not working at all.
- Some municipal buildings are technically step free, but due to weather, or wear and tear, some ramps or entrances have thresholds, lips or drops that can be hard to get over in a wheelchair.
- There is not enough simple signage with icons or plain language.
- There are not enough handrails along the walls inside municipal buildings.
- Construction has blocked many paths and sidewalks, and this can be particularly difficult for people using mobility devices. It has also removed accessible parking spaces in some instances.
- Patios and sandwich signs, signage about construction, and other non-cane detectable signage sometimes block paths on sidewalks or pose a hazard to people who cannot see.
- More outdoor seating is needed in parks and along sidewalks.
- Audio signal tones and types at crosswalks are not standardized and create confusion for blind and low-vision pedestrians.
- Mobi Mats at lakes can be hard to maneuver in a wheelchair due to there being large threshold lip.
- Lighting in some buildings is too bright.
- The lack of sidewalks in some areas pose a transportation barrier and safety risk as some people are forced to either be isolated or go out onto the road and risk getting hit by vehicles.

- Some signs are missing or hard to see. For example, street signs at road level.
- Some streets are very steep and could benefit from hand holds or full handrails.
- Snow clearing throughout HRM is often slow or delayed.
- There is a consistent problem of E-scooters driving on sidewalks or close to them which can be hazardous to people who use mobility devices, are blind, are deaf are hard of hearing, or who are unstable when walking.
- Poor drainage can cause puddles which some people cannot jump over on paths, crosswalks, and sidewalks.
- There are not enough single stall bathrooms in public buildings.
- HRM does not have many playgrounds with accessible equipment, specifically high back swings.
- There are signs that have been installed during the summer without consideration of how they look in the winter in the snow. There are also some signs that have been installed in the winter without consideration of how tree leaves might cover the signs in the summer.
- Door intercoms within HRM properties used to gain access to the property do not have alternative solutions for people who are deaf.
- Snow removal around community mailboxes can be delayed, meaning some people cannot access their mail during and after snowfalls.
- Snow is often cleared in a path that is only wide enough for a person to walk through, not wide enough to traverse in a wheelchair.
- Outdoor spaces, particularly parks, lack wheelchair accessible washroom facilities.
- There is a community centre that requires all people to go outside to transfer between floors. This can be difficult for some people with disabilities.
- Playgrounds have multiples steps and terrain changes which would make it difficult for children or adults who use mobility devices.

- Cobblestone sidewalks and walkways pose a danger for trips and falls and are painful for people using wheelchairs to go over.
- It is not clear what people with disabilities are supposed to do in building emergencies, especially if they cannot use the stairs.
- Crosswalk buttons are often placed too high for someone in a seated position to reach.
- Heavy construction can lead to noise pollution, which can be a safety barrier for people who are blind or hard of hearing (as they are unable to hear cars coming etc.)
- Violations of vehicles using accessible parking when there are not supposed to is not covered well by enforcement.
- Some sport facilities may be accessible to fans, but not necessarily to employees. For example, the announcer booth is often inaccessible, which precludes people using wheelchairs from working as announcers.

Suggestions and Ideas

- HRM should have QR codes on signs that people can scan and then have the information that is on the sign read to them for people who cannot read or who do not speak English.
- HRM should add more symbols, icons, and images to signs for better understanding of messages.
- Makes sure that all crosswalk symbols are standardized and give the same tone for east, west, north south.
- HRM needs more tactile signage.
- People in charge of determining whether buildings are accessible need the appropriate training to do so to ensure different types of accessibility are included.

- HRM properties should have lights that can be dimmed for people who are light sensitive and would benefit from dimmer areas.
- Playgrounds or parks could include a picture, symbol, or ASL sign board to facilitate communication.
- HRM should embed accessibility principles into zoning rule considerations.
- HRM should make sure all accessible parking spaces are big enough.
- HRM properties should have a variety of seating for different bodies. For example, having some seats both with and without armrests.
- HRM should have sensory areas in buildings, like waiting areas that are quieter, with lower light etc.
- HRM should have more paved trails to make additional accessible outdoor areas.
- The Central Halifax pool and Peace and Friendship Parks is a good standard for accessibility.
- Ensure that all entrances and exits to municipal buildings are regularly inspected and maintained to ensure that they remain barrier and step free.
- HRM should enforce rules on the timely removal of snow for contractors.
- In general HRM should ensure that contractors do not violate accessibility guidelines or rules by withholding contracts to those that do.
- Snow removal from roads is prioritized over removal from sidewalks. This indicates to residents that traffic flow is more important than accessibility.
- Beaches should provide sand and waterproof wheelchairs to visitors.
- HRM should create an accessible viewing platform at Peggy's Cove.
- HRM should ensure that there is braille and tactile markings on reachable signage.

Appendix D: Goods and Services Feedback

The following points show the compiled feedback from community consultation participants on the topic of goods and services of HRM and the further suggestions and ideas that were raised:

- The SPCA and HRM animal control department do not understand rules around service dogs.
- Kiosks and pay terminals that are touchscreen are not accessible to some people. Library check-out self-serve systems are one example.
- Some people who cannot read are faced with challenges when voting, including election staff not being willing to offer accommodations.
- The cost of recreational programs is prohibitive.
- When people raise accessibility barriers to 311, they often go unaddressed.
- There is not enough information about what kinds of adaptive equipment is available and where at HRM locations.
- Kids with disabilities have very limited time available in HRM summer programs, which leaves parents having to find other options.
- The process for signing up for recreation programs favours people with computers and time to wait to get on early. There are also barriers to registration itself online.

Suggestions and Ideas

- Create an accessible gym specifically for people with disabilities.
- Make sure that there is specific time set aside at recreation facilities for people with disabilities. For example, specific workout times where extra staff are available, or holding "sledge hockey" time at the rink could be another example.
- Have a liaison that can help people with find programs.

- Recreation centres should have simple and clear signs at the front that show what accessible equipment or features are available inside.
- All free recreation should be accessible.
- All frontline staff should be trained on accessible customer service.
- Include pictures of candidates on election ballots to help people who cannot read.
- Ensure 311 is accessible for people who cannot use the phone, for example have a live-chat feature and also easy way to navigate for people with cognitive disabilities.
- Programming does not exist in all communities at HRM, and with a lack of transportation it means that some programming is inaccessible period.
- 311 operators should have training about interacting with people who have disabilities.
- Consider having satellite offices so that programs and services are accessed more easily in rural areas.
- Para sport organizations should get discounts when booking recreation time and facilities.
- Create a centralized system to search for finding accessible housing.
- Do better promotion and outreach about existing accessible recreation services and options.

Appendix E: Information and Communications Feedback

The following points show the compiled feedback from community consultation participants on the topic of HRM communications and the further suggestions and ideas that were raised:

- City notifications about closures, outages, and other temporary events, are hard to locate.
- The HRM Website can be hard to navigate and understand, especially if you have lower literacy.
- Information about municipal services is inaccessible to people who cannot read.
- Exclusively online communications exclude some people with disabilities and seniors.
- There is a lack of response from HRM when issues are identified, or requests related to accessibility are made.
- When colors, font, and background switch around on the website, it can be difficult for people using adaptive tools so they have to switch settings for every new page.
- Some software and websites that are used by HRM are not accessible to people who use screen readers.
- HRM's webpage specifically dedicated to accessibility is hard to find and some residents cannot locate it.
- There is no reliable way to have two-way communication with HRM. Residents can ask a question or get information from the website, but often they cannot get a response or answer.
- There is a lack of diversity in the City's promotional materials.
- Some signs are laminated or put behind glass which can cause glare and make it difficult for some people to see.

Suggestions and Ideas

- Social media posts should be made for when sidewalks are closed.
- HRM can create an app specifically for accessibility that has information, push notifications, resources etc. (and make sure it is an accessible app). HRM can also utilize a phone tree for people who cannot use an app.
- Add more images, icons and images to the website and other communications.
- Create a "phone bank" system that people can opt in to where important information (like emergencies etc.) will go out through a phone call and recorded message (for people who cannot read or do not have internet/computer access).
- More attention is needed to writing things in plain language.
- Written and e-mailed communications should come with a QR code or link where you can watch a video or get an audio version of the content.
- HRM should evaluate the full accessibility of technology before it is adopted and deployed.
- Have some information for newcomers about cultural norms related to accessibility (scent-free environments, service dogs etc.)
- Events hosted by HRM should promote accessibility of those events more.
- Apps that provide up to date information about emergencies or other things people need to know about should be utilized more.
- HRM could do more social media campaigns about accessibility and people with disabilities.
- Maintain an up-to-date webpage about accessibility in HRM and ensure that it is easy for people to find. For example, having accessibility appear as an option on the website's main menu bar.
- Provide a list of available resources in the city (both offered by HRM and not) for people with disabilities on the website.
- Having a text option in addition to phone lines and other options like email.

- Make sure that all communications are in plain language.

Appendix F: Employment Feedback

The following points show the compiled feedback from community consultation participants on the topic of employment and the further suggestions and ideas that were raised:

- There is a lack of permanent part-time positions, which can be a barrier for some people with disabilities.
- It is very difficult to get a job if you cannot read.
- The lack of transportation to and from certain areas is a barrier to employment opportunities.
- Structured and standardized interviews seem like they are bias-free but can lead to some people with disabilities not being able to demonstrate their strengths. For example, some wordings of questions (i.e. scenario-based questions) are not culturally competent.
- There is a lack of representation of minority groups (people with disabilities, Black Nova Scotians, Indigenous people) among city employees. HRM should ensure that the city's workforce is reflective of the communities that exist in the area.
- A lack of reliable transit options is preventing people with disabilities from gaining employment at the city and elsewhere.

Suggestions and Ideas

- There should be more positions specifically designated for people with disabilities.
- All staff should be trained on accessibility by people with disabilities.
- Along with tracking number of employees with disabilities, HRM should also track how many candidates who self-disclose attain employment.

- HRM needs to hire more accessibility specialists/highly trained staff members in different departments.
- HRM should include a clear statement in job postings welcoming applications from people with disabilities.
- HRM should have more flexibility in how people can apply to and interview for jobs. Consider cultural competence, different disabilities etc.
- HRM should provide work from home options where possible.
- HRM should showcase their current staff who have disabilities so that the community knows HRM hires people with disabilities and provides an accessible workplace.

Appendix G: Other Community Feedback

The following points show the compiled feedback from community consultation participants on other topics related to the community that might either be directly related to accessibility or related in an intersectional way with other sectors or community demographics:

Directly Accessibility Related:

- There is not enough accessible housing.
- Some people with guide dogs are being refused services (not specific to municipal services, likely businesses).
- The Nova Centre meets basic building code requirements but lacks a lot of other accessibility features.
- Hop on-off scooters are left in areas that block path accessibility or ramps.
- There is a need for more public knowledge about disability and accessibility. For example, not all disabilities are visible.
- Bylaws may prevent construction of certain wheelchair accessible features. For example, elevators installed into private homes.
- A lack of Covid precautions means that some people with disabilities are excluded entirely from public life.

Not Directly Accessibility Related:

- There are not enough hours offered to part time recreation workers.
- Most municipal services are challenging for people who do not speak English.
- More information about snow removal is needed for newcomers.
- There is a general need for more dedicated bus lanes.
- Operational hours for 311 are limited.

- There are safety concerns about taxis. Some people have heard racist remarks and experienced sexual assault. There needs to be more prominent and significant ways to report issues.
- Community members feel there are general safety issues on buses and in transit from other individuals.
- There is a poor cycling infrastructure.
- There are concerns that parking enforcement unfairly targets people with Indigenous licence plates.
- Employment requirements (such as criminal record checks) impact some groups more than others, especially people from overpoliced populations.
- Dog leash laws should have better enforcement.
- There is an issue with too much poison ivy on trails.
- The cost of transit is difficult for people living in poverty.
- Bike lanes are not constructed well or maintained, they are not safe or comfortable.
- Community members feel that some city staff can be rude or unhelpful at times.
- The lack of infrastructure (buses, sidewalks etc.) seem to impact some marginalized groups more significantly (for example, lack of transit in East Preston). This is concerning from an equity perspective.
- It is difficult to refill transit cards.

Related to Other Sectors:

- Provincial and Federal services are hard to access within HRM.
- Retail stores in HRM should have regulations that they have to arrange displays in a way that are accessible to all people.
- Not enough respite workers in HRM or information on how to find them.

Appendix H: Summary of Recommendations for Future Consultations

Through this report and the communications plan (found in Appendix A) LTRT has provided a variety of recommendations for future consultations about accessibility at HRM. For ease of location, we have repeated those recommendations here.

Recommendations for planning and advertising consultations activities

- Advertise consultations far in advance. Give residents at least 2-3 months of notice before hand.
- Create detailed and ongoing consultation plans that are updated regularly so that HRM and residents with disabilities know when consultation activities will be happening.
- For opportunities for more frequent consultations so that residents with disabilities feel like they have an open dialogue with the city and that their concerns are being heard and responded to.
- Seek opportunities for more casual consultations. Try using frequent pop-up style consultations where HRM staff go to events or busy locations to collect feedback from people who are already in those locations.
- Promotions for the digital and in-person engagement should be included in all event promotions to display alternative opportunities to the public. For example, if people are unable to participate in in-person engagements at that time, they could go to the digital platform instead. This will also support the cross-promotion of engagement activities.
- Public engagement advertisements such as news ads, community posters, and social media posts, should be in the form of a single plain language advertisement that is consistent across all media formats.
- The advertisement should contain the date, time, and location of all events, both in-person and online, along with notification of the registration link for online attendance.

- Advertising should also offer contact information for individuals that may require further accommodations to attend such as ASL interpretation.
- Reiterating contact information for the engagement events on the registration webpage that is the same as advertised will be important for centralizing communications and lessening confusion with the public.
- Further detailed information on conventional and para-transit options, venue accessibility, and restrooms present on the in-person locations is recommended to be provided on the HRM registration webpage so that this information does not need to be specifically requested by the public.

Event Facilitation Recommendations

- Communications from the public can also be sent by American Sign Language video to the event contact email and LTRT can translate to record the feedback.
- Post engagement questions in advance for individuals to have the opportunity to craft their feedback responses prior to events for accessibility reasons.
- Find opportunities to share progress with residents and to keep them up to date on various initiatives.