Regional Accessibility Plan 2025

Colchester
be centred here.

BIBLE HILL

The Village of
Tatamagouche

STEWIACKE
RIVERS OF OPPORTUNITY
HALF WAY BETWEEN THE NORTH POLE & EQUATOR

TRURO
make the connection

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Plan Background

In 2022, the Town of Truro, Municipality of Colchester, Village of Bible Hill, Town of Stewiacke, and the Village of Tatamagouche (the ‘entities’) collaborated to develop our first Regional Accessibility Plan for the Truro-Colchester Region (the Region). Barriers to accessibility were assessed across the Region resulting in a list of recommendations to guide accessibility improvements throughout the Region. In 2024, we decided that the 2022 Regional Accessibility Plan was due for a review and update. This was to ensure better alignment of commitments to accessibility with the priorities of the community and our capacity to implement them. We retained the accessibility consulting firm Left Turn Right Turn (LTRT) to support the Regional Plan review and update process.

As a third party, LTRT connected with staff members, the Regional Accessibility Advisory Committee, council and commission members, and members of the public to gain a better understanding of the successes and challenges of implementing the recommendations from the 2022 plan. LTRT also engaged the public to solicit feedback on what is working well in our communities when it comes to accessibility, and on priority areas of improvement for accessibility across the Region. The insights shared through these meetings and community engagements informed this updated Regional Accessibility Plan. The commitments made in this plan reflect:

- The needs and priorities of people with disabilities living in the Region.
- Realistic actions we can take to improve accessibility
- Actions focused on capacity building to ensure the Region’s efforts to improve accessibility are sustainable.

We recognize that accessibility is an ongoing and evolving process. Full implementation of this plan will not mean that the Truro-Colchester region has achieved ‘full’ accessibility. However, it will make the Region more accessible than it was before, and this is a meaningful step in the process.

Statement of Commitment

The Municipality of Colchester, the Town of Truro, the Village of Bible Hill, the Town of Stewiacke, and the Village of Tatamagouche are committed to fostering an inclusive, accessible, and welcoming region for all our residents and visitors. To ensure the long-term success of the changes we plan to make, we are building our internal capacity around accessibility and working to embed accessibility into our programs and services. Our goal is to improve accessibility consistently and intentionally across the Truro-Colchester Region and to listen to the voices of people with disabilities at every stage of this process.

Territorial Acknowledgement

In peace and in friendship, and in the spirit of truth and reconciliation, it was acknowledged that the Municipality of Colchester is in Mi'kma'ki, the ancestral and unceded territory of the Mi'kmaq.

Definitions

Disability: An inability to participate fully and equally in society because of the interaction of an impairment and a barrier.

Accessibility: Proactively designing barrier-free spaces, products, tools, and practices which enable people with disabilities to live with dignity and to meaningfully participate in their own communities.

Accommodation: The practice of responding to a barrier to accessibility experienced by a person and coming up with a solution to reduce or remove that barrier for that person.

Equity: A principle and process that promotes fair conditions for all persons to fully participate in society. It recognizes that while all people have the right to be treated equally, not all experience equal access to resources, opportunities or benefits.

Region: Referring to the Truro-Colchester Region, which includes the Town of Truro, Municipality of Colchester, Village of Bible Hill, Town of Stewiacke, and the Village of Tatamagouche.

Entities: Referring to the municipal bodies within the Region, collectively the Town of Truro, Municipality of Colchester, Village of Bible Hill, Town of Stewiacke, and the Village of Tatamagouche.

Guiding Principles

We approached this plan from a place of intention and good-faith efforts towards accessibility. We recognize the importance of accessibility to the Region and the people who live, work, and play here. The following guiding principles guided the development of this plan.

Nothing Without Us Inspired by the disability rights movement's slogan "nothing about us without us" which suggests that anything relevant to people with disabilities should involve the input of people with disabilities. However, people with disabilities are important members of our communities who are and have a right to be involved in all aspects of community life. Therefore, we have taken a "nothing without us" approach to this plan, as all aspects of community life are relevant to people with disabilities. We have done this by consulting people with disabilities living in the Region in the development of this plan, as well as by making commitments in this plan that support the full and equal access and participation of people with disabilities in our communities.

Equity The commitments in this plan support equity in our communities by working to remove barriers proactively, when possible, and through accommodation where barriers persist. We recognize that while people have the right to be treated equally, the process to achieve equality may require different steps for different people and groups. Not all people have the same access to resources, opportunities, or benefits. This plan contributes to the advancement of equity in our communities.

Safety, Dignity, Autonomy: We believe that true accessibility is more than just ensuring a person can do something free of barriers. We believe it also means that a person can do something in a way that is safe, dignified, and respecting their autonomy.

This doesn't mean that we shouldn't help each other. This means that a person has agency, and that they have the opportunity to be independent to their fullest extent. This plan respects these principles.

Capacity Building and Sustainability: This plan was developed to build capacity and therefore enhance the sustainability of accessibility initiatives. We recognize that achieving maximum accessibility is a process that involves time, know-how, and resources. Through this plan we have strived to make commitments that promote meaningful, achievable, and sustainable change. Change done right is better than change done quickly. This plan is forward thinking and future oriented.

Progress Made to Date

This plan represents an update to our 2022-2025 Regional Accessibility Plan. Some commitments from our previous plan have been carried forward to this one. Some commitments have been reframed to better align with community need and regional capacity. And some progress has been made towards commitments made in our last plan. The following is a summary of progress made towards accessibility across the Region over the last 3 years.

Public Awareness and Engagement

Entities within the region have completed activities related to increasing public awareness and engagement including:

- Staff training on engaging with persons with disabilities.
- Online municipal voting made available for the first time in October 2024.
- Efforts to launch public events celebrating diversity.

Buildings, Infrastructure, and Public Spaces

Entities within the Region have completed activities related to increasing accessibility of buildings, infrastructure, and public spaces, including:

- Adjusting the height of regularly used (e.g. fire extinguishers, first aid kits, soap dispenser, etc.) or critical items in public buildings for greater accessibility.
- Installing auditory and visual alarms for emergencies.

- Establishing emergency response plans and muster points for people with disabilities who need support during an emergency.
- Improvements to recreational trail gates design to be cane detectable.
- Updates to by-laws to ensure all government and public buildings adhere to accessibility standards.
- Working towards creating an accessible playground standard.

Accessibility improvements at specific sites include:

Stewiacke Community Centre

- Installed new accessible doors and ramps at the newly renovated washrooms with accessible doors.

Stewiacke, Kitchener Street

- Purchased 6 new benches to install along Kitchener Street to provide a rest station for those using Active Transportation as a means of travel.

Dennis Park and Recreation Grounds

- Installed a ramp and accessible doors in both parks.

Bible Hill Recreation Park

- Paved parking lot.
- Painted lines with 6 accessible parking stalls and areas with walking aisles.
- Installed power door operators on 2 washrooms with long-style door buttons.
- Installed anti-slip flooring in all washrooms and the change room.
- Installed wood-fibre surfacing in the main play area, removing pea gravel, which makes it more friendly for wheelchairs, walkers, strollers to navigate the space.
- Installed a sensory tunnel play structure.
- Constructed a new multi-use trail between neighbouring subdivisions to access the park (Guest Dr, Covington Pl (55+ community), & Osprey Ct)

Airport Field Park

- Installed multiple new accessible picnic tables.
- Planning to convert existing two-washroom building to three new barrier-free washrooms.
- Working on new accessible parking, new site pathways from sidewalk to parking, building, and seating areas.

H. Douglas Boyce Village Hall

- Accessible entrance to the fire station installed.
- Elevator installed in recent years.
- Accessible washroom installed in fire station in recent years.
- Installed anti-slip flooring in lobby and commercial kitchen.
- Planning to install horn/strobe annunciators to replace fire bells.

Colchester Courthouse

- Front entryway into main administration office at the Courthouse Heritage building has a redesign is in progress for full accessibility with tendering for construction this spring 2025.

Colchester Public Buildings

- Bathroom signage has been updated for all facilities for accessibility options including braille and all gender locations.

Fundy Discovery Site

- Improvements to accessible parking.
- Improvements to surface accessibility for paths and parking.
- Installation of accessible picnic tables.
- Increase of benches and places of rest.
- Accessible family washrooms installed.
- Construction of accessible playground and structure.

Stewiacke River Park

- Improvements to accessible parking.

- Installation of accessible picnic tables.
- Improvements to accessibility of surfacing (crusher dust and concrete).
- Improvements to washroom accessibility.
- Improvements to signage accessibility.
- Improvements to accessibility of playground structure.
- Improvements to number and accessibility of benches.

Five Islands Lighthouse Park

- Improvements to accessible parking.
- Installation of accessible picnic tables.
- Improvements to accessibility of surfacing (crusher dust and concrete).
- Improvements to washroom accessibility.
- Improvements to signage accessibility.
- Improvements to the accessibility of playground structure.
- Improvements to the number and accessibility of benches.
- Improvements to viewing ramp accessibility.

Nelson Memorial Park

- Improvements to accessible parking.
- Installation of accessible picnic tables.
- Improvements to accessibility of surfacing (crusher dust and concrete).
- Improvements to washroom accessibility.
- Improvements to signage accessibility.
- Improvements to the accessibility of playground structure.
- Improvements to the number and accessibility of benches.

Cobequid Trail

- Improvements to accessible parking.
- Improvements to accessibility of surfacing (crusher dust and concrete).
- Improvements to washroom accessibility.
- Improvements to signage accessibility.

Crosswalks

- Bible Hill has reviewed the majority of our marked crosswalks, with NS Department of Public Works, to improve visibility and uniformity, installing flashing lights whenever permitted by Nova Scotia Department of Public Works. In recent years, this has involved upgrading eight crosswalks with new flashing lights.
- In Stewiacke, installed RRFB (rapid reflective flashing beacons) Units at 8 crosswalks in Town, which have audio and visual features for those hard of hearing and seeing.

Transportation

Entities within the Region have completed activities related to increasing accessibility of transportation including:

- Putting out a request for proposals and beginning a regional public transit feasibility study.
- Colchester public parking - Repainted several parking lots to refresh all parking spaces including the accessibly locations and signage.

Information and Communications

Entities within the Region have completed activities related to improving accessibility of information and communications including:

- Staff training on accessible communications
- Incorporating accessible communications practices into signage, including font type and size, colour contrast, and plain language.
- Evaluating and updating information technology systems to ensure they are compatible with assistive technology.
- Updates to municipal websites for accessible navigation.
- Streaming of some council meetings for greater public accessibility.

Delivery of Services and Goods

Entities within the Region have completed activities related to improving accessibility of the delivery of services and goods, including:

- Staff training on engaging people with disabilities in the Region.

Employment

Entities within the Region have completed activities related to improving accessibility of employment including:

- Staff training on disability, including engaging persons with disabilities.
- Working with procurement to fulfill accommodations requests that require special equipment.
- Working to establish an accessibility compliance role.

What We Heard from the Community

LTRT completed a series of engagement activities on behalf of the Region to support the development of our updated accessibility plan.

The purpose of these engagements was to gather feedback about accessibility from residents (people who live here but aren't necessarily directly impacted by accessibility barriers) and stakeholders (people who live here and have a personal stake in accessibility) in the Region. People were asked about the current state of accessibility. We asked what the towns, villages, and municipality in the Region are doing well and what they could do better with respect to accessibility. Residents and stakeholders were asked what they would like to see improved, and what their priority areas of improvement are for accessibility in the Region.

We engaged residents and stakeholders in a variety of ways to maximize accessibility. Engagement activities were conducted virtually as well as in person. Options to contribute and have conversations in American Sign Language were available across engagement activities. The following engagement activities took place between November 2024 – February 2025:

November 2024

Virtual engagement – Regional Accessibility Advisory Committee

December 2024

Truro – In-person engagement at the Douglas Street Recreation Centre

Stewiacke – In-person engagement at the Royal Canadian Legion

Truro – In-person engagement at the Truro Farmer's Market

January 2025

Virtual engagement – Stakeholder organizations in the Region

February 2025

Virtual engagement – Regional Accessibility Advisory Committee consultation #2

Summary of Feedback

Overall, residents and stakeholders in the Region were pleased to hear that the Region was preparing a new accessibility plan. Few people had knowledge of the first Regional Accessibility Plan (2022-2025), and many were surprised to learn of its existence. Residents were mostly unaware of any recent or ongoing accessibility initiatives in the Region, and they had no knowledge of the goals the Region intended to achieve through its original plan. Capacity limits delayed the implementation of the first plan, but residents and stakeholders had low to no expectations from it because they did not know about it. However, this shows that we should consider how we can better communicate information about important plans and activities to residents. This includes both information about plans and activities, and consultation about these plans and activities. This should also serve as a sign of the extent to which the first Accessibility Plan was deprioritized, and as a call to action for us to prioritize the implementation of the forthcoming plan.

Most of the people consulted believe the Region has a lot of work to do when it comes to accessibility. The areas of need they referenced most frequently were access to transportation and accessibility of the built environment and public spaces. Increased public awareness about and engagement on accessibility were also frequent topics of

discussion. Some residents talked about communication and access to services and information as areas they would like to see improved, but these topics were generally a lower priority than the preceding areas.

Notably, nearly everyone consulted expressed that the town, village, or municipality where they lived felt welcoming and like home to them. They shared that, despite the barriers to accessibility, they were happy living in the Region - even if they wished for improvement in some areas. They were invested in the future of the Region and eager to share their feedback about how to make it a more accessible and livable place. Importantly, people shared ideas about community-based initiatives that could support accessibility in the Region. While residents and stakeholders believe that the towns, villages, and municipality should take an active role in improving accessibility and we should use our power and resources to do so, many people described a vision for accessibility that incorporates community resources such as disability advocacy organizations and local businesses. Given that the towns, villages, and municipality have limited capacity and resources, leveraging community resources and goodwill will be key to the successful implementation of the forthcoming Accessibility Plan.

Positive Feedback

The following positive feedback about accessibility was shared with LTRT and the Region.

Welcoming and Helpful

Many residents shared that their respective communities within the Region are welcoming, and that the people around them are helpful. They expressed that, though the Region has many structural and systemic barriers to accessibility, most people are willing to do what they can to support accessibility needs. One example of this was shared by a resident who frequents the Truro Farmer’s Market. The accessible bathroom needed repair, and they reported this to the Market’s facilities manager. The bathroom was not proactively maintained and so it posed barriers to access for people with disabilities. However, once the issue was raised it was addressed quickly, and the bathroom was repaired. In another example, residents shared that the legion and the library in Stewiacke have poor infrastructure for people using mobility devices to access

their buildings. To work around these barriers, staff and other residents are always willing to assist people with disabilities to get into the buildings safely, if not easily.

Moving in the Right Direction

Many residents and stakeholders shared their frustration with the pace at which accessibility is being advanced across the Region. However, they acknowledged that they have seen evidence that things are moving in the right direction. People noted increased accessibility in newer or recently renovated spaces controlled by Regional entities, such as the Rath Eastlink Community Centre. A member of the Regional Accessibility Advisory committee noted that a heritage building in the Municipality of Colchester is being renovated for accessibility, and that they are glad to see a move towards blending heritage and accessibility.

Services

Residents and stakeholders shared that they are typically able to access services controlled by the Regional entities without any barriers. They reported that staff are generally easy to contact and are helpful in answering questions. They shared examples of staff answering questions about tax bills and helping seniors to find and register for community programs. People appreciated that they could connect with staff in a variety of ways, including in person, over the phone, and by email. They also appreciated that information is shared using a variety of forms (like digital, print, and public signage) and channels. Residents and stakeholders are hopeful that the Region will continue to be mindful of the diverse needs and communication preferences of residents (such as aging persons, newcomers, and people with disabilities), and that they will continue to provide services accordingly.

Where They Want to Be

People we engaged with, by and large, felt that the Region and entities within it are inaccessible. However, the Region is their home and where they want to be. They are frustrated by a lack of access but have endured it, hoping for a better and more accessible future for their community. The personal connection and/or history that people have with the Region is important and meaningful to them, to the extent that they'd rather stay, if they can, than move somewhere more accessible. Even with these

connections, however, residents and stakeholders have been practically and emotionally impacted by barriers to access. As one resident put it, “[It feels like] this town I adored and fell in love with and fully participated in didn’t want me.” People want to live, work, play, and age-in-place in the Truro-Colchester region. However, it needs to be accessible to continue to be livable.

What We Heard: Areas of Improvement

The following constructive feedback about accessibility was shared with LTRT and the Region.

Public Awareness and Engagement

- Members of the Regional Accessibility Advisory Committee feel there is a lack of community awareness about accessibility. As noted above, Committee members and other stakeholders shared that individual people are generally helpful when they are made aware of a barrier to accessibility. An example was shared of staff helping people with mobility disabilities access the recently closed Truro Brewing Company. However, individuals can only do so much to address systemic and structural barriers to access. Accessibility needs to be meaningfully considered and addressed at a community-wide level.
- Stakeholder organizations we spoke with told us that stigma and ignorance around disability persist in the community. They shared that much of their work and energy focuses on dismantling false, harmful beliefs around disability.
- Stakeholders feel that people in the community want to help, but they don’t always know what help is needed or how to help. They want to see more community education and awareness around accessibility.
- Community advocates feel they are not listened to by people within the community who have the power to make change. As previously noted, stakeholders feel that people are helpful and supportive in reducing barriers on an individual basis, within limited interactions. When it comes to longer-term

solutions or ongoing initiatives, community advocates for accessibility feel their perspectives and priorities aren't listened to or respected.

Buildings, Infrastructure, and Public Spaces

- We heard many concerns about the barriers posed by aging buildings. People noted that older buildings either haven't been retrofitted for accessibility, haven't been sufficiently updated, or have kept barriers to access in the name of preserving heritage features. For example, we heard that the library and legion in Stewiacke have ramps and doorways that are poorly designed and difficult to navigate. We heard similar feedback about the East Hants Library. We also heard multiple times that heritage is prioritized over accessibility in the use and maintenance of older buildings in the Region. LTRT acknowledges this may be a blend of perception and reality, as municipal staff told us that accessibility is considered when older public buildings are renovated. It may also be that residents are referring to older, non-public buildings.
- Where accessibility features have been incorporated into public buildings, maintenance of those features is important. People shared experiences with automatic door openers not working and accessible pathways and ramps not being properly maintained, whether related to snow removal or surface maintenance.
- A parent to a child with a disability shared a story of how her daughter, a wheelchair user, couldn't get into the library in Stewiacke. When she and her daughter visited the Stewiacke Town Hall to raise the issue with town staff, her daughter couldn't get into that building, either. Their experience highlights the need for the renovation and maintenance of public spaces for accessibility.
- Several people noted a lack of places of refuge and rest throughout community, such as benches or sheltered pavilions. They shared that this is a barrier to some people with disabilities, including those with mobility disabilities or limited stamina, who need places to rest to safely and comfortably travel in their communities. These features should be in public places that are frequented by

residents, including parks and town squares. They should not impede pathways of travel. For example, benches should not be installed along public sidewalks or paths if there isn't sufficient width to accommodate them, as this may pose a barrier to people using mobility devices.

- Residents noted a lack of accessible public washrooms throughout the community, such as in parks and town squares. One person with a disability cited the washrooms in Bible Hill Rec Park as a good example of accessible public washrooms. They suggested this as a good model and starting point for future washroom designs.

- We heard a need for accessible venues, forums, and events throughout the community. This includes physically accessible venues to host events, as well as accessibility features to support the events like sign language interpreters, accessible seating, and accessible signage. This also includes forums like council/commission meetings and other public forums.

- Several parents of children with disabilities expressed a need for more accessible play structures and facilities in parks and recreational spaces. The same parents also cited a need for accessible recreation and leisure programs.

Transportation

- By far the most common feedback we received about accessibility was about the barriers created by the lack of public transportation options across the Region. For people who can't drive (e.g. some people with disabilities, aging persons who are no longer licensed, or newcomers without valid provincial licenses), or who otherwise lack access to personal vehicles (e.g. for reasons of affordability), the lack of public transportation in the Truro-Colchester Region is a major barrier. Services are spread out across the Region, and many residents shared that they live in residential areas that are not within walking distance to essential services. Accessible vehicles for conventional transit as well as paratransit services were highlighted as necessities for any future regional transportation plans.

- We heard that sidewalk safety and access are major barriers to access and transportation throughout the Region. Stewiacke was referenced most often, but these comments apply across the Region. Residents reported that some areas have no sidewalks or crosswalks at all. In cases where sidewalks are present, they noted that some are too narrow to fit mobility devices, or are heaving, uneven, or otherwise poorly maintained. All these factors pose barriers and hazards for people with disabilities. Where there are crosswalks, people reported that many feel unsafe and lack accessibility features like tactile walking surface indicators, pavement markings, audio and visual crossing signals, and islands of refuge for wide intersections.
- Many people reported that key services and locations in the community are not safely walkable, due to both distance and factors like the lack of accessible sidewalks. This poses a particular problem given that there are no public transportation services.
- Several people mentioned a lack of sufficient accessible parking throughout the community. This may or may not be under the purview of the Regional entities, as it may be provincially controlled or the responsibility of private businesses.

Information and Communications

- Residents shared that they don’t always know where to find information. They appreciate that information about services, activities, and initiatives in the Region are shared in a variety of mediums and channels to suit the diverse needs and preferences of the community. However, when it comes to looking for specific information, such as about services, programs, and events, people aren’t sure where to look. To this end, people advocated for a more centralized and/or intuitive method of information-sharing on the towns’, villages’, and municipality’s websites. At the same time, people facing barriers to technology, whether related to access or knowledge, need print information to remain available.

- Even if they are able to find information about services, programs, and events, some people noted that the information put out by the Region rarely addresses accessibility. As one resident with a disability put it, “How do we know where we can go and what we can do?” Understanding what is accessible and to what extent is helpful to residents making plans in their community.
- We heard that it would be helpful to have more accessible signage throughout the community. Signage that is written in plain language, uses intuitive symbols, includes tactile features, and designed with sufficient font size and colour contrast is helpful to people with disabilities and to newcomers whose first language isn’t English.
- In addition to more accessible signage, people shared that it would be helpful to have more signage about accessible spaces and accessibility features in the community. This could include things like signage indicating where the nearest accessible washroom is, or which trails are accessible and to what extent.
- People also reported that creating consistency in the signage across the Region (especially in its design, placement, and usage) would be helpful to people with disabilities and newcomers to the community.

This feedback from the community has been addressed through the commitments outlined in the Commitments to Accessibility section of this plan. Additional priority areas of commitment were identified through LTRT’s review, including improvements to accessibility in municipal employment practices. While community members we spoke with were satisfied with the accessibility of municipal services on the whole, we made commitments around preserving and enhancing service quality when it comes to the delivery of goods and services. These areas are also captured in our Commitments to Accessibility.

Regional Accessibility Advisory Committee

The Regional Accessibility Advisory Committee was established to provide advice to the Municipal Councils and Village Commissions on identifying, removing, and preventing

barriers to people with disabilities in the Truro-Colchester Region. As part of this accessibility plan review and update process the Regional Accessibility Advisory Committee participated in two virtual consultation sessions to provide feedback. The committee members provided feedback on the state of accessibility generally during our first consultation. They provided feedback a draft version of this plan and the commitments included in it during their second consultation. Their feedback was aligned with the feedback we heard from the wider community. Committee members specifically highlighted the persistent barriers to accessibility in the built environment including sidewalks, washrooms, and other respite facilities.

The Regional Accessibility Advisory Committee will continue to play a crucial role in monitoring our progress on accessibility and the implementation of this plan.

Identification and Development of Priority Areas

In addition to feedback from the community, we identified and developed our priority areas of commitment based on the Nova Scotia Accessibility Act (Bill 59, 2017), the Accessible Canada Act (2019), and the input of regional staff. Note that standards for both the Nova Scotia Accessibility Act and the Accessible Canada Act are currently in development. The language below refers to anticipated forthcoming standards. These should not be interpreted as the standards themselves. The language in the legislation around these priority areas is as follows:

Delivery of Goods and Services:

Nova Scotia Accessibility Act: Standards for delivering and receiving goods and services may address how service providers interact with and are trained to serve persons with disabilities. This may include how persons with disabilities access goods and services, including the use of assistive devices.

Accessible Canada Act, Service Design & Delivery: Receive services that are accessible to all.

Buildings, Infrastructure, and Public Spaces

Nova Scotia Accessibility Act: Standards in this area will address how to make buildings, streets, sidewalks, and shared spaces accessible to all. These standards may

address gaps in current regulations.

Accessible Canada Act, Built Environment: Move freely around buildings and public spaces.

Information and Communications

Nova Scotia Accessibility Act: Requires institutions to ensure all Nova Scotians can receive and share the same information. Consider accessible formats (for example, braille, American Sign Language, or large print), accessible websites and technologies, and standards for communicating with persons with disabilities.

Accessible Canada Act, Information and Communications Technology: Requires accessible digital content and technologies, barrier free spaces and services for people with communication disabilities. Note that the Accessible Canada Act has an additional separate priority area, Communications Other than ICT.

Transportation

Nova Scotia Accessibility Act: Public transportation and transportation infrastructure: standards in this area will help make it easier for everyone to travel throughout rural and urban Nova Scotia.

Accessible Canada Act, Transportation: Barrier-free federal transportation network.

Employment

Nova Scotia Accessibility Act: Standards in this area will support persons with disabilities in finding meaningful employment. The goal is to ensure equal access to employment for persons with disabilities.

Accessible Canada Act, Employment: Access to employment opportunities and accessible workplaces.

Public Awareness and Engagement

While not identified as a priority area under either Act, following best practices and feedback from the public, we have identified Public Awareness and Engagement as a priority area for this plan. This is to support cultural change across the Region when it comes to understanding, prioritizing, and addressing accessibility.

Consultation

While not a distinct priority area on its own, consulting people with disabilities is important to ensuring that spaces, activities, and operations across the Region meet the needs of people with disabilities, and that their input is considered when making changes or planning new projects. To that end, consultation with people with disabilities has been seeded throughout the commitments to accessibility put forth in this plan.

Note that the Accessible Canada Act has an additional priority area, Procurement, not addressed in the Nova Scotia Accessibility, nor directly addressed as its own distinct area in this plan. However, commitments around accessible procurement are embedded in other areas of this plan.

Prioritization Framework

The following prioritization framework is a set of criteria that each regional entity will apply to the commitments made in this plan as we work to implement them. Applying this prioritization framework will help determine which accessibility improvements the Region/entities should address sooner during the life of this plan, and which we may address later. Note that this prioritization framework has not been applied to this Plan. It will be applied during the planning and implementation stages as this Plan goes into effect. The order in which commitments are listed are not necessarily the order they will be prioritized and acted upon.

We used three prioritization criteria, and a scoring system associated with those criteria to help determine the priority and order of implementation. The criteria are:

Degree of Benefit Associated with Implementing a Recommendation

How beneficial will the implementation of a commitment be? The benefit of implementing a commitment will often be related to how significant the barrier is. Removal of a significant barrier (e.g. no ramped access to a community building) will be more beneficial than the removal of a less significant one (e.g. missing alt-text in a social media post).

Priorities of People with Disabilities.

This considers whether a particular commitment is a high priority for people with disabilities, based on feedback received from people with disabilities. Barriers that people with disabilities report are highly problematic for them (e.g. inaccessible transit access; inaccessible public buildings) should be given a higher priority than barriers which people with disabilities don't see as being as large of a problem (e.g. lack of braille and ASL formats for public communications).

Degree of Difficulty Implementing a Commitment

This considers the degree of difficulty for the Region to implement a commitment in the plan. This does not mean the commitment is not a priority for the Region. It means that some commitments will be more complex and/or require more time and money than other commitments and therefore are likely to take longer to implement.

These criteria and the associated scoring methods are outline in this rubric below:

	Score 1/4	Score 2/4	Score 3/4	Score 4/4
1. Degree of benefit associated with implementing a commitment	There is minimal or moderate benefit for a small number of people	There is minimal or moderate benefit for many people	There is significant benefit for a small number of people	There is a significant benefit for many, people
2. Priorities of people with disabilities	This is a low priority for people with disabilities but may have a small impact for a small number of people	This is a moderate priority for people with disabilities and may have a small impact for many people	This is a high priority for people with disabilities and may have a moderate or high impact for a small number of people	This is a very high priority for people with disabilities and will have a high impact for many people
3. Degree of difficulty implementing the commitment	There is a high degree of difficulty (time, complexity, cost) implementing the commitment.	There is a moderate degree of difficulty (time, complexity, cost) implementing the commitment.	There is little difficulty (time, complexity, cost) implementing the commitment.	There is virtually no difficulty implementing a commitment. This mostly applies to commitments that are already underway or ongoing.

Commitments to Accessibility

The following are our commitments to accessibility, which have been developed according to feedback from people with disabilities and the larger community, following Nova Scotia Accessibility Act and Accessible Canada Act legislation, following best practices, using input from regional staff, and with support from accessibility experts.

Commitments: Public Awareness and Engagement

The entities (“we”) within the Region will work together to:

- **Advance public education and awareness** around accessibility by developing and implementing a Regional public education campaign on accessibility aimed

at both residents and the business community, including things like why it is a priority for the Region, how the Region is taking action towards accessibility, and how the public can engage with the Region and the entities within it on accessibility (e.g. a feedback mechanism; community consultations on specific projects). This may include social media messaging, dedicated webpages to accessibility, columns in community newsletters, and postering. The purpose of this is to raise awareness around accessibility, reduce attitudinal barriers to disability, and give a forum for engagement around accessibility.

- **Promote relationship-building by**:
    - Continuing to work in good faith the Regional Accessibility Advisory Committee.
    - Working to build relationships with relevant service and advocacy organizations who can support the work the Region is doing to achieve greater accessibility.
- **Identify accessibility champions** and consider ways to spotlight accessibility champions within the Region, for example local businesses and leaders who can model accessibility for others in the Region. This will reward businesses and leaders who are making good on accessibility, inform community members about accessible places they can visit, as well as promote accessible practices across the Region.

Commitments: Buildings, Infrastructure, and Public Spaces

We will work together to:

- **Prioritize planning for accessibility** when making plans for renovations, updates, or construction of municipal buildings and facilities.
    - We will prioritize accessibility from the earliest stages of planning.
    - We will consult people with disabilities in the planning and design of these spaces.
- **Align heritage and accessibility** when making plans for renovations or updates of existing public spaces.

    - We will work with architects and engineers who are experts in aligning heritage considerations with accessibility.
    - We will be sure to prioritize accessibility on equal or greater terms to heritage when updating community spaces.
- **Incorporate accessibility into RFPs and vendors agreements** when sourcing and procuring vendors.
    - We will incorporate accessibility into the earliest stages of planning and projects, including selecting and working with vendors during the procurement and contracting stages.
    - We will include accessibility as a criterion for vendors to address when responding to RFPs. E.g. explaining how they will incorporate accessibility into their work, both the process and the finished product.
- **Improve accessibility of signage.** When updating or replacing regional signage, we will:
    - Integrate accessibility features into new designs. Accessibility features include things like plain language, easy-to-read font, visual cues, and tactile signage.
    - Consider developing regional guidelines on signage to ensure consistency and accessibility in signage across the Region, as well as work with the Provincial Accessibility Directorate to improve accessibility of signage.
- **Identify opportunities to increase the number of public accessible washrooms.**
    - When feasible to advance these projects, we will consider different user needs including adults with disabilities who may require changing stations.
    - We will ensure that these washrooms are clearly identified on public information kiosks and other wayfinding elements such as point of interest markers and park information kiosks.
- **Investigate the possibility of increasing the availability of public seating (e.g. accessible benches) throughout the Region.**

    - When feasible to advance these projects, we will ensure that the design and construction of this seating accommodates a range of body types and disabilities, and that the location of seating does not create new barriers.
    - We will ensure that this seating is clearly identified on public information kiosks and other wayfinding elements such as point of interest markers and park information kiosks.
- **Review currently available accessible public parking** and determine if there is need and opportunity to increase those spaces.
- **Align bylaws, where feasible.**
    - We will work to develop consistent accessibility practices across the Region, especially where public spaces are concerned, to the extent feasible and in alignment with forthcoming provincial standards. For example, consistency in accessibility of crosswalks, sidewalks, and intersections; consistency in accessibility of signage and wayfinding.
- **Identify more opportunities to improve accessibility of public parks and recreational spaces**. Opportunities could include more accessible playground structures, accessible seating, improving accessibility of pathways and trails.

Commitments: Transportation

We will work together to:

- **Investigate opportunities to improve transit access** by conducting a regional transportation feasibility study to explore options to increase access to public transit in the Region.
    - We will give high priority consideration to accessibility (of routes and vehicles) in the study.
    - We will explore paratransit options as part of the study.
- **Prioritize accessibility when planning transportation projects.**
    - We will ensure accessibility is a key consideration in the execution of projects.

    - We will prioritize plans that address known accessibility barriers or provide significant upgrades to accessibility and increased safety for vulnerable road users.
- **Consult people with disabilities** in the planning and design of transportation-related projects, including the Region's 2025 regional transportation feasibility study.
- **Source expertise and include accessibility knowledge and experience** as a criterion when sourcing and selecting vendors for transportation-related projects.
- **Leverage community programs** by continuing to work with, provide support to, and promote local non-profit and community organizations (e.g. Colchester Transportation Co-operative Limited; Local health transport unit) to support transportation access.
- **Work to improve sidewalk and safety access** in line with provincial requirements by:
    - Working to identify high-priority sidewalks and crosswalks in need of repairs and updates.
    - Working with the province to secure necessary permissions to facilitate those improvements.
    - When projects are happening, we will consult people with disabilities and industry experts on accessibility to identify key accessibility features (e.g. curb cuts, tactile surface indicators, crosswalk markings, auditory and visual signals) needed for these improvements.
    - When projects are moving forward, we will work with the necessary Councils/Commissions to secure the budget to complete the work.

Commitments: Information and Communications

We will work together to:

- **Include accessibility as part of our communications practices**.
    - If a formal communications policy doesn't exist, we will consider developing one and including accessible communications practices as a priority item. Practices may include:

    - Information on producing accessible documents (e.g. internal documents, public documents, newsletters). shared internally with employees, as well as public facing documents such as official plans, community newsletters, etc.
    - Social media accessibility.
    - Accessible style guides.

- **Develop guidance or a checklist on accessibility best practices for social media communications**, including:
    - Using alternative text
    - Using camel case hashtags
    - Writing in plain language
    - Including or enabling captions in videos captions Ensure that when updating or developing these policies that consideration is given to both accessible formats and channels of dissemination.

- **Incorporate accessibility into our websites and web tools.** When making planned changes to public websites and internal web systems, we will engage a digital accessibility specialist to ensure accessibility of the updated websites and web tools.
- **Develop a feedback mechanism for web accessibility.** If a user encounters a barrier to web accessibility with engaging with regional websites or web tools, they can share feedback about the barrier with the relevant entity. The relevant entity will take steps to remove that barrier.
- **Source training on accessible communications best practices and have relevant staff complete training.** Note that relevant staff may not just be communications personnel, but anyone who has a role in creating content that is shared with staff or residents.
- **Develop guidelines for meeting accessibility**, both for in-person and virtual meetings. Guidelines could include information on things like:

    - Developing accessible meeting agendas.
    - Creating and sharing accessible slide decks for presentations in advance of meeting.
    - Enabling captions in meetings.
    - Etiquette for speaker identification and visual descriptions for meetings which include participants who identify as blind or having low-vision.
    - Scheduling breaks in longer meetings.
    - Etiquette for working with sign language interpreters.
    - Booking accessible venues for in-person meetings.

- **Explore options for all-staff training on meeting accessibility**, including how to use virtual meeting platforms in accessible ways, how to provide accommodations in meetings, and how to prepare and circulate accessible meeting materials.
- **Leverage relationships with service provider and stakeholder organizations (e.g. The Lemonaid Stand Society) to help disseminate relevant communications** to ensure that high priority information is reaching residents with disabilities.

Commitments: Delivery of Services and Goods

We will work together to:

- **Explore opportunities for accessible recreational community programming, for example accessible programs and/or program designed specifically for people with disabilities through local libraries, community centres, and other recreation and leisure channels controlled by the entities.** We will ensure that, when available, these programs are advertised in the community in accessible ways, and we will work with advocacy organizations to promote the availability of these programs.

- **Establish an in-person service (e.g. kiosk or service desk) to support residents accessing and navigating services.** We will ensure this service operates on a regular schedule and is well-advertised in the community using accessible communications methods and leveraging relationships with stakeholder organizations to get the word out.
- **Consult with the public—including people with disabilities—about major or highly relevant planned changes.**
    - We will inform the public of any confirmed changes to services in an accessible manner (e.g. multi-modal communication channels; alternative formats such as braille or ASL upon request).
    - We will take into consideration how planned changes may create barriers to accessibility and either modify the plans or make alternative provisions for service for people with disabilities upon request.
- **Allocate budget that will allow the entities to address ad hoc accessibility requests/expenses** that arise unexpectedly throughout the year (e.g. ASL interpretation for a council meeting or regional event).
- **Develop and implement an accessible events checklist or a guidance document for regional events** that is also free to use by local community groups, non-profit and for-profit businesses and organizations who stage events in the community. This could be part of a larger, pre-existing resource library for the community.
    - We will ensure this resource is well advertised, and easy to find or access by relevant user groups (e.g. a dedicated tab or page on municipal websites.) Items to consider including in the list are:
        - Ensuring event venues are physically accessible for people using mobility aids and devices.
        - Ensuring communications about events are made and disseminated in accessible ways (e.g. following best practices in document and web accessibility, having alternative formats of communications).

        - Including information about accessibility in event communications (e.g. if the venue is physically accessible, if there will be a sign language interpreter).
        - Considering proactively including accessibility measures for events (where reasonable and feasible) like sign language interpreters, CART captioning, assistive hearing technology, sensory-friendly spaces, etc.
        - Offering accommodations upon request in communications about the event.
        - Developing a roster of accessible venues and service providers who can facilitate accessible events.

Commitments: Employment

We will work together to:

- **Promote knowledge and resource-sharing related to accessibility.** The Region will work to identify actions that leverage staff knowledge about accessibility, particularly the professional and lived experience of staff who have disabilities. Examples activities could include:
    - Establishing a Regional Accessibility Staff Working Group.
    - Identifying Accessibility Champions within each of the Regional entities.
    - Regular meetings among the Regional entities to share progress on and promising practices to support the fulfilment of this Accessibility Plan.
    - Engaging the Provincial Accessibility Directorate.
- **Improve accessibility of our recruitment and hiring processes.** Improvements could include things like:
    - Using plain and inclusive language in job postings to the extent possible.
    - Including information in job postings about the availability of accommodations in the recruitment process.
    - Focusing on bona fide job requirements in job postings, and eliminating exclusionary language from postings.

    - Formatting job postings according to best practices in web and document accessibility.
    - Incorporating discussions about accommodations early in the onboarding process.
    - Developing a process to fulfill accommodation requests efficiently and effectively.
    - Developing relationships with local service providers and stakeholder organizations to facilitate the implementation of best practices around recruitment and hiring for people with disabilities, and to increase outreach to jobseekers with disabilities in the Region.
- **Develop a comprehensive accommodations policy and process for municipal employees.**
- **Ensure that the policy and process:**
    - Reflect best practices and legal requirements.
    - Have clear guidance on timelines for fulfillment of accommodations.
    - Have expectations established for both employee and employer.
    - Clearly define process owners for the end-to-end (e.g. receiving request; evaluating and approving request; fulfilling request) accommodations process.
- **Source and deliver practical training on accessibility to all employees** (e.g. disability and accessibility awareness training).
- **Identify learning needs and deliver accessibility training specific to job requirements.** For example, accessible customer service training for people interacting with the public; accessibility engineering standards training for people responsible for infrastructure; etc. The purpose of this is to raise awareness around accessibility in work carried out across the Region, to reduce attitudinal barriers to disability, and to promote accessible practices in municipal jobs.

Commitments: Other

We will work together to:

- **Explore funding opportunities** such as provincial grants to support accessibility work in the Region. Likewise, we will work to source and promote funding opportunities for local businesses and organizations to improve accessibility of their spaces and services.

Conclusion

We understand that the above commitments are a matter of inclusion, dignity, autonomy, and safety. Greater accessibility in the Region translates to a more livable and welcoming place for all people, including people with disabilities. The removal of barriers to access is not a luxury. It is a need. We take seriously the commitments outlined in this plan. We will work to secure the resources we need to prioritize the implementation of the plan. And we look forward to working with the community to build a more accessible Truro-Colchester Region.