



THE REGIONAL MUNICIPALITY
OF DURHAM HEADQUARTERS

The Regional Municipality of Durham 2022-2025 Multi-Year Accessibility Plan

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accessibility@durham.ca
Or 905-668-4113 extension 2009.



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Message from Regional Chair John Henry and Chief Administrative Officer Elaine Baxter-Trahair

We are pleased to present our 2022-2025 Multi-Year Accessibility Plan. This plan for Durham Region celebrates the accomplishments of the last few years and outlines efforts that will continue into 2025.

As in every other area of life, the global pandemic has left its mark on Regional projects over the past two years. Some projects were delayed due to lockdowns, while others were deferred as a result of closed borders. One example was Durham Region Transit's autonomous-electric vehicle pilot project, which finally launched in August 2021. We look forward to learning how this innovative transit vehicle and service can support accessible mobility.

On a more positive note, the pandemic accelerated projects and practices that should provide important benefits for many people with disabilities. The need for staff to work from home, and for the Region to serve customers remotely, drove remarkable change in a short period of time.

Job interviews and training quickly shifted online. Our customer service modernization project—myDurham 311—took on a heightened priority. It strives to offer customers a single point of contact with consistent, seamless service, regardless of the method or device used to reach us.

Plus, the stresses of the pandemic placed an enhanced focus on mental health, which was long overdue. Maintaining this momentum and refining these changes to ensure and expand accessibility will be essential.

Over the next four years, we will continue to train staff on accessible services and document creation, while striving to keep our websites accessible, despite rapidly changing technology.

Work is ongoing to ensure that Regional employment practices, from recruiting to employment and beyond, are inclusive, providing the tools and accommodations that allow job candidates and our staff to excel.

Regional facility projects, such as the Workplace Modernization Project, will transform Regional Headquarters over the next few years. These are being designed for barrier free access. And, we will keep on innovating and refining transit to meet the needs of our community.

This iteration of our plan takes us through to 2025, when, in accordance with the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 (AODA) Ontario must be counting down to ensure full accessibility. While significant progress has occurred since the Act was proclaimed, those of us who have been working toward full accessibility for the past 15 years understand that the effort will not end in 2025.

Improving accessibility of our services, programs and facilities is central to the Region's 2020-2024 strategic plan, which aims to "build a healthy, inclusive, age friendly community where everyone feels a sense of belonging" and prioritizes service excellence. Our recent community accessibility survey provided valuable feedback on how we are doing and insights into issues that still need work.

We will continue to reach out to the community and rely on great advice from our Accessibility Advisory Committee to support our ongoing accessibility efforts with this plan.

Yours truly,

John Henry

Regional Chair and Chief Executive Officer

Elaine C. Baxter-Trahair

Chief Administrative Officer



About Durham Region

Durham Region has a population of more than 700,000 residents; expected to grow to more than one million by 2041. According to Statistics Canada, about 22 per cent of Canadians identified as having at least one disability. This means about 6.2 million people in Canada or about 154,000 in Durham Region.

The Region covers a vast land area of 2,390 square kilometres (1,000 square miles), including both urban and rural settings. Citizens within Durham Region are serviced by eight area municipal governments and The Regional Municipality of Durham.

The Region is governed by a council, consisting of a Regional Chair and 28 elected members. The Regional Chair is the head of Regional Council and Chief Executive Officer of the corporation. The Chief Administrative Officer is the most senior staff person in the Region of Durham. She reports to Regional Council and works closely with the Regional Chair.

The Region provides services and programs that are delivered across wide areas and require large-scale co-ordination. Through various departments, the Region is responsible for:

- 9-1-1 management.
- Borrowing of money for capital expenditures of upper- and lower-tier municipalities.
- Childcare centres, nursery school programs and Durham Behaviour Management Services (children).
- Delegated authority for local area Municipal Official Plans and Amendments.
- Durham Regional Official Plan and implementation.
- Economic development and tourism.
- Emergency management.
- Family counselling.
- Industrial, commercial, and residential development approvals.
- Land ambulance services.
- Land Division Consent applications.
- Long-term care and services for seniors.
- Municipal water supply, treatment, distribution, and billing.
- Ontario Works programs and services.
- Police services.
- Property tax policy.
- Provincial Offences Court, prosecution services, administration, and collection of fines.
- Public Health programs and services.
- Regional roads, bridges and traffic signals and controls.

Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 (AODA)

The purpose of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 (AODA) is to address discrimination against persons with disabilities in Ontario. The Act involves accessibility standards that have been developed to be implemented and enforced, throughout public and private sectors. The AODA specifies that accessibility will be addressed in areas of goods, services, facilities, accommodation, employment, buildings, structures, and premises by the year 2025. The following standards will all be addressed in this Plan.

Accessibility standards

Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulations (IASR)

- **Customer Service:** Provide accessible customer service to people with disabilities.
- **Information and Communications:** Create, provide, and receive information and communications in ways that are accessible to people with disabilities.
- **Employment:** Incorporate accessibility practices across all stages of employment.
- **Transportation:** Make it easier to move around through accessible public transportation services.
- **Design of Public Space:** Make public spaces more accessible.

Our organization is committed to fulfilling our requirements under the AODA. This accessibility plan outlines the steps the Regional Municipality of Durham is taking to meet those requirements and to improve opportunities for people with disabilities along with its role in making Ontario an accessible province for all.

Statement of Organizational Commitment

The Plan outlines the long-term strategies that Durham Region will implement to achieve legislated accessibility requirements, while being committed to ensuring accessibility for persons with disabilities throughout its programs, services and facilities. The Accessibility Policy outlines that accessibility shall be addressed in a manner that:

- Upholds the principles of dignity and independence.
- Strives to provide integrated services.
- Provides equal opportunity.

The 2022-2025 Multi-Year Plan builds off the success of Regional Council's direction with the previous 2016-2021 Plan.



Accessibility planning supports Durham Region's Strategic Plan and Regional Commitments

The Region uses strategic planning initiatives to create programs and deliver services that meet the needs of our growing population and an increasingly diverse community.

Accessibility planning in Durham includes the requirements of the AODA and supports the Region's strategic direction and long-term goals. Creating a community that is inclusive and accessible for everyone links with the goals set out in the following regional strategies and policies:

- The 2020-2024 Durham Region Strategic Plan. Connect. Grow. Succeed.
 - Goal 2: Community Vitality:
 - 2.5 Build a healthy, inclusive, age-friendly community where everyone feels a sense of belonging.
- Accessibility Policy
- Regional Commitment to Accessibility



Alignment with Regional Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Initiatives

The Region is developing a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Strategy to foster safe, fair, respectful and inclusive communities and set measurable goals to evaluate our progress. A core component of the Strategy is accessibility; ensuring staff of all abilities are valued and supported and that regional programs and services are available and accessible to all. The DEI Strategy aims to embed a DEI and accessibility focus into all departments—from frontline staff to senior leadership.

In addition to employing dedicated accessibility-focused staff, the Region has convened a Disabilities Working Group to address the needs of employees and community members with disabilities.

The Region is committed to building our partnerships with community service organizations with an accessibility mandate. We will continue to work with the Abilities Centre to deliver targeted programming and community events and continue our partnership with Ready, Willing and Able to enrich our workforce through inclusive recruitment of experienced, talented, and skilled staff.

Durham Accessibility Advisory Committee

Each local municipality also has its own multi-year accessibility plan and Accessibility Advisory Committee (AAC), as required by the AODA.

The Durham Accessibility Advisory Committee (AAC) advises Regional Council about accessibility initiatives that the Region is responsible for to ensure a barrier-free region.

Committee members are comprised from the eight local municipalities and are a dedicated group of individuals. The committee members represent diverse backgrounds and abilities. This allows many perspectives and experiences to improve accessibility for Durham Region residents.

The Durham AAC and Regional employees are committed to identifying, removing, and preventing barriers through accessibility planning.

This updated Multi-Year Accessibility Plan builds on the accomplishments of Durham Region's previous accessibility plans and activities to implement the Standards outlined in the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA).

Our Region is enhanced when input comes from people of all abilities. The invaluable support and advice from the Durham AAC, is appreciated to continue the work needed to help chart the path of creating an accessible Ontario by 2025.

The Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act progress to date

The Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) sets out accessibility requirements that an organization must meet in the areas of customer service, information and communications, employment, transportation, and the design of public spaces.

The following outlines the AODA requirements by the year achieved:

2010

- Met all requirements of the Accessibility Standards for Customer Service including:
 - The Accessibility Policy, which outlines the Customer Service mandate.
 - Training of all employees, students and volunteers is ongoing.

2011

- Incorporated specific accessibility criteria for Durham Region Transit (DRT), as required for 2011.

2012

- Emergency and public safety information offered in an accessible format, upon request.
- Emergency response plan forms developed for employees with temporary and permanent disabilities.
- Incorporated specific accessibility criteria for Durham Region Transit, Specialized Services as required for 2012.

2013

- Established a corporate Accessibility Policy to guide the Region's accessibility direction.
- Created a multi-year accessibility plan that outlines strategies to achieve AODA requirements; and improve accessibility within programs, services and facilities.
- Incorporated accessibility design, criteria and features in the procurement process for new goods, services and facilities.
- Incorporated specific accessibility criteria into DRT and Specialized Services, as required for 2013.

2014

- Trained employees, volunteers, and contractors on the requirements of the AODA's Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulation and Ontario's Human Rights Code, as it pertains to people with disabilities.
- Ensured processes for receiving and responding to feedback continue to be accessible to people with disabilities by providing accessible formats or communication supports upon request.
- Developed and documented accessible employment practice and policies across all stages of the employment life cycle.
- Incorporated specific accessibility criteria into Durham Region Transit and Specialized Services as required for 2014.

2015

- Provided accessible formats and communication support when requested by employees and members of the public.

2016

- Incorporated the requirements of the Design of Public Spaces Standard into future capital projects.

2017

- Implemented pre-boarding and on-board announcements.
- Fare parity throughout Durham Region Transit services.
- Provide same hours of operation for conventional and specialized transportation services.

2021

- All existing Durham Region websites and web content conform to the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 2.0 Level AA.

A close-up photograph of a person's hands holding a small, white, rectangular card. The card is held horizontally and features the text "Your feedback matters!" written in a dark blue, cursive-style font. The person's hands are light-skinned and are positioned to frame the card. The background is a blurred brown fabric, likely a jacket. The right side of the image is partially obscured by a blue graphic overlay.

Your feedback
matters!

What we heard

Feedback was gathered through the on-line multi-year plan survey, along with input received through emails and phone calls from accessibility advisory committee members around Durham Region, agencies who support people with disabilities, family members sharing their experiences and the general public. Below is a summary of what was heard from the public and regional staff—categorized in each standard and outlined in the ranking order of importance—as indicated in participants’ responses.

Information and Communication Standard

The information and communication standard was ranked as the most important when asked throughout the consultation process. The Region of Durham has made great improvements in the way communication and information is provided to the public. COVID-19 has amplified the need to have information and communication accessible to everyone. There are always opportunities to improve and receive feedback to assist in the Region’s planning.

- Communication is vital to ensuring that people know where, and how, to find the services they require.
- During the pandemic, many residents accessed current information—on such topics as vaccine updates, registration for vaccine doses and statistics kept about the pandemic—by visiting the Durham.ca website.
- Members of the deaf community expressed that having options to communicate with the Region, other than by phone, is crucial to meeting their needs. Having email addresses, chat functions on the website, TTY (teletypewriter) availability is important when buildings are closed for in-person interaction.
- Communicate information about the Region’s programs and services in different ways and through multiple channels.
- For the Region to understand the unique needs of those accessing services, staff education must continue to ensure we are doing our part to address the needs of diverse residents.

Transportation Standard

The transportation standard was ranked as second in importance by the participants. The following information about this standard was shared by them:

- Even when buildings and information are accessible, if you can't get to the buildings then that is a huge barrier.
- Continuous planning is needed to ensure that routes and placement of stops are within a reasonable walking distance for those using the conventional buses.
- Consistency in the processes for riders who plan cross border travel within other transit partners, such as Metrolinx/GO Transit and Toronto Transit Commission (TTC), is so important for ease and familiarity of the experience.
- Accessible, reliable, and convenient transportation—for those with accessibility challenges—affects a person's ability to get to a job, attend medical appointments, pick up groceries, and be part of community life. Without accessible transportation, a person could be totally isolated and dependent on others.
- Assessing the need for more specialized transit must continue.
- Listening to feedback from those who use transit services is key along with taking action, where appropriate.
- Education for Durham Region Transit operators must be ongoing to assist in their understanding of disabilities, and the unique ways they effect people.
- As an aging population, accessible transportation allows independence without relying on others.



Customer Service Standard

- Well-trained staff in the programs and services provided, along with knowledge of different types of disabilities, allows the public to feel comfortable and respected when asking for assistance.
- Staff should ask how can I help you? Based on the answer to this question are the cues of how to proceed. Assumptions should not be made. The person knows best what services they need and how they should be offered.
- Learning to adapt to specific needs of the public is important.
- Staff being knowledgeable of resources in our community, or where to find them assists the public.
- The public doesn't necessarily know what the Region is responsible for, versus what the local towns and cities oversee.
- The Region needs to provide equal access to all their programs and services.



Employment Standard

- Providing accessible employment practices through the employee life cycle will enable staff to feel they are part of a team, community, and have a sense of accomplishment.
- Flexibility is needed for employees with disabilities, where their disability may affect their ability to work traditional hours.
- Learning about disabilities, and the fact that everyone has abilities, can assist people being open to everyone in the employment lifecycle.
- Hiring people with disabilities is a part of inclusive employment practices, and the Region should be a leader in that.
- Employment is integral to independence.





Design of Public Spaces

- If the environment and public spaces are not designed to be universally used by every community member, then it creates a double standard for access to services, programs, and necessities.
- Equal access to all spaces is vital to a healthy community.
- Designing for all, eliminates timely and costly modifications down the road.

myDurham 311

Durham Region provides programs and services that impact people's daily lives. In 2021, the Region processed more than one million customer-based transactions via 80 front desks, 28 call centres, and 18 social media accounts. This can be overwhelming for customers. The Region understands that.

Through the myDurham 311 project, Regional departments are working together to enhance the customer journey. There will be a clear point of contact—whether interacting online, by phone or in person. More options to complete transactions. And, extended hours and a self-service channel for those who need it.

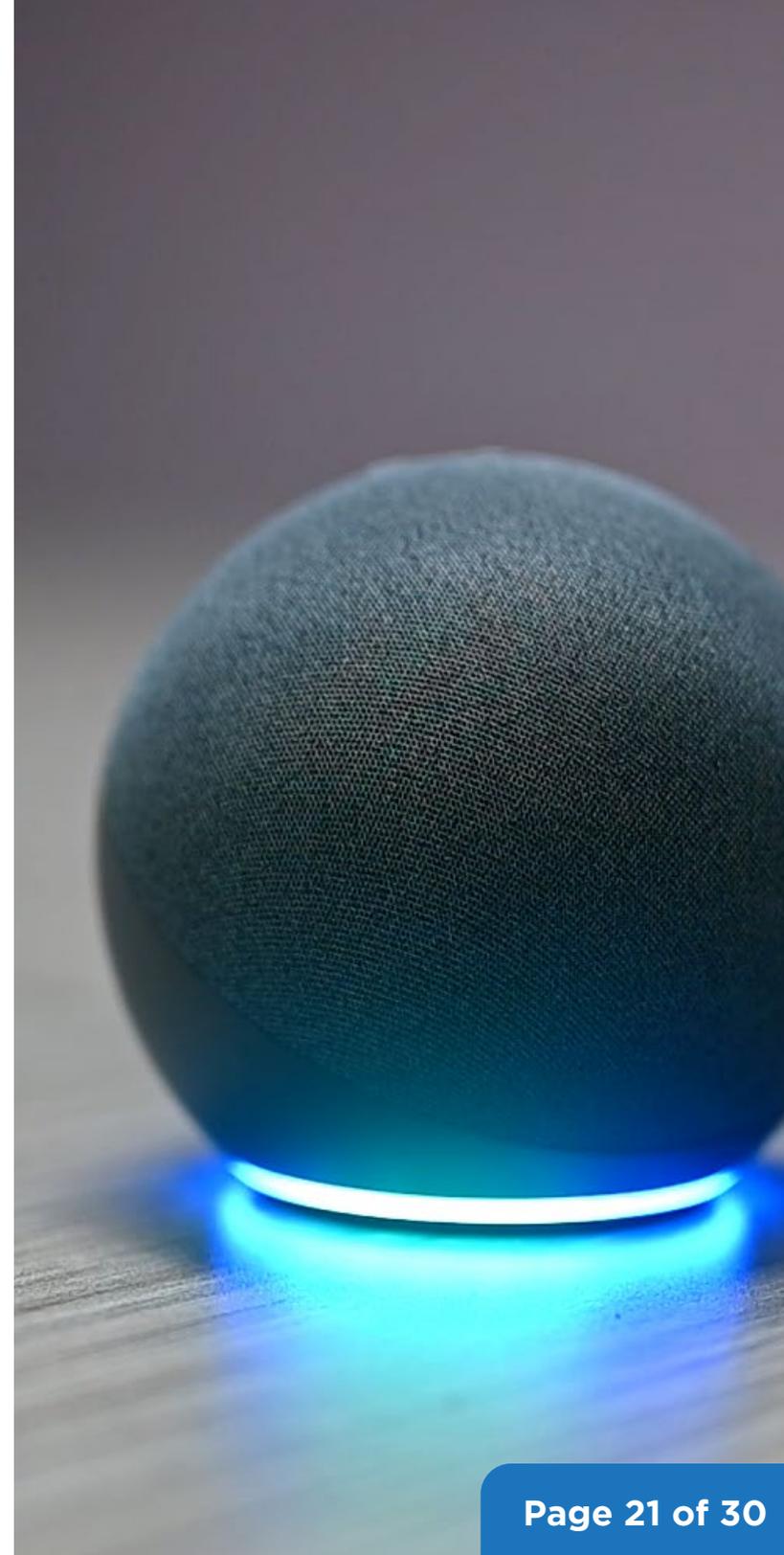
It's all part of our promise to deliver a consistent, convenient, and personalized service.

In 2021, the Region asked residents to weigh in on accessible options for people with disabilities. About 91 per cent of respondents felt it was a priority. The myDurham 311 project will help ensure this through: one phone number; consolidated front counters; a tiered contact centre; Customer Relationship Management System and Knowledge Base; Self Service options; first contact resolution; digital transactions; and service solution for smart devices.

This means that there will be **No Wrong Door**—customers will be served where they arrive; by the right people. There will be **Streamlined Flow** of services near building entry points, with signage. We will offer **First Contact Resolution** with inquiries resolved at first call/contact, where possible. All through Omnichannel where services resolved through customer's channel of choice, with same service delivered regardless of channel.

Some of the accessibility-related achievements we celebrated in 2021 include:

- **Social Services Interactive Voice Response consolidation:** myDurham 311 transitioned 25 telephone numbers for Social Services into one telephone number 905-666-6239 OR Toll free 1-888-721-0622 thus creating a single point of contact for Social Services customers. Callers now navigate menu options through pre-recorded voice prompts to reach specific individuals or departments. The script for the pre-recorded voice prompt was redesigned to provide a clear and easy message for customers to understand and follow. Statistics shows that 75% of customers navigate the automated menu and 25% of customers zero out to reach a customer service representative.
- **myDurham 311 Smart Home Device Voice Service:** This innovative, new platform allows residents to access information about Regional services, and frequently asked questions, via Google Home or Amazon Alexa. They can learn about who their local councillor is; Regional facilities; garbage pick-up; the nearest bus stop; and when the bus will arrive.
- **Online eForms:** The Region launched more than 20 online forms for customers to apply for services online, including the purchase of garbage bag tags.
- **Public Consultation:** The Region reached out to find out what people want. Visit the public consultation web page for the full report.
- **Vaccine Call Centre:** This call centre was implemented in March 2020 to manage more than 136,449 incoming calls from inception (about 915 calls a day). This includes selecting from multiple immunization clinic locations to receive a vaccination.



Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulation work plan

Accessibility strategies moving forward

Meeting the requirements of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA), 2005, outlined under the Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulations (IASR) continues. The Region of Durham looks for ways to go beyond what the regulations outlined up to and including 2021, to improve what we do and how we do it.

Customer Service

The Region of Durham is committed to providing an excellent accessible customer experience to everyone. This means that access will be provided to the goods, services, and facilities to people with disabilities with the same high quality and timeliness as others.

The following are planned actions under the Customer Service Standard:

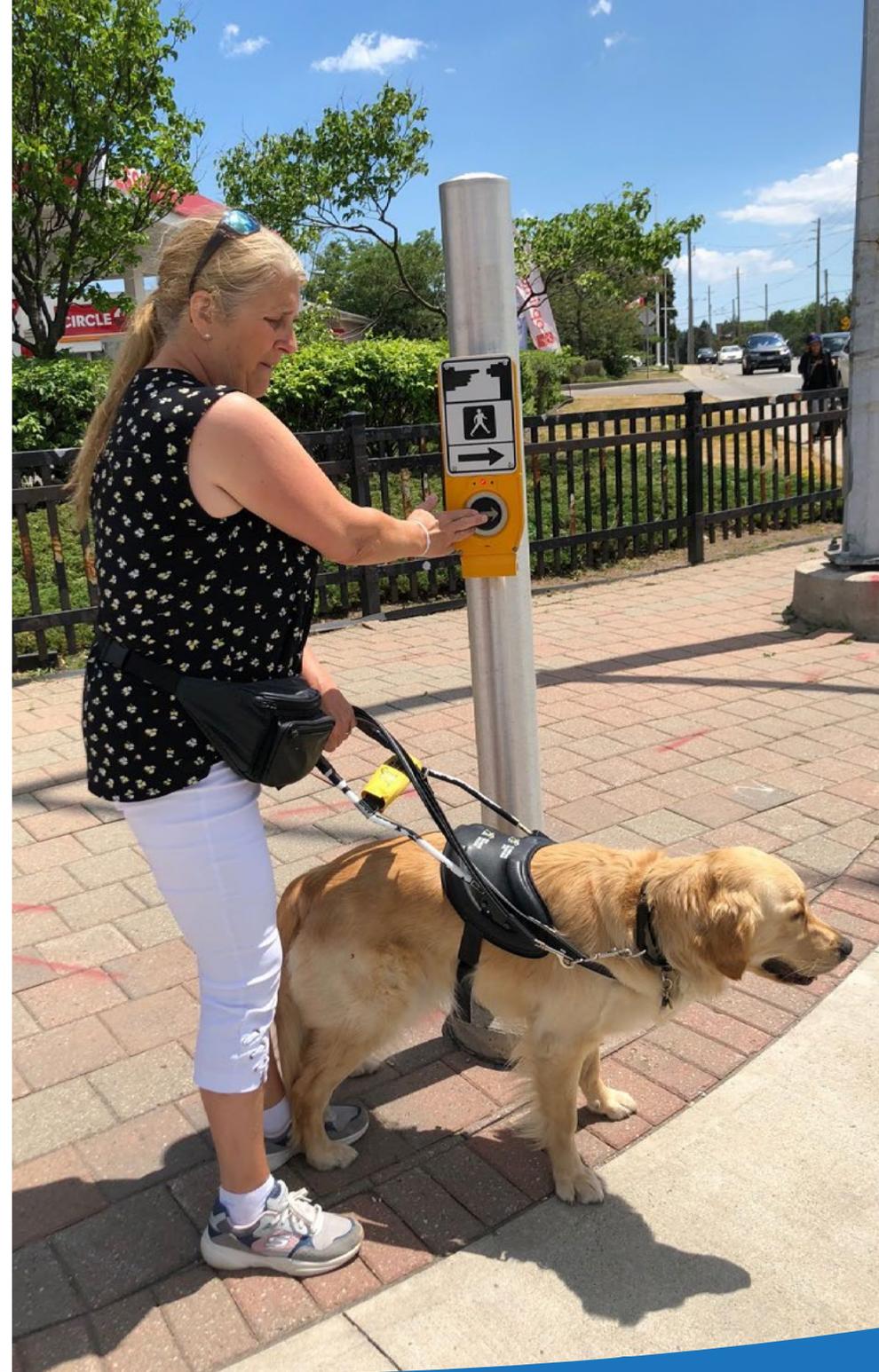
- Continue to provide Accessible Customer Service training to all staff and explore how we can incorporate other ways of delivering it. This is accomplished through mandatory on-line training modules, virtual lunch and learn sessions, videos, as well as in-person education sessions for staff, that cover disability related topics.
- Gathering feedback from the public continues, using the updated on-line accessible feedback form on durham.ca, by email, by phone and in person. This allows the public the opportunity to share their experiences and to inform the plans for improving access to the Region's programs, services and facilities. Staff are also able to provide their input on how to improve accessibility at the Region through internal resources and committee work.
- Continue to explore ways to interact with the public to learn from the experiences of restrictions during the pandemic. This will allow the Region to develop and implement many options and venues to provide optimal customer service.

Information and Communications

The Region of Durham is committed to making information and communications accessible to people with disabilities.

The following are planned actions under the Information and Communications Standard:

- Continue to provide accessible information and communications to residents, visitors, and employees.
- Ensuring that all forms of communication channels are used when important information must be communicated to the public, such as notices of service disruptions, vaccine clinics etc.
- Continue to receive feedback to improve the way we provide information and communications that takes a person's needs into account when they request an accessible format.
- Continuous training of staff in the areas of accessible documents and web content to meet the requirements of Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0 Level AA.
- Provide emergency information in accessible formats, upon request.



Employment

The Region of Durham is committed to fair and accessible employment practices by including the following actions:

- Continue to review employment policies and practices to ensure applicants and employees with disabilities receive the supports they need, throughout all stages of employment including recruitment, selection and supporting regional employees with disabilities.
 - Notify applicants about the availability of accessibility accommodations in the recruitment process.
 - Advise successful applicants about the availability of accommodations for employees with disabilities.
- Ensure policies on accommodating and supporting employees with disabilities are available and promoted. This can be done through internal courses, webinars, team meetings and e-newsletters.
- Provide accessible formats and/or communication supports to employees with disabilities who require it.
- Develop and document individual emergency evacuation plans with employees who require it. This is employees who have temporary or permanent disabilities.
- Document individual accommodation plans for employees with disabilities.
- Engage with applicants and staff hired to obtain feedback on how to make the recruitment process more accessible and inclusive.



Transportation

The Region of Durham is committed to accessible transportation services. This is accomplished by the following actions:

- Successfully implement a robust travel training program (Travel Training is for customers of all ages and abilities who would like to learn how to use Durham Region Transit).
- Complete an Eligibility Review for all customers registered prior to 2015, enabling DRT to determine how to best provide mobility for all customers based on their current abilities in accordance with the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA).
- Continue to explore opportunities for fare integration and payment options to improve the customer experience (including emphasis on cross-border demand responsive trips).
- Implement a Demand Responsive service that amalgamates the existing Specialized and On Demand services, resulting in a service that is more spontaneous, equitable, reliable, and customer focused.
- Continue planning and coordinating key transit expansion programs such as the Durham-Scarborough Bus Rapid Transit (BRT), and Lakeshore East GO Extension to Bowmanville.
- Continue engaging in community outreach to better understand customer experience, including participation in the Ontario Public Transit Association's (OPTA) public education campaign, EnAbling Change.
- Continue improving accessibility and customer experience at bus stops by implementing DRT's hard surfacing and bus shelter program.
- Complete the ongoing Stations, Terminals, and Hubs study; enabling planning for the rollout and improvement of accessible transfer locations throughout Durham Region.



Design of Public Spaces

The Region of Durham will continue to ensure new or redeveloped public spaces comply with specific accessibility design requirements for the following areas:

- Service counters, fixed queuing lines and waiting areas.
- Exterior paths of travel including sidewalks and accessible pedestrian signals.
- Durham Region operated Child Care centers and the redesign of the play spaces.
- Outdoor public eating areas at Regional Headquarters.
- Accessible parking at region-owned facilities.
- Implement emergency and preventative maintenance in public spaces as follows:
 - Review and update procedures for the preventative and emergency maintenance of the accessible elements required in the Design of Public Spaces Standards, such as curbs and ramps, handrails, and tactile indicators on stairs.
 - Review and update procedures for dealing with temporary disruptions when the accessible elements are not working. The Region of Durham will notify members of the public of any temporary disruptions to accessible elements through the website, social media, on-site signage, and any other appropriate means. The Region will ensure that accessible elements are fixed as soon as possible and will indicate in the notice of alternative accommodations until the disruption has ended.

The Accessibility Advisory Committee (AAC) and/or the AAC Site Plan review sub-committee will continue to be consulted by staff, for their review and input on projects.

At the time of the creation of this plan, development of Durham Design Standards was in progress.

Accessibility partnerships

The Region of Durham Accessibility Coordinator regularly meets with our eight local municipal Accessibility Coordinators. This gives us the opportunity to collaborate on initiatives, host speakers and presentations, educate ourselves and allow for sharing information to continue to raise the bar for accessibility within our communities.

The Region's Accessibility Coordinator also belongs to the Ontario Network of Accessibility Professionals (ONAP). This network is comprised of accessibility professionals within the broader public sector across Ontario and its purpose is to share best practices and resources in accessibility.

Accessibility awards allow us to demonstrate the importance of accessibility, and to honour leadership in breaking down barriers. Each year the Region of Durham honours individuals, organizations, and/or businesses that have improved accessibility in their community. Nominations for these awards are made by the accessibility advisory committees of municipalities within Durham Region.

Education about accessibility/disability related topics and initiatives within our departments and community is a very important piece for the AAC and the AODA Staff Working Group. Presentations allow us to learn and gain understanding so we can all in turn, share with others.

Accessibility partnerships provide the opportunity to learn and collaborate in numerous ways. These opportunities will continue to be an important part of creating a more accessible and inclusive Region.



Contact Information

We welcome your feedback. Please let us know what you think about the 2022-2025 Multi-Year Accessibility Plan.

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