



# Regional Accessibility Plan 2025

## Plain Language



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## Territorial Acknowledgement

We acknowledge that the Town of Truro, the Town of Stewiacke, the Village of Bible Hill, the Village of Tatamagouche, and the Municipality of the County of Colchester are located within Mi'kma'ki, the ancestral and unceded territory of the Mi'kmaq people. This land is governed by the Treaties of Peace and Friendship, first signed in 1752 between the Mi'kmaq and the British Crown, with later agreements also involving the Maliseet and Passamaquoddy. These treaties affirm the ongoing rights, responsibilities, and sovereignty of the Mi'kmaq and remind us that we are all Treaty people, with a shared duty to uphold these agreements.

We recognize the historical and ongoing impacts of colonization and acknowledge our responsibility in the process of truth and reconciliation. Ensuring accessibility is a vital part of reconciliation, as systemic barriers disproportionately impact Indigenous Peoples and persons with disabilities. As we work towards greater accessibility and inclusion across our communities, we are committed to fostering respectful relationships, continuous learning, and meaningful action that supports equity, justice, and belonging for all.

## Recognition of People of African Decent

We recognize that Nova Scotia is home to over 50 African Nova Scotian communities, whose culture, heritage, and histories have been and remain a key part of this province for more than 400 years. We honour and offer gratitude to the ancestors of African descent who came before us and contributed to shaping this land.

## Our commitments to accessibility

Here's what we're going to do to make the Truro-Colchester area more accessible.

### Providing goods and services

We will work together to:

- Look for ways to create accessible recreational programs for the community.
- Set up an in-person service to help residents access and navigate services.
- Ask the public for feedback on major or important planned changes.
- Set aside budget to handle unexpected accessibility requests and costs.
- Create and apply guidelines for making area events accessible.

### Buildings, infrastructure, and public spaces

We will work together to:

- Focus on accessibility when renovating, updating, and building municipal buildings and facilities.
- Make sure heritage and accessibility are considered when planning renovations or updates to public spaces.
- Include accessibility in requests for proposals and vendor agreements.
- Make signage more accessible.
- Look for ways to add more accessible public washrooms.
- Explore options to increase public seating.
- Review the current accessible public parking.
- Update bylaws, when possible, to ensure consistent accessibility practices.
- Find ways to improve accessibility in public parks and recreational spaces.

### Information and communications

We will work together to:

- Make accessibility part of our communications practices.

- Create guidelines for accessibility best practices on social media.
- Make our websites and web tools more accessible.
- Set up a way to collect feedback on web accessibility.
- Find training on accessible communications and have the right staff complete it.
- Create guidelines for accessible meetings.
- Look into options for all-staff training on accessible meetings.
- Work with service providers and stakeholder organizations to help share important information.

## Transportation

We will work together to:

- Look for ways to improve transit access by running a feasibility study to explore options.
- Prioritize accessibility when planning transportation projects.
- Involve people with disabilities in the planning and design of projects, including the 2025 transportation feasibility study.
- Seek expertise and include accessibility knowledge when choosing vendors.
- Collaborate with local non-profit and community organizations to help support and improve community programs.
- Improve sidewalks and safety access to meet provincial requirements.

## Employment

We will work together to:

- Promote knowledge and resource-sharing related to accessibility.
- Improve accessibility of our recruitment and hiring processes.
- Develop a comprehensive accommodations policy and process for municipal employees.
- Source and deliver practical training on accessibility to all employees.
- Identify learning needs and deliver accessibility training specific to job requirements.

## Public awareness and involvement

We will work together to:

- Improve public education by creating and running a campaign for residents and businesses.
- Build relationships by continuing work with the Regional Accessibility Advisory Committee and connecting with service and advocacy groups.
- Recognize and highlight accessibility champions in the area.

## Other

We will work together to:

- Explore funding opportunities to support accessibility work.

## Our progress so far

This is a summary of what we've done in the past 3 years to improve accessibility.

### Providing goods and services

- Staff were trained on how to interact with people with disabilities.

### Buildings, infrastructure, and public spaces

- We adjusted the height of important items in public buildings to make them easier to reach.
- We installed alarms that use sound and light for emergencies.
- We created emergency plans and designated safe meeting spots for people with disabilities.
- We improved trail gates so they can be detected with a cane.
- We updated by-laws to ensure government and public buildings follow accessibility standards.
- We are working on setting a standard for accessible playgrounds.
- We made specific accessibility improvements at these sites:
  - Stewiacke Community Centre
  - Stewiacke, Kitchener Street
  - Dennis Park and Recreation Grounds
  - Bible Hill Recreation Park
  - Airport Field Park

- H. Douglas Boyce Village Hall
- Colchester Courthouse
- Colchester Public Buildings
- Fundy Discovery Site
- Stewiacke River Park
- Five Islands Lighthouse Park
- Nelson Memorial Park
- Cobequid Trail
- Crosswalks

## Information and communications

- Staff were trained on accessible communications.
- We are making signs easier to read and understand.
- We are checking and updating our technology to work with assistive devices.
- We are improving municipal websites, so they are easier to navigate.
- We are streaming some council meetings so more people can access them.

## Transportation

- We started a study to explore the possibility of regional public transit.
- We repainted several parking lots to update accessible parking spaces and signs.

## Employment

- Staff have been trained on disabilities and how to interact with people with disabilities.
- We are working with procurement to provide special equipment when needed for accommodations.
- We are creating a role to ensure accessibility compliance.

## Public awareness and involvement

- Staff have been trained on how to interact with people with disabilities.
- Online municipal voting was offered for the first time in October 2024.
- We worked to create public events that celebrate diversity.

## Identifying priority areas

We identified our accessibility priority areas based on:

- community feedback
- the Nova Scotia Accessibility Act (Bill 59, 2017),
- the Accessible Canada Act (2019), and
- input from staff in the region.

Our accessibility priority areas are:

1. providing goods and services,
2. buildings, infrastructure, and public spaces,
3. information and communications
4. transportation,
5. employment,
6. public awareness and involvement, and
7. consultation with people with disabilities.

## The priority-setting system

The priority-setting system is a set of criteria that each town and village will use to decide which commitments to focus on first. The criteria will help us figure out which accessibility improvements to address sooner and which can wait.

The priority-setting system hasn't been used yet. It will be used once the plan starts, which is during the planning and implementing stages.

The 3 priority-setting criteria are:

1. the impact of doing an improvement,
2. the priorities of people with disabilities, and
3. the level of difficulty doing an improvement.

There is also a scoring system connected to these criteria. The scoring system is based on a scale from 1 to 4. One being minimal impact, low priority, or high level of difficulty. Four being significant impact, high priority, and zero level of difficulty.

## What we heard from the community

The consulting company Left Turn Right Turn did several activities to help update the Regional Accessibility Plan. They gathered feedback from 2 groups of people who live in the area:

1. people who aren't directly impacted by accessibility barriers and
2. people who have a personal involvement in accessibility.

The activities were done virtually and in-person. They took place between November 2024 and February 2025.

## Feedback summary

Residents and stakeholders were happy to hear about the new accessibility plan. Many were unaware of the first accessibility plan and surprised it existed. Most residents didn't know about recent accessibility efforts or the plan's goals. This highlights the need for better communication about the accessibility plan and its activities in the future.

Most people believe the area needs a lot of work in accessibility, especially in:

- transportation,
- public spaces and buildings, and
- accessibility awareness and engagement.

Nearly everyone said their town or village feels welcoming and like home, even with accessibility barriers. People are happy living in the area and want to improve it. Many people shared ideas for community-based projects to improve accessibility.

Residents and stakeholders believe the towns and villages should play an active role in improving accessibility. But they also want to involve community resources like local businesses and disability advocacy organizations. Since the area has limited resources available, using community support will be key to implementing the new accessibility plan successfully.

## The Regional Accessibility Advisory Committee

The Regional Accessibility Advisory Committee advises local councils and village commissions on making the Truro-Colchester area more accessible for people with disabilities.

As part of updating this accessibility plan, the committee took part in 2 virtual meetings. In the first, they shared their thoughts on the current state of accessibility. In the second, they reviewed a draft of this plan and its commitments. Their feedback matched what we heard from the wider community, especially concerns about ongoing barriers like sidewalks, washrooms, and rest areas.

The committee will continue to help track progress and ensure the accessibility plan is carried out.

## Background

In 2022, the Truro-Colchester area worked together to create their first Regional Accessibility Plan. The Truro-Colchester area is made up of:

- the Town of Truro,
- the Municipality of Colchester
- the Village of Bible Hill
- the Town of Stewiacke, and
- the Village of Tatamagouche.

This plan involved assessing accessibility barriers across the area and creating recommendations for improvements.

In 2024, we decided that this plan needed a review and update. We decided to update the plan to better match accessibility goals with what the community needs and what the Truro-Colchester area can do. To help do this, we hired a consulting firm called Left Turn Right Turn.

The updated 2025 Regional Accessibility Plan focuses on:

- the needs and priorities of people with disabilities in the area,
- practical steps to improve accessibility, and
- steps to build capacity and make long-term improvements.

Accessibility is a continuous process. Fully implementing the plan won't make the Truro-Colchester area fully accessible. But it will make it more accessible than before, which is an important step forward.

## Conclusion

We are committed to making the Truro-Colchester area more accessible because it's essential for inclusion, dignity, and safety. We will find the resources to carry out this plan and work with the community to make it happen.