



Bulkley-Nechako Joint Accessibility Advisory Committee

ACCESSIBILITY PLAN

Version 1.0 – Spring 2024



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Introduction

In June 2021, the Accessible BC Act became law. The Act provides a framework to identify, remove and prevent barriers to accessibility, including physical, technological, informational, sensory, systemic, and attitudinal barriers.

More information about the Act can be found at:

<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/governments/about-the-bc-government/accessibility/legislation/accessiblebc>

To facilitate the work of the Accessible BC Act, the Bulkley-Nechako Joint Accessibility Advisory Committee was formed. It includes participating organizations from the Regional District of Bulkley-Nechako, Telkwa, Houston, Granisle, Burns Lake, Fraser Lake, Vanderhoof and Fort St. James.

Territorial Acknowledgement

The Bulkley-Nechako Joint Accessibility Advisory Committee would like to open this Plan by acknowledging that the Committee conducts its work on the unceded territories of First Nations across the vast region. The Bulkley-Nechako Region covers an area over 70,000 square kilometers, spanning the traditional territories of the Dakelh, Nedut'en, Tse'khene, and Witsuwit'en speaking peoples. The Committee respects the distinct cultures of the Indigenous Peoples in the Bulkley-Nechako and honours their long-standing relationship with these lands and waters from time immemorial.

About the Partners

This joint Committee was created to support collaborative efforts across the Bulkley-Nechako for accessibility improvements. The partner organizations who make up the non-voting members of the Committee, and who have committed to use the work of the Committee to further accessibility in their own communities are:

1. Regional District of Bulkley-Nechako (all Electoral Areas)
2. District of Fort St. James
3. District of Houston
4. Village of Burns Lake
5. Village of Fraser Lake
6. Village of Telkwa
7. Village of Granisle
8. Fort St. James Public Library
9. Vanderhoof Public Library
10. Burns Lake Public Library
11. Granisle Public Library

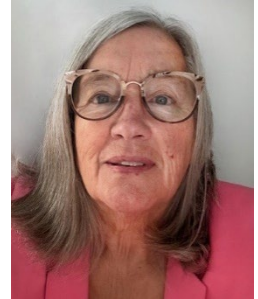
About the Committee

The membership of the Committee reflects, to the best extent possible, the diversity of persons with disabilities in BC, and particularly the Bulkley-Nechako region. Membership is prioritized for applicants who have lived experience of disability, are a support person for persons with disabilities (either personally or professionally) or are Indigenous.

Message from the Chair

As the inaugural Chair of the Committee, it has been an honour to learn from the passionate, knowledgeable members. It is wonderful to see so much commitment to improving our communities and ensuring equitable access for all our residents. I look forward to continuing the work to see tangible improvements across the region.

Director Judy Greenaway,
Bulkley-Nechako Joint Accessibility Advisory Committee Chair



Definitions

For the purposes of this Plan,

"Committee" means the Bulkley-Nechako Accessibility Advisory Committee;

"Plan" means the Committee's published accessibility plan;

"barrier" is anything that hinders the full and equal participation in society of a person with an impairment. Barriers can be caused by environments, attitudes, practices, policies, information, communications, or technologies. They can also be affected by intersecting forms of discrimination.

"disability" means an inability to participate fully and equally in society as a result of the interaction of an impairment and a barrier;

"impairment" includes a physical, sensory, mental, intellectual or cognitive impairment, whether permanent, temporary or episodic;

"Indigenous peoples" has the same meaning as in the [*Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act*](#);

Framework Guiding our Work

Accessible BC Act Principles

The Government of British Columbia is working towards being an inclusive province. There are over 926,000 people with disability in B.C. In June 2021, the Accessible B.C. Act became law. It provides a framework to identify, remove, and prevent barriers to accessibility. The new law is an important step to make B.C. a more accessible province.¹

Part 3 of the Act requires Local Governments to:

- Establish an accessibility committee.
- Develop an accessibility plan.
 - Review the plan every 3 years
- Create a public feedback mechanism.

What are examples of barriers?

Attitude

When people think and act based upon false ideas, like:

- Making decisions about people with disabilities without including them.
- Not believing that a person with a disability can contribute to the workforce.

Physical

When obstacles make access difficult, like:

- A washroom with an accessible stall but no automatic door opener.
- Hosting a meeting in a space with no wheelchair access.

Information or communication

When communication methods do not reach people with disabilities, like:

- Using small print or not providing large-print versions of material.
- Videos, events, or meetings that do not have closed captions.

Systemic

When an organization's policies or procedures aren't inclusive, like:

- Not providing an American Sign Language interpreter or closed captioning.

¹ <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/governments/about-the-bc-government/accessibility/legislation/accessiblebc>

- Requiring a driver's licence for a job when another form of transportation could be used.

Technology

When technology can't be accessed by people with disabilities, like:

- Websites, documents, or databases that are not accessible for screen readers.
- Website graphs and charts do not have text to explain them.

Sensory

When lights, sounds or smells prevent participation in the environment, like:

- Co-workers wearing perfume in the workplace.
- Use of fluorescent lighting in the workplace.

Other Legislation

Other Legislation that governs how local governments operate include:

[Local Government Act](#) - provides a legal framework and foundation for the establishment and continuation of local governments.

[Community Charter](#) - Charter provides a legal framework for the powers, duties and functions that are necessary for local governments to fulfill their purposes.

[BC Building Code](#) - governs how new construction, building alterations, repairs and demolitions are completed.

Committee Mandate

The BN JAAC Committee's mandate is to advise all participating Councils and Boards in the Regional District of Bulkley-Nechako of the need to establish, develop and maintain equitable policies, services and facilities for persons with disabilities, including, but not limited to: transportation; housing; employment; education; and recreation.

To provide an opportunity for public input on accessibility issues affecting people with disabilities.

To identify barriers to services and facilities encountered by people with disabilities, and partner with local councils and agencies to address them.

To promote initiatives that foster active living, and the full participation of people with disabilities in their communities.

Feedback Mechanism

The Joint Committee and partner organizations are committed to hearing from residents about barriers to accessibility in all forms, including physical, technological, informational, sensory, systemic, and attitudinal barriers. We welcome feedback via several mechanisms:








- Toll free via phone at 1-800-320-3339
- Via email to info@rdbn.bc.ca
- Via the online form at <https://www.rdbn.bc.ca/departments/administration/bulkley-nechako-joint-accessibility-advisory-committee>
- Via a Committee member in your community

All feedback received will be provided on the agenda of the next regularly scheduled Bulkley-Nechako Joint Accessibility Advisory Committee meeting to help with planning. All partner organizations receive the minutes from those meetings.

Barriers Identified

What we Heard

Via public feedback and Committee contributions, several types of barriers were identified that are prevalent across the region. They include:

Type of Barrier	Examples
 Barriers in the built environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Insufficient accessibility in public washrooms - Poor condition of sidewalks. - Insufficient quantity and accessibility of public seating (benches).
 Informational Barriers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lack of parking signage for accessible parking - Signage not accessible to low-vision readers. - Lack of support for digital literacy assistance.
 Attitudinal Barriers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lack of prioritization of employer training to support employees with disabilities. - Protests that impact or re-traumatize marginalized communities.
 Sensory Barriers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lack of quiet spaces for people on the autism spectrum - Accessibility issues on websites/social media for low-vision residents
 Systemic Barriers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lack of services for adults with disabilities once out of school. - Lack of accessible employment opportunities. - Insufficient quantity of accessible, affordable housing for residents on a disability allowance.
 Transportation Barriers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - No or limited taxi service, particularly accessible taxis. - Transportation to medical appointments is challenging.
 Housing Barriers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Older high-density housing is not accessible, especially important feature like washrooms. - Many apartments lack elevators.

Action Items

As an advisory body, the Committee requests that all partner organizations consider the actions listed below (should they be applicable). Wherever possible, guidelines or standards are provided to assist in the actioning of a listed item.

Built Infrastructure Actions

- 1) Ensure recreation infrastructure is designed or upgraded for accessibility.
Suggested resource: [BC Parks Universal Design Guide Front-country Parks](#)
- 2) Review local accessible parking availability for best-practices.
Suggested resource: [Regulatory Changes to Accessible Parking Requirements](#)
- 3) Participate in the Business Façade Improvement Program offered by [Northern Development Initiative Trust](#) and highlight accessible improvements.
- 4) Identify eligible projects and apply for support from the [Government of Canada's Enabling Accessibility Fund](#) to improve infrastructure.
- 5) Allocate [Canada Community-Building Funds](#) to accessibility projects in eligible project categories.

Information and Sensory Actions

- 1) Ensure printed materials for internal and external use are accessible.
Suggested resource: [CNIB Clear Print Accessibility Guidelines](#)
- 2) Review Social Media posts for accessibility.
Suggested Resource: <https://www.queensu.ca/accessibility/tutorials/social-media-accessibility>
- 3) Be sure that websites are designed for accessibility.
Suggested resource: <https://www.destinationbc.ca/learning-centre/accessible-website-design/>
- 4) Review communication, especially emergency-related documents, for plain language to ensure your messages reach many literacy levels.
Suggested resource: <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/governments/services-for-government/service-experience-digital-delivery/web-content-development-guides/web-style-guide/writing-guide/plain-language>
- 5) Create sensory safe spaces in public buildings and workplaces.
Suggested resource: Cognitive and Sensory Checklist in [Destination BC's Accessible Attributes Checklist](#)
- 6) Investigate options for ASL/Transcription of public or recorded meetings.
Potential resources: <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/family-social-supports/services-for-people-with-disabilities/supports-services/american-sign-language-asl-interpretor-services/understanding-asl-interpretor-services>
or
<https://www.chs.ca/service/cart-communication-access-realtime-translation>

Attitudinal and Systemic Actions

- 1) Research and provide ongoing education and training for staff to improve awareness and understanding of service delivery for vulnerable residents.
Suggested resource: [BC Public Service Equity, Diversity and Inclusion learning and resources](#)
- 2) Create employment opportunities for staff with diverse backgrounds and support needs within your organization.
Suggested resource: [Work BC Employer Resources on Creating an Inclusive Workspace](#)
- 3) Pursue or review and evaluate recommended actions in and age-friendly designation to increase local awareness of and thoughtful action about community barriers to accessibility.
Suggested resource: [Becoming an Age-friendly Community: Local Government Guide](#)

Emergency Response Actions

- 1) Review and recommend actions in your community's Emergency Response Plan to include public education, identify advance planning considerations or response mechanisms to assist in the safe evacuation of vulnerable populations in an emergency event.

Advocacy Items

The Committee also encourages partner organisations to actively advocate for improvements to accessibility in areas outside their direct influence. This involves advocacy with other levels of government, as well as businesses and services offered in their communities. This includes raising awareness of and requesting improvements to:

- the declining availability of assessment and diagnosis access in northern, rural communities. Waitlists for assessments like autism are very long, delaying support delivery.
- the impact centralization of services has on people with disabilities.
- The overarching impacts of downloading accessibility work to schools/local governments. The large workload of those organizations means that accessibility is hard to prioritize.
- A lack of respite and community-based supports for adults with disabilities
- The loss of/lack of wrap around services available in our communities.

Monitoring and Evaluation

Monitoring

Public feedback will continue to be collected through all channels and provided to the Committee.

Partner organisations are asked to report any actions taken to address accessibility barriers the Committee's Staff Liaison at the RDBN.

Evaluation

Public feedback and partner organization actioned items will be provided to the Committee for ongoing review.

The Committee will review this information annually to measure progress on the actioned items and will evaluate successes and additional avenues for influence.

Conclusion

The Committee is pleased to be able to deliver these recommended actions and advocacy items for consideration to all partner organizations. We hope that this Plan will provide actionable items that will help make our communities more accessible.

The RDBN Staff Liaison to the Bulkley-Nechako Joint Accessibility Advisory Committee welcomes questions at any time. They can be reached by phone at 1-800-320-3339 or by email at info@rdbn.bc.ca.

Appendix 1 – Mural Board Brainstorming

informational barriers

- lack of above ground parking signage for wheelchair parking
- Signs are not accessible to low-vision residents
- Employer training and awareness programs for adults with ASD
- Colour blindness can impact signage accessibility

sensory barriers

- quiet spaces for people on the autism spectrum

systemic barriers

- need broader input from community, staff and community leaders
- Accessible employment opportunities-municipal offices
- Services for adults once out of school system are lacking
- Winter conditions can isolate those who have a hard time in icy conditions due to a higher fall risk
- lack of mental health awareness
- Employment for residents on the autism spectrum
- lack of awareness of how to meet needs of disabled travelers
- Provincial programs not easy to use
- Politics, collaboration and staff training to overcome inhibitors around serving diverse populations
- Housing - focus needed for integrated, accessible housing.
- housing - many rental prices remain high after industry is done
- food and housing security is more challenging for those on a disability living allowance.

Emergency Management Issues

- Emergency Planning do not sufficiently identify and plan to help vulnerable individuals
- Accessible hotel spaces during an emergency event.
- Prescribed burning and wildfires impact residents with respiratory issues due to poor air quality.

attitudinal barriers

- protests that impact marginalized communities - re-traumatized

technological barriers

- e-readers cannot use 'captcha' button on website forms
- digital literacy is low but many services are moving online

transportation

- No taxi service in many communities
- Maternity travel within Vanderhoof is challenging
- accessible taxis and buses for inter-community transportation is non-existent
- transportation to medical appointments is challenging

Housing

- Apartments rented to vulnerable populations are not accessible with important features like bathrooms.
- apartments in Burns Lake have deplorable access for those with mobility issues

built environment

- No wheelchair access to Medical Clinic in Houston
- crosswalks can be challenging for those with vision impairment or mobility limitations
- No public washroom in some communities
- No path to washrooms at park in Burns Lake
- No facilities for adults that require diaper changes
- cut outs are steep onto roads with raised bumps
- Lack of sidewalks in residential areas
- No seating/benches in Burns Lake Mall
- benches or seating areas to meet needs of wheelchair users like at doctors office
- snow removal around cutouts and accessible parking needs to be addressed
- Fraser Lake - neither hotel is wheelchair accessible.
- poles in sidewalks block wheelchair and walker passage
- Stairs are a barrier in buildings with no elevator - eg: dentist in Houston.
- Wheelchair height service and sales counters
- Much of the accessible parking is on private (business) property No uniformity and poor signage.
- sidewalks are pitted or in poor conditions and can be dangerous for wheelchairs and walkers
- Recreation areas need accessible benches and picnic tables-not usually constructed with disability needs in mind
- Bathroom at Burns Lake Mall inaccessible to wheelchairs and walkers
- poor lighting indoors can make indoor reading difficult
- Wheelchair and walker access at waterfront sites at Cottonwood Park
- child accessibility for rec seating
- Glare on plexiglass can make signage hard to see
- Winter maintenance of sidewalks is challenging