urban matters

NORTHEASTERN BC COLLABORATIVE ACCESSIBILITY PLAN

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PREPARED FOR:

Peace River Regional District

Northern Rockies Regional Municipality

City of Dawson Creek

City of Fort St. John

District of Chetwynd

District of Hudson’s Hope

District of Taylor

District of Tumbler Ridge

Village of Pouce Coupe

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TERRITORIAL ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The communities of Northeastern BC are situated on the traditional territories of the Dane-z̲aa, Dene, Cree, Dunne Tsaa, Tsáá? Çhé Ne Dane, Tse'khene, Dene Tha', Kaska peoples, Dunne-za, and the Métis Nation BC Region 7.

The Northeastern BC Collaborative Accessibility Committee recognizes the many Indigenous communities who have ongoing connections to the land base on which we are situated, as well as the many more whose communities have meeting grounds, gathering places and traveling routes across the region.

We recognize and value the significant contributions of Indigenous Peoples who have lived and worked on this land since time immemorial.

ABOUT THIS PLAN

This Accessibility Plan was created by municipalities across Northeastern BC to support collaborative and efficient efforts to improve accessibility. Working together provides a unique opportunity to share resources, knowledge, and build collective skills. It also helps community members to have reliable access across the region.

Accessibility for people with disabilities is a shared responsibility. There are many layers to accessibility, such as physical accessibility, accessible information and technology, social and cultural inclusion, safe and inclusive environments, and more. Ensuring that communities are accessible requires knowledge building as well as the application of that knowledge to many different aspects of our society.

The Accessible BC Act (2021) is provincial legislation that sets out a path for British Columbia to become accessible. The Act recognizes the shared responsibility by creating requirements not just for provincial services but for public and civic services within the province as well. More than 750 types of organizations have been prescribed to work towards accessibility by creating accessibility plans, establishing accessibility committees, and receiving feedback on how accessible their organizations are. Prescribed organizations include educational services, local governments, municipal police and emergency services, libraries, health authorities and more. This plan is part of meeting these new requirements.

Did you know that 1 in 5 Canadians over the age of 15 have a disability?

– National Disability Survey, 2017

WHO IS INVOLVED?

The following communities are part of the Northeastern BC Accessibility Collaborative:

- Peace River Regional District
- Northern Rockies Regional Municipality
- City of Dawson Creek
- City of Fort St. John
- District of Chetwynd
- District of Hudson's Hope
- District of Taylor
- District of Tumbler Ridge
- Village of Pouce Coupe

WHY WORK TOGETHER

Taking a collaborative approach to accessibility amongst local governments in Northeastern BC is a promising opportunity to increase integration amongst communities and improve outcomes for people with disabilities across the region.

The geography of Northeastern BC makes a collaborative approach critical for meeting the aims of improving accessibility for all residents. The mix of rural and urban as well as high and low population density areas in the region means that services (such as medical, post-secondary education, some types of employment, public service offices, etc.) are concentrated in regional hubs, while many people live outside of these hubs in rural or remote settings. Taking a regional approach can support all residents to fully participate and access opportunities and services within their own community and across the region.

This regional collaboration is an opportunity for an equitable approach to accessibility in a region that is diverse, geographically vast, spatially distributed, and where access to services for most residents of the area is outside of their community – making accessible servicing critical.

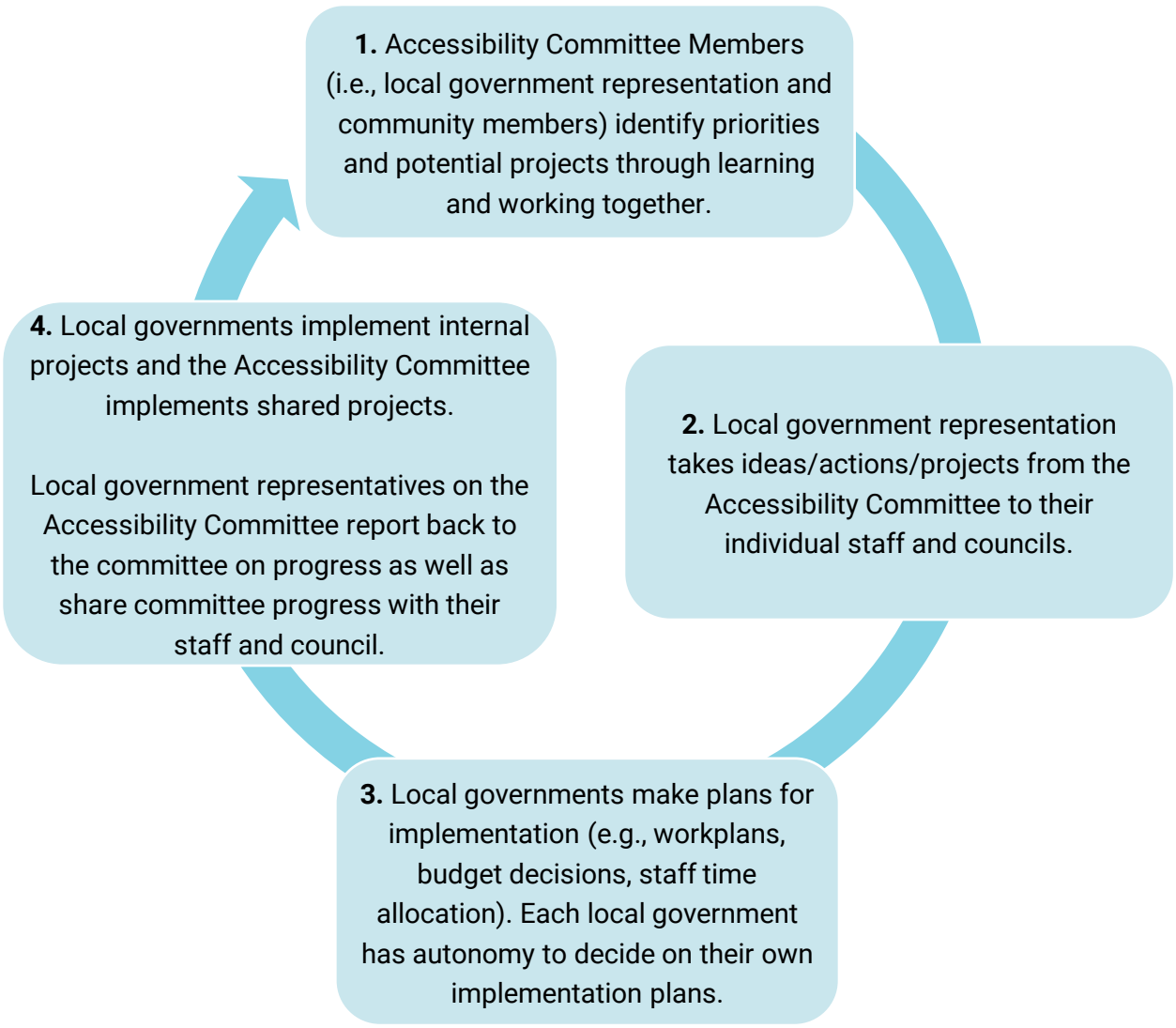
OUR VISION

We envision a Northeastern British Columbia that offers accessibility for all people with disabilities living, working, and exploring Northeastern BC.

HOW WE PLAN TO WORK TOGETHER

Working together across the region in this way is a new tactic. Local governments of Northeastern BC believe that accessibility is more important than geographic boundaries and individual goals. That is why we have chosen to come together in this way.

Together, we have created a shared vision, priorities for action, and an initial set of goals. We have also established a shared Accessibility Committee to support this work.


1. Accessibility Committee Members (i.e., local government representation and community members) identify priorities and potential projects through learning and working together.
2. Local government representation takes ideas/actions/projects from the Accessibility Committee to their individual staff and councils.
3. Local governments make plans for implementation (e.g., workplans, budget decisions, staff time allocation). Each local government has autonomy to decide on their own implementation plans.
4. Local governments implement internal projects and the Accessibility Committee implements shared projects.
Local government representatives on the Accessibility Committee report back to the committee on progress as well as share committee progress with their staff and council.

NORTHEASTERN BC COLLABORATIVE ACCESSIBILITY COMMITTEE

The Northeastern British Columbia Collaborative Accessibility Committee (the Committee) is tasked with providing a consistent approach to accessibility for people with disabilities living, working, and exploring Northeastern BC.

The Committee was created to assist partnering organizations in implementing requirements of the Accessible British Columbia Act. **By participating in the Committee, member local governments will be in compliance with the Act.** A regional approach was selected to foster collaboration and cooperation, sharing, and pooling of resources, and avoiding duplication of work.

The purpose of the Committee is to:

- Provide a forum for discussion of issues affecting people with all types of disabilities in the region;
- Inform local governments on accessibility issues and solutions in the region and make recommendations for improving accessibility in communities;
- Identify accessibility barriers in the region and solutions to address them;
- Review and provide input on community plans, actions, designs, and so forth, with an accessibility lens; and
- Organize and/or participate in relevant community events or awareness activities wherever possible.

MEMBERSHIP

The Committee is comprised of staff representatives from nine member communities as well as people living in the region who have disabilities and/or work with organizations that serve people with disabilities.

- **Nine local government staff representatives** – Staff members are a conduit for communication between the Committee and local governments. They bring experience and expertise in local government practices and services and can offer insight into how to achieve the goals of the Committee.
- **Nine to twelve community members** – These members represent a wide geography and diversity of persons with disabilities in the region. Community members are able to share invaluable lived experience and perspectives on barriers to assist local governments in setting priorities, reviewing plans and policies with an accessibility lens, and identifying best practices to follow.
- **Organizations and departments within the local governments** – These groups will be invited to meetings as needed, so the Committee can directly engage with groups that are going to be potentially involved in rolling out recommendations.

SHARED PRIORITIES AND GOALS

Local governments in Northeastern BC are working together to achieve a shared goal: embedding accessibility in our local government practices.

VISION

We envision a Northeastern British Columbia that offers accessibility for all people with disabilities living, working, and exploring Northeastern BC.

By working collaboratively, we can strive for consistency. We want residents to be able to access the services they need, wherever they are in the region.

We are committed to the ongoing process of embedding accessibility in our work. We intend to learn and grow together to improve accessibility in all areas that we have influence. The process of becoming accessible is long-term and we see changes as having a rippling effect.

As our Committee learns and grows, it will support local governments in understanding and responding to barriers, which in turn will impact external organizations that interact with the local governments.

OUR APPROACH

The Committee and Local Government Collaborative group plan to focus on areas of shared interest and influence. This approach reflects the Committee and the local governments' ability to effect change by focusing on internal practices and external relationships.

As areas to focus action, they are simple but have a scaling impact over time. Work can begin now and expand as new projects, knowledge, and priorities emerge.

Five key approaches have been identified:

1. Education and skill-building
2. Cohesive improvements to infrastructure and service delivery
3. Sharing resources
4. Accountability and enforcement
5. Building relationships with other groups and stakeholders

EDUCATION AND SKILL BUILDING

Skill building and education opportunities for staff, the public, and the Committee are important. With more education and awareness around accessibility issues, community and local government leadership support can be improved for initiatives.

The goal is to increase knowledge and skills on non-physical barriers to accessibility, specifically how to design programs, policies, and places to remove all types of barriers.

COHESIVE IMPROVEMENTS TO INFRASTRUCTURE AND SERVICE DELIVERY

This approach is focused on working together to improve the quality and distribution of accessible infrastructure as well as inclusive programming and service delivery. It is important to create a regional approach that sets cohesive standards for the participating communities.

SHARING RESOURCES

Sharing real examples of accessibility initiatives can help provide insight and resources as well as improve future accessibility initiatives. Creating a culture and tools for sharing will help with ongoing learning and standardization of practices.

ACCOUNTABILITY AND ENFORCEMENT

Regular implementation planning will take suggested actions into reality. This will require council support, perhaps budget, updates to policies, procedures or bylaws, and enforcement. While each community will act independently to implement the plan, accountability through reporting (likely to the Collaborative Accessibility Committee) to ensure that action is being taken will be important to demonstrate effectiveness to each other, the Committee, and the public.

BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHER GROUPS AND STAKEHOLDERS

Building relationships with other groups and stakeholders through regular communication and/or engagement during project and implementation planning will be critical to expanding the impact of projects outside of local government policies and practices.

2023–2026 ACTION PLAN

Members of the Northeastern BC Collaborative understand that they cannot tackle every issue and barrier to accessibility at once. To ensure it maintains momentum through achievable goals, five priorities have been identified for the 2023-2026 Action Plan:

1. Accessibility committee formulation and goal setting
2. Staff and committee training opportunities
3. Resource sharing across communities
4. Accessibility awareness in community
5. Region-specific standards related to accessibility

To preserve some key actions that member communities want to take but may not be able to undertake in this plan, long-term actions for next steps have also been identified. These are intended to show how learning and resource creation undertaken in the 2023-2026 action plan can be further embedded in local government work in the following years. We expect that learning and working together as a collaborative Committee will both expand on these and identify additional actions.

ACCESSIBILITY COMMITTEE FORMULATION AND GOAL SETTING

2023 – FORMING AND PREPARATION

1. Hold monthly meetings to formulate group, clarify role, and action plan.
    - Approach: Building relationships with other groups and stakeholders
    -

2. Collaboratively review and refine Terms of Reference.
    - Approach: Accountability and enforcement

3. Collaborative review and refine Action Plan.
    - Approach: Accountability and enforcement

4. Establish feedback mechanism.
    - Approach: Accountability and enforcement

2024 – 2025

5. Host conversations with potential partners and organizations.
    - Approach: Building relationships with other groups and stakeholders

6. Create public engagement tools to help share information about the Accessibility Committee and its projects.
    - Approach: Education and skill building

ANNUAL EVALUATION AND PLANNING

7. Identify any specific Committee projects and prepare a budget submission for member community boards and councils.
    - Approach: Accountability and enforcement

8. Review Accessibility Plan.
    - Approach: Accountability and enforcement

STAFF AND COMMITTEE TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES

2024 – 2025

1. Offer staff at all local governments training on accessibility.
    - Approach: Education and skill building

2. Identify training opportunities for the Accessibility Committee.
    - Approach: Education and skill building

3. Increase staff capacity for accessing accessible construction workshops (e.g., workshops, resources, checklists, etc.)
    - Approach: Education and skill building

SHARING RESOURCES ACROSS COMMUNITIES

2024 – 2025

1. Develop and share resources. This can be related to areas such as tech support, website content creation, accessible engagements, accessible recreation programs and services, building and streetscape design, examples of successful projects, and any other resources as identified by the Accessibility Committee.
    - Approach: Sharing resource

ACCESSIBILITY AWARENESS IN COMMUNITY

ONGOING

1. Publicly document accessibility initiatives and projects.
    - Approach: Education and skill building

2. Document areas of strength in accessibility.
    - Approach: Education and skill building

2024 – 2025

3. Develop and launch public engagement campaign.
    - Approach: Education and skill building

REGION-SPECIFIC STANDARDS RELATED TO ACCESSIBILITY

ONGOING

1. Complete reporting on projects to the Accessibility Committee for discussion. Share projects early and act on feedback.
    - Approach: Cohesive improvements to infrastructure and continuity

2024 – 2025

2. Identify common areas of work and consider what can be improved with shared standards. This may include maintaining a website, customer service policies, sidewalk or streetscape design, etc.
    - Approach: Cohesive improvements to infrastructure and continuity

3. Research best practices and standards for accessibility.
    - Approach: Cohesive improvements to infrastructure and continuity.

NEXT STEPS: ACTIONS FOR 2026 AND BEYOND

1. Promote and encourage use of the feedback mechanism.
    - Approach: Education and skill building

2. Individual communities to begin updating Human Resources policies and practices to increase opportunities for people with disabilities.
    - Approach: Cohesive improvements to infrastructure and continuity

3. Consider best practices for accessibility in development and infrastructure projects as part of evaluation and approvals.
    - Approach: Cohesive improvements to infrastructure and continuity

4. Update programming and service delivery policies and practices to ensure accessibility is a key consideration.
    - Approach: Cohesive improvements to infrastructure and continuity

5. Approve formal Council commitments to accessibility. This can include approval of Accessibility Committee Budgets, endorsement and approval of bylaws and policies that align with accessibility recommendations and best practices.
    - Approach: Accountability and enforcement

INDIVIDUAL PLANS

Awaiting finalization of individual community plans (Fall 2023)

EVALUATION METHODS

Evaluation is an important part of applying learning. Each year, the Collaborative Accessibility Committee will evaluate progress and discuss learnings.

- **Regular Reporting** – Each Collaborative Accessibility Committee meeting will include an opportunity for project updates. The facilitator, sub-committees, or local governments may provide brief updates on projects.
- **Annual Evaluation** – Each year a Collaborative Accessibility Committee meeting will be designated as an evaluation meeting. The facilitator will provide a summary of the year's activities and members may provide updates on projects and key learnings. The Committee may then discuss the projects and learnings and consider how to adjust projects, priorities, actions, or approaches to its work in the coming year.

Guiding questions have been developed to support in overall evaluation. Specific projects or activities may have their own metrics. Specific evaluation tools, such as surveys of committee members, checklists, or reporting templates may need to be created as the Committee works together and evolves its processes. This list of questions is not encompassing of everything the Committee may choose to monitor over time. It is simply a starting point for evaluation and may be refined if the Collaborative Accessibility Committee chooses to do so.

ARE WE ADDRESSING MULTIPLE BARRIER TYPES?

The Accessible BC Act discusses a variety of barrier types that can prevent access to communities for people with disabilities. The Committee strives to address multiple barrier types in its work. The following questions can be asked during evaluation:

- What projects did we undertake related to each barrier? Some projects may address multiple barriers.
- Were there any barrier types we did not address? Why?
- What can we do next year to address more barrier types?

TYPES OF BARRIERS

BC's Accessibility Plan identifies the following barriers:

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

- Not providing an American Sign Language interpreter or closed captioning
- Requiring a driver's license for a job when another form of transportation could be used

Technological Barriers – 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 Barriers – 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

ARE WE APPLYING THE GUIDING PRINCIPLES OF THE ACCESSIBLE BC ACT?

The Accessible BC Act identifies a set of guiding principles for improving accessibility. The Committee commits to following these guiding principles. In evaluations, the following questions can be asked, which are related to each of the six guiding principles.

ADAPTABILITY

The Accessibility Committee must adapt its priorities as emerging needs and new information arise. Additionally, accessibility plans should reflect that disability and accessibility are evolving concepts that change as services, technology, and attitudes change.

- Did we learn anything new this year that required adaptation of our plans? What was it and how did we adapt? How can we adapt for next year?

COLLABORATION

This work involves partnerships and collaboration across governments, with people with disabilities, and the Provincial Accessibility Committee. Promoting accessible communities is a shared responsibility and everyone has a role to play.

- Did we work well together as a committee? Were we able to identify and work with other partners?

DIVERSITY

It's important to consider the variety of identities found within an organization, group, or society.

- Does our committee membership reflect our region?

INCLUSION

This principle focuses on the practice of using proactive measures to create an environment where people feel welcomed, respected, and valued. It aims to foster a sense of belonging and engagement to support participation. All British Columbians, including persons with disabilities, should be able to participate fully and equally in their communities.

- Do committee members feel included in the committee processes? Do they see how their input is being applied in local government practices?

SELF-DETERMINATION

The ability to choose and set goals, self-advocate, make personalized decisions, and reach goals is an important component of this work.

- Have committee members been able to identify and pursue their own projects?

UNIVERSAL DESIGN

Universal design is the process of creating services and environments that are accessible to people with a wide range of abilities, disabilities, and other characteristics.

The Centre for Excellence in Universal Design defines Universal Design as “the design and composition of an environment so that it can be accessed, understood, and used to the greatest extent possible by all people regardless of their age, size, ability or disability.”

- Have we considered best practices and universal design in our learnings, shared resources, and approaches to policies, practices, and projects?

LEARNING AND INSIGHTS

Learning is critical to practicing accessibility. Each year, the Committee will consider how it has supported ongoing learning. This learning might look like hosting workshops or inviting guest speakers to present to the Committee or local governments. It could be developing and launching public awareness or education projects, or it could be committee members sharing and discussing best practices, policies, or projects they have worked on.

- Did we host guest speakers, complete courses, or participate in other types of learning? How did we share that learning with member communities?
- What learning did each local government undertake?
- Did we help inform the public about accessibility?

RECEIVING PUBLIC FEEDBACK

Feedback collected from the public and any actions taken will be summarized by the facilitator and shared with the Committee for discussion.

CONCLUSION

The Northeastern British Columbia Collaborative Accessibility Committee is excited to be embarking on this journey towards accessibility together. The local governments of Northeastern BC have decided to collaborate on this work to improve the public's experience across the region. We do this work in recognition that our communities' boundaries are not the boundaries our citizens live their whole lives in. Together, we can do have a much greater impact than if we worked independently.

Please be on the lookout for opportunities to be involved!