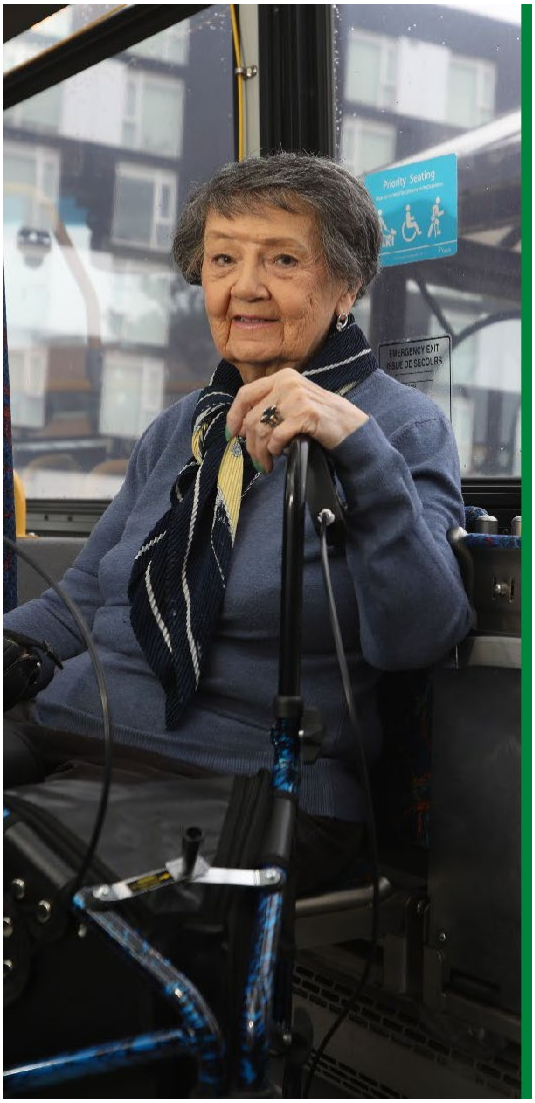


NIAGARA TRANSIT MULTI-YEAR ACCESSIBILITY PLAN 2025-2029

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To the attention of:

Niagara Transit Commission

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DOCUMENT REVISIONS CONTROL

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1 INTRODUCTION AND OUR COMMITMENT

Niagara Transit is pleased to present its first-ever Multi-Year Accessibility Plan (MYAP) - 2025-2029. This plan outlines our planned actions to improve accessibility over the next 5 years.

Niagara Transit is committed to building and maintaining an accessible transit system. An accessible transit system is an inclusive transit system. Our mission is to provide safe, dependable, and sustainable transit service in Niagara. Our vision is a more connected region where every person in Niagara can experience independence, freedom, and a sense of discovery. To achieve this, we need to ensure that our transit system is free from barriers and meets the needs of all riders. We are working to create a transit system that is accessible, inclusive, and user-friendly for everyone. This accessibility plan is both a commitment to the community as well as a road map to greater accessibility. We look forward to working for and with the community as we action this accessibility plan over the next 5 years.

1.1 Message from the General Manager

I am pleased to present Niagara Transit's first-ever Multi-Year Accessibility Plan (MYAP) 2025-2029. This plan reflects our commitment to creating a transit system that is accessible, inclusive, and responsive to the needs of every rider in our community. Accessibility is at the heart of our mission to provide a safe, reliable, and sustainable transit service, and it is essential to building a connected region where every person in Niagara can experience independence, freedom, and a sense of discovery.

This plan will serve as our roadmap for action over the next five years, guiding improvements to vehicles, infrastructure, and the customer experience. It reflects not only a compliance requirement under the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) but also our promise to Niagara to continuously work to eliminate barriers.

I want to thank our riders, staff, community partners, and accessibility advocates who helped shape this plan by sharing their knowledge and insights. Your feedback plays an integral role in helping us understand the challenges faced by people with disabilities and in identifying meaningful ways to address them. Niagara Transit remains committed to collaboration, accountability, and transparency as we bring this plan to life. Together, we can create a truly barrier-free transit system that supports mobility, equity, and connection for all.

2 CONTEXT

2.1 Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act

Under the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) municipal organizations in Ontario are required to prepare and publish an MYAP, and to update that MYAP at least once every five years. The MYAP must include planned actions to reduce barriers to accessibility across the organization. Under the AODA, Niagara Transit has responsibilities to reduce barriers and improve accessibility in the following areas:

- Customer Service
- Information and Communication
- Employment
- Public Spaces
- Transportation

This plan outlines the actions we plan to take over the next 5 years to reduce barriers and improve accessibility across our organization, focusing on the above areas.

2.2 Niagara Transit's Core Values

In 2023 Niagara Transit was created by merging the existing transit systems of Niagara Region Transit, Niagara Falls Transit, St. Catharines Transit, Welland Transit, and Fort Erie Transit into a single, comprehensive transit operator. Since then, we have been working to build and maintain a regional transit system that prioritizes our 5 Core Values:

- Service excellence
- Safety
- Customer focus
- Affordability
- Employee success

As we work to modernize and improve our services, we are keeping accessibility front of mind. Accessibility is a key component to achieving the above priorities. It must be a part of everything we do. This accessibility plan brings focus to our accessibility goals.

2.3 Our Community

The Niagara Region is comprised of twelve (12) municipalities in Southern Ontario. With an estimated population of just under half a million, the Region's growth has outpaced that of the

province of Ontario between 2016 and 2021. While the two largest population centres in the Region are Niagara Falls and St. Catharines, residents are spread out across various municipalities.

The St. Catharines-Niagara Census Metropolitan Area has 90,500 persons with disabilities (28.9%) and 223,150 without (71.1%). This is a higher proportion of individuals with disabilities compared to Ontario (24.1%). As a result, this plan is of significant importance to our community.

3 CONSULTATIONS WITH THE COMMUNITY AND PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

Consulting people with disabilities – including both customers and employees – was important to the development of our MYAP. We wanted to hear from the community what their priorities are when it comes to accessibility. We wanted the people most impacted by barriers to have their say on the future of accessibility at Niagara Transit. While developing this MYAP, Niagara Transit consulted with the community focusing on people with disabilities. This included:

- Community pop-ups
- Virtual roundtable for service and advocacy organizations
- Online questionnaire for community members
- Virtual drop-in session for Niagara Transit employees
- Online questionnaire for Niagara Transit employees

Thanks to the community, we have developed a MYAP that we feel is relevant, timely, and responsive to community needs, as well as the needs of employees with disabilities working for Niagara Transit.

4 PLANNED ACTIONS TO ADVANCE ACCESSIBILITY

The following are our planned actions to advance accessibility across Niagara Transit's operation over the next five years and in alignment with Niagara Transit's Master Plan timelines.

1. General Requirements

1.1 Accessibility Plan and Policies

We have identified some areas where our policies could more robustly reflect our organizational commitment to accessibility. As a result, we will:

- Prepare and publish an updated Multi-Year Accessibility Plan.
- Update our policies in accordance with AODA requirements to better reflect Niagara Transit's ongoing commitment to accessibility across the organization.

- Continue to ensure that accessibility is a key consideration in procurement, including incorporating accessibility criteria when acquiring goods, services, or facilities where practicable.
- Continue to consult people with disabilities in the implementation of this plan and hold at least one public meeting with people with disabilities annually.

1.2 Training

Staff receive accessible customer service training, human rights training, and some job-specific training. We have identified opportunities to refresh the training that staff receive, to provide more job-specific training, and to better monitor the training that contracted service providers receive. As a result, we will:

- Better document our training policies in accordance with AODA requirements.
- Seek opportunities to refresh staff training and provide additional job-specific training.

2. Customer Service

Through our public consultations, we received a large volume of feedback about the excellent customer service that frontline Niagara Transit staff provides. People shared with us that staff are friendly, helpful, knowledgeable, proactive, and respectful. We appreciate the confidence that our customers have in staff. Niagara Transit is currently updating how we get customer feedback. We expect this to be finished by the end of 2025. The changes focus on better documenting the process and the actions that we take when complaints are received, including how we provide services or facilities to customers with disabilities.

We also identified some opportunities to improve the accessibility of our customer service. In particular, we have identified opportunities to better document and share our processes and improve our training. We will:

- Better document and publish our accessible customer services policies, our service animal and support person policies, in accordance with AODA requirements.
- Better document and publish documented steps that we take when a temporary disruption of services that people with disabilities usually use.
- Ensure the completion of relevant training by contracted service-providers in accordance with AODA requirements.
- Continue our campaign encouraging rider etiquette, including courtesies for riders with disabilities to further educate our customers.

3. Information and Communications

We recognize how important reliable and timely information is for all our customers. In the event of specialized transit delays, we use a communication protocol that includes multiple attempts to reach passengers. The protocol includes using passengers' preferred method of contact and clear, timely updates. When necessary, alternate transportation, such as taxi service is arranged, and customers are informed directly of these changes. All actions, including rescheduling efforts and customer notifications, are documented to ensure accountability and transparency.

Through our public consultations, customers expressed satisfaction with the Niagara Transit app and appreciation of our audible and visual stop announcements. Customers also identified some challenges in navigating the transit system and a desire for more communication around route or service changes. Staff also identified an opportunity to improve the accessibility of our social media posts.

- Work with our software provider to develop a process for giving customers updates and reminders about trip bookings.
- Continue to ensure that all content posted on our website is compliant with WCAG 2.0 (the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines).
- Look for opportunities to improve our processes to ensure our website remains WCAG compliant.
- Establish consistent web processes.
- Better document our processes for providing accessible formats and communication supports.
- Identify opportunities to enhance clarity and knowledge about trip planning and navigation. This may include working with community organizations, travel training, videos, or other resources.
- Identify opportunities to improve the implementation of accessible communications practices, such as in social media and signage. This may include staff training where gaps exist and developing internal resources to ensure coordination between teams.
- Ensure transparency in our processes by making established, customer-facing policies and procedures publicly accessible.

4. Employment

Our human resources department is relatively new at Niagara Transit. As part of the amalgamation process to stand up our organization, we have largely adopted many of the policies of the Niagara Region. We have identified opportunities to refine these policies to better align with our unique

workplace. Through our engagement with employees with disabilities, we also identified a need to improve our workplace culture around disability. We will:

- Review and seek opportunities to expand management training needs for accessible employment practices.
- Develop a plan of actions to improve our workplace culture around disability.
- Review our current recruitment practices for opportunities to solidify our processes of offering accommodation to candidates, successful applicants, and employees.
- Review our current processes for providing accessible formats and communication supports to employees; and developing individualized workplace emergency response information.
- Review and better document our process for developing individual accommodation plans and return to work processes.
- Review our performance management and career development and advancement processes to ensure that they consider the accessibility needs of employees with disabilities, including individual accommodation plans.

5. Public Spaces, Infrastructure, and Stops

We have recently completed accessibility audits of several locations including the garage and terminals in St. Catharines and Welland, and the garage in Niagara Falls. We are aware of challenges at some bus stops without dedicated pads or seating, poor maintenance, and without even and accessible paths to the stops. To address these barriers, we will:

- Review the findings of the accessibility audits to identify high priority and low-cost improvements to make as soon as possible.
- Incorporate accessibility measures in the planning for all future infrastructure.
- Work with the accessibility advisors and people with disabilities to review accessible design criteria for bus stops and shelters.
- Work with the municipalities and Region to ensure regular maintenance of transit stops, including timely removal of snow and ice, and sidewalk maintenance.

6. Transportation

As a specialized and conventional transportation provider, we recognize how important dependable, accessible, and timely services are. We have implemented measures, including regular maintenance, to prevent equipment failures. We also have procedures to address accessibility equipment failures on all our vehicles. Drivers inspect the vehicles before each shift and report any problems immediately. Problems are classified as major or minor. Buses with major problems are immediately removed from the road. On-road supervisors assess reported issues,

and maintenance teams ensure significant issues are resolved promptly. Minor problems are scheduled into preventive work. All accessibility-related defects are tracked to ensure timely resolution. These measures ensure passenger safety, service reliability, and compliance with IASR s.43(1).

To minimize wait times for specialized transportation services, we use a “dynamic scheduling model.” This scheduling prioritizes specialized trip requests, ahead of general trips. Staff continuously monitor our trips so that we can make changes if there is a risk we will not be able to complete a scheduled trip (e.g. if a vehicle broke down; or traffic delays). In those cases, we rebook rides, reallocate vehicles, or arrange other transportation as needed. Our software can make immediate changes to the planned routes of buses to reduce delays, detours, and increase capacity. We notify customers of any changes to improve reliability and reduce uncertainty.

Through our public engagement, riders expressed satisfaction with vehicle accessibility and recent improvements. Customers shared that they appreciate that vehicles feel safe, clean, equipped for accessibility, and adaptable. Additionally, we received positive comments about recent changes to fares, such as fare subsidies. We received some feedback about vehicle and service improvements. In response to this feedback, we will:

- Assess whether any improvements are practical to the existing fleet, such as relocating stop request buttons, improving seating comfort, or adding loop straps.
- Continue to regularly inspect and maintain accessibility features on vehicles, such as deployable ramps, stop announcement signs, and folding seats, paths of travel, and in parking.
- Continue to review opportunities to enhance specialized transit service coverage.
- When procuring new vehicles, ensure that they comply with or exceed the accessibility requirements of the AODA and explore options that may accommodate multiple mobility device users at one time.
- Continue to review booking requirements to maximize rider flexibility and bus predictability. We can accommodate emergency or compassionate requests outside our standard booking timelines. To do this, booking requests are escalated to trained booking agents or supervisors, who prioritize accessible vehicle deployment to ensure urgent medical, personal, or family needs are met.
- Consider whether improvements are possible to the integration of specialized and micro-transit services.
- Update the specialized transit eligibility and appeals policy, including the application to ensure compliance with the AODA and to meet the needs of future users of the service. We will ensure that changes made will be communicated to the public through multiple channels and we will continue to support new applicants throughout the application process.

5 CONCLUSION

Niagara Region Transit is committed to improve our accessibility, to supporting people with disabilities to fully participate in our community, and to the goals of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act. We will continue to work to identify, prevent, and remove barriers throughout our operations. This Multi-Year Accessibility Plan outlines how we will maintain and exceed compliance with the legislative requirements and continue working towards being barrier-free. The MYAP will be monitored by NTC's Customer Experience Department. Annual status updates will be provided on the MYAP to the Board, in addition to publicly posted information for our customers.

6 CONTACT

For more information, to provide feedback or to request an alternate format of this document please contact Niagara Transit by calling 1-833-NRT-LINE (1-833-678-5463), emailing info@niagaratransit.ca, or in-person at one of our terminal locations listed below:

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