

# City of Ottawa Provincial and Federal Accessibility Plans 2025 Update (Resident Facing Report)

## Introduction

This is the first annual update of the new 2025-2029 City of Ottawa Municipal Accessibility Plan (COMAP). To develop this plan, the Corporate Accessibility Office (AO) consulted widely with persons with disabilities, caregivers, organizations, the Accessibility Advisory Committee (AAC) and members of the public.

This is also the first annual update of the new 2024-2026 OC Transpo Accessibility Plan, which is a requirement of the *Accessible Canada Act* (ACA). A list of updates concerning Transit-related initiatives can be found in the Transportation Initiatives section of this report.

The City is committed to meeting the requirements of both the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act* (AODA) and the ACA. The City works with people with disabilities, including residents, employees, and visitors, to make Ottawa accessible for all. The City's efforts to achieve these goals over the past year are outlined in this report.

## AODA Compliance

The City must submit an accessibility compliance report to the Province every two years. The next report is due by December 31, 2025. City Council receives an update on compliance each year through the COMAP update reports.

In 2024, the City met all requirements under the AODA except for its websites and web content and some elements in our built environment regarding pedestrian crossings. Work continues to make the City's websites, web content and web applications more usable for all residents. Staff are also working to fix the accessibility-related concerns in the built environment by adding the required features to ensure our pedestrian crossings are accessible to everyone.

# 2024 Highlights

## **Accessibility Advisory Committee**

The Accessibility Advisory Committee (AAC) is a committee required by law under the AODA that provides guidance to City Council and staff on accessibility issues affecting persons with disabilities and older adults in Ottawa. Throughout 2024, the AAC consulted on roughly 22 projects during the eight regularly scheduled meetings, in addition to the hundreds of planned capital projects for the year presented to the Committee at their annual duty to consult meeting.

Some projects of note include:

- O-Train Operations Transition to Push-Button Doors
- Lansdowne 2.0 Phase 1 Event Centre, as well as North Side Stands Accessibility Design
- E-Scooter Pilot Project
- City of Ottawa Municipal Accessibility Plan Consultations

## **Working with the Community**

Engagement with persons with disabilities was the primary focus in the development of the 2025-2029 COMAP. In 2024, the AO continued to engage with many community groups from the disability community, including people who are blind or have low vision, Deaf persons and people who are deafened and hard of hearing, and the Ottawa Disability Coalition. During these meetings, held either virtually or in-person at various sites across the city, staff answered questions and received feedback about City buildings, programs and services. These meetings also help inform City staff of trends and new developments, which help set priorities.

The AO also received numerous accessibility-related complaints, questions, and feedback from residents to AO staff members. The City tracks these communications and directs them accordingly to the responsible service areas. While the City does not have the authority to enforce accessibility compliance for private businesses, the AO goes above and beyond to educate businesses on their Provincial obligations, encouraging them to comply for the benefit of all.

The AO will continue to work with the AAC, disability community partners, and residents to ensure that accessibility-related feedback is received and responded to appropriately.

## **Partnerships**

The City also partners with accessibility organizations in Ontario, Canada and around the world to work on projects people with disabilities. Some of these partnerships include the Ontario Network of Accessibility Professionals (ONAP), the Canadian Accessibility Network (CAN), and International Association of Accessibility Professionals (IAAP).

## **Events**

The City held four accessibility related events in 2024: a virtual Emergency Preparedness Event in February, AccessAbility Day in May, a Treat Accessibly Halloween event in October, and the first flag raising ceremony for the International Day of Persons with Disabilities in December.

In February 2024, staff hosted a virtual public information session and discussion on emergency preparedness for persons with disabilities. Staff provided information and resources to attendees with a focus on key emergency preparedness considerations for persons with disabilities.

AccessAbility Day 2024 in Ottawa returned to an in-person event at City Hall, and featured opening remarks from the Mayor, City Manager, City Councillors and staff, as well as a keynote speaker.

At the Trick or Treat with the Mayor event, the City partnered with Treat Accessibly to help make Halloween accessible and inclusive for all. This event featured non-food treats, accessible lines and entrances, lower sound levels and less lighting effects.

Finally, to celebrate International Day of Persons with Disabilities, the flag of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities was raised for the first time in Ottawa. The event was an opportunity to celebrate the achievements and contributions of persons with disabilities, recognizing that work remains to achieve a shared vision of an accessible city for all, and the commitment and progress made towards this goal by the City of Ottawa.

## **Design of Public Spaces Initiatives**

The Ādisōke main library branch project significantly progressed in 2024. The building's iconic roof structure was completed, as well as the installation of all the glass windows. Significant progress was also made on construction projects including insulation, air vapour barrier, and stonework. Inside the building, scaffolding was installed to complete

the interior glass installations and much of the wood millwork, and plumbing, electrical and mechanical work is ongoing.

Other existing library branches received many accessibility-related retrofits and upgrades within their facilities in 2024, including an accessible washroom with adult change table at the Stittsville branch, elevator modernizations at the Nepean Centrepointe and Rideau branches, and other accessibility-related upgrades at the Alta Vista branch.

The City is also fully committed to improving accessibility in the City's public realm and regularly completes projects annually to upgrade aging infrastructure to current standards. In 2024, the Public Works department installed 11 new pedestrian crossovers at locations across the city, allowing all vulnerable pedestrians, including persons with disabilities, older adults, and children, to cross streets safely at locations where no crossing previously existed.

## **Transportation Initiatives**

This year, we drafted the first OC Transpo Accessibility Plan required by the *Accessible Canada Act* (ACA, 2019). Before this year, Transit Services was committed and will continue to commit to the spirit and intent of the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005* (AODA). OC Transpo will continue to provide updates as part of the City of Ottawa Municipal Accessibility Plan as well as this new plan. You can read the OC Transpo Accessibility Plan in Document 3.

In response to a direction from Council, staff from OC Transpo will explore options to improve booking for Para Transpo, such as same-day bookings. This is related to the On-Demand Transit Pilot Project that happened in 2024. Staff recognize that Para Transpo riders rely on the service for essential activities, medical appointments, and employment, so increased availability of same day bookings would enhance their independence and quality of service.

Lines 2 and 4 opened in January 2025 and were designed to meet accessibility standards. Some station features that increase accessibility include:

- Dual elevators at stations with elevator service
- Stations without elevators have ramps and multi-use pathways for access
- Tactile warning strips and inter-car barriers
- Black and white directional signs throughout the station
- Braille signs indicating direction of service
- Audio announcements on platforms

- Tactile wayfinding tiles tracing a route on the floor

O-Train features that increase accessibility include:

- Cooperative seating areas
- Level boarding
- Spacious interior for easy circulation
- High visibility colours for grab bars, handholds and stanchions
- Onboard information including bilingual audio and visual announcements
- Audible tones and visual indicators that the train doors are opening and closing

## **Information and Communication Initiatives**

To keep residents and subscribers informed on all matters accessibility related at the City, the Accessibility Office publishes a monthly e-newsletter, “Accessibility Spotlight”. In 2024, 13 editions of the newsletter were published, featuring a total of 45 articles including information on City services, events, programs and initiatives. Accessibility Spotlight is published in both English and French, with a total of 5431 subscribers as of December 2024. Some examples of articles published have included the promotion of the City of Ottawa’s Emergency Preparedness for Persons with Disabilities Event, Accessibility Advisory Committee updates, and engagement opportunities. Special editions are additionally shared with the public related to important events or emergency situations, such as extreme heat resources.

Recreation, Culture and Facility Services improved the accessibility of departmental applications forms in the last year. The Cultural Funding department has worked to develop an online, accessible grants management system, which includes continuous updates of programs, and developing resources for applicants to better navigate the system. In 2024, accessible online forms were implemented for both the Commemorative Bench Program and Commemorative Naming Program.

## **Employment Initiatives**

All staff, including new hires, continue to be encouraged to complete the Count ME In! Questionnaire, managed by the Equity Team. As of December 31, 2024, 78 per cent of continuous staff had completed the questionnaire. In December of 2023, 22 per cent of staff self-identified as having a disability, compared to 20.8 per cent in December of 2024. This decrease reported representation may be accounted for due to the overall decrease in participation of the questionnaire compared to the previous year, but is close to the proportional representation of persons with disabilities overall. Additionally,

as of December 2024, 11.5 per cent of management identified as persons with disabilities, which is an increase in representation compared to 9.8 per cent in 2023.

The City is committed to providing training and education to staff to reduce attitudinal barriers. Throughout the year, 17 sessions of Bias Awareness Training for employees, and seven sessions for leaders were facilitated. Additionally, four sessions of “Learning My Way” were provided, which is a course designed to provide participants a deeper understanding of neurodiversity and the different types of learning disabilities to support changes that can be made in the workplace to accommodate a neurodiverse workforce.

Throughout the year, to promote the City as an inclusive employer, staff in Human Resources (HR) participated in various job fairs that support job seekers with disabilities. As part of these efforts, HR attended 11 outreach and career fair events and conducted 28 presentations to a wide variety of schools and organizations. Events included the Accessible Spring Fair, presented by Algonquin College's Co-op and Career Centre, in partnership with the Centre for Accessible Learning, as well as an event hosted by the Canadian National Institute for the Blind (CNIB) for individuals who are blind or partially sighted.

The City also began collaborating with LiveWorkPlay (LWP), an organization which supports individuals on the autism spectrum find meaningful employment. Meetings were held between the Accessibility Office, LWP, HR and Community and Social Services Department to begin the process of collaborative and inclusive hiring. Initial meetings were also held with various hiring managers, Ottawa Public Library and staff from the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) to build a relationship with union representation to further support collaborative and inclusive hiring practices.

## **Customer Service Initiatives**

Staff continue to offer accessible services that help support people with disabilities and older adults, including the Snow Go and Snow Go Assist programs. In 2024, \$147,565 was given to nine agencies to provide snow removal services to residents.

To improve the accessibility for public delegations and general participation at Standing Committee and Council meetings, new equipment was installed in Andrew S. Haydon Hall (Council Chambers) in late 2024, including a full update to the audio and visual systems to improve quality and sound in the room. Hearing loops have also been installed to work in conjunction for individuals with hearing aids or cochlear implants.

Finally, throughout 2024, staff continued to assess and revise recreational programming options to increase participation for persons with disabilities. This included increasing the number of Inclusive Recreation summer camp mentors to better support the increased number of camp participants with disabilities, as well as introducing Inclusive Recreation private swimming lessons for children who cannot participate in existing class formats. Both offerings will continue throughout 2025.

## Conclusion

The City continues its work with staff and partners, including people with disabilities and community organizations, to make Ottawa more accessible for all.

While there is still more work to do, the City will continue to lead and share resources and knowledge, while always learning from our partners and residents.