



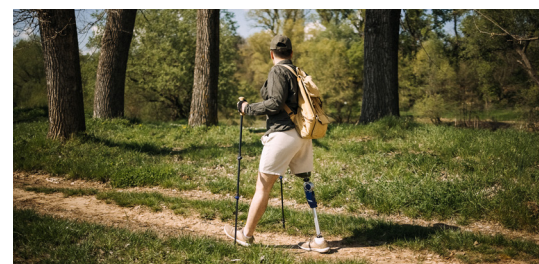
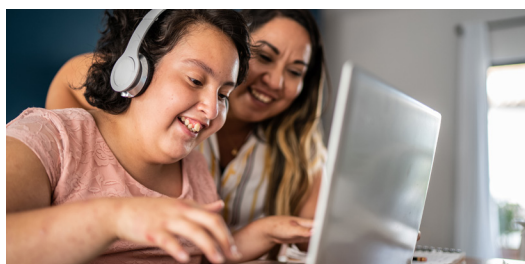
# **MULTI-YEAR ACCESSIBILITY PLAN**

**2024-2028**



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# A Message from the Chief Administrative Officer

I am proud to present the County of Simcoe's Multi-Year Accessibility Plan for 2024-2028 in addition to reaffirming the County's commitment to meeting the legislative requirements of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 (AODA). This plan outlines steps to overcoming the barriers to accessibility in the services, programs and facilities that the County operates. It is our firm belief that everyone should feel welcome and recognized in Simcoe County.

In consultation with our Joint Accessibility Advisory Committee, the County endeavours to be a leader in accessibility in Ontario. We have made great strides in many areas. Recently built Social Housing facilities have added greatly to the much needed accessible housing supply in Simcoe County with many more planned in the coming years. Since 2018 our transit service LINX and LINX+ have grown from nothing more than an idea to a sprawling system connecting dozens of communities across the region while being a leader in accessible infrastructure and vehicles. To improve how we communicate with our residents we're launching a new, more accessible website in early 2024. Our Museum continues to design its exhibits with accessibility in mind and recently approved its own accessibility plan. We continue to work with our Joint Accessibility Advisory Committee to ensure that the needs of our residents and clients living with disabilities are being properly met.

The County of Simcoe will continue its compliance with the AODA and meet accessibility standards to ensure our programs, services and facilities remain accessible and inclusive to all our citizens. We are proud of our accomplishments of the past and a look forward to implementing this plan for the future. We recognize that far more work is needed if we are to ever meet the promise of an open and accessible Ontario for everyone.



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mark Aitken'.

**Mark Aitken**  
Chief Administrative Officer  
County of Simcoe

# A Message from the Joint Accessibility Advisory Committee

As the Chair of the County of Simcoe's Joint Accessibility Advisory Committee, I am pleased to introduce the County's Multi-Year Accessibility Plan (2024-2028). This plan ensures the County's commitment to accessibility, and provides a clear roadmap to appreciably improving the lives of everyone living in Simcoe County.

Just over a year from now, the twenty-year period of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 (AODA) will pass with a promise of a truly accessible Ontario yet to be achieved. Barriers still exist that prevent everyday Ontarians from participating in daily life, and more has to be done to overcome them. At the same time, I marvel at how far we have progressed in just two decades. Embracing the accessibility standards has eliminated obstacles and improved our awareness of the lived experience of our friends, family members and neighbours.

In particular, I appreciate the County's commitment to accessibility and recognize how much incredible work is being done to make this area the finest place to live in Ontario. It's clear that championing accessibility and leading by example is at the heart of the County's business. This plan details the incredible progress that has been made and reinforces a firm commitment to betterment in all areas.

As members of the Joint Accessibility Advisory Committee, we will continue to provide strong advocacy for people living with disabilities and connect the County to many communities, organizations, and municipalities throughout the region to help achieve that aim. We look forward to working with the County to identify and eliminate the barriers people living with disabilities face so that we can one day say we have achieved the dream of an open and accessible Ontario for everyone.

## **Doug Mein**

Chair, Joint Accessibility Advisory Committee  
County of Simcoe



## Types of Disabilities and Barriers

The purpose of this accessibility plan is to outline the County of Simcoe's strategy for the identification, removal, and prevention of barriers faced by persons with disabilities.

**Disability** means, as per the Ontario Human Rights Code:

- Any degree of physical disability, infirmity, malformation or disfigurement that is caused by bodily injury, birth defect or illness and, without limiting the generality of the foregoing, includes diabetes mellitus, epilepsy, a brain injury, any degree of paralysis, amputation, lack of physical co-ordination, blindness or visual impediment, deafness or hearing impediment, muteness or speech impediment, or physical reliance on a guide dog or other animal or on a wheelchair or other remedial appliance or device;
- A condition of mental impairment or a developmental disability;
- A learning disability or a dysfunction in one or more of the processes involved in understanding or using symbols or spoken language;
- A mental disorder; or
- An injury or disability for which benefits were claimed or received under the insurance plan established under the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, 1997

When hearing the word “disability,” it is common to think of visible disabilities, such as a person with a physical disability using a wheelchair or other mobility device, a person with a vision disability using a service dog or a white cane, or a person with a hearing disability using the services of a sign language interpreter. However, many disabilities are not as visible and may be hidden. Disabilities can be organized into the following categories:

**Vision disabilities** reduce a person's ability to see clearly. There are many degrees of vision loss, and many people have limited vision rather than no vision at all.

Hearing disabilities reduce a person's ability to hear. People who have hearing loss may be deaf (a person with profound hearing loss), deafened (a person who has become deaf), or hard of hearing (a person with some level of hearing loss).

**Deaf-Blind disabilities** affect a person's ability to see and hear, making it challenging to access information. Many people with deaf-blind disabilities are accompanied by an intervener, a person who helps with communication. Physical disabilities affect a person's ability to perform physical tasks. Their mobility, including standing, moving, and sitting, as well as dexterity may be affected by their disability. There are many degrees of physical disability, and not all people require an assistive device.

**Speech or language disabilities** affect a person's ability to communicate. These disabilities are often due to other disabilities such as hearing loss, cerebral palsy or other conditions that make it difficult to pronounce words, cause slurring or stuttering or prevents someone from expressing themselves or understanding written or spoken language.

**Mental health disabilities** are less visible than many other types of disabilities, as many people do not show signs of their disability. There are varying degrees of disabilities, and some examples include depression, phobias, and bipolar, anxiety, or mood disorders.

**Intellectual or developmental disabilities** may affect, mildly or profoundly, a person's ability to learn, socialize or take care of their everyday needs. It may be difficult to do many things that most people take for granted each day. Learning disabilities are information processing disorders that can affect how a person acquires, organizes expresses, retains, understands or uses verbal or non-verbal information.

**Barrier** means anything that prevents a person with a disability from fully participating in all aspects of society because of his or her disability.

Barriers are often seen as physical obstacles that prevent or challenge persons with disabilities from accessing a building or facility. However, barrier are any obstacles that prevent a person with a disability from fully participating in all aspects of society because of a disability. Barrier can be organized into the following categories:

**Physical and architectural barriers** are facilities, building, spaces or features that restrict or impede physical access. An example is a doorway that is too narrow to accommodate entry by a person using a wheelchair.

**Communication barriers** are obstacles with processing, transmitting or interpreting information. Examples include a brochure that has small print and cannot be read by someone with a vision disability and is not available in alternate formats.

**Attitudinal barriers** are prejudgments or assumptions that directly or indirectly discriminate against persons with disabilities. An example is assuming that all people with vision disabilities have no vision or read Braille. Technological barriers occur when technology cannot be or is not modified to support various assistive devices and/or software. An example is a website that does not provide for increased text size or contrast options.

**Systemic barriers** are those within an organization's policies, practices and procedures that do not consider accessibility for those with disabilities. An example is listing a driver's license as an employment qualification for a position that does not actually require driving. This might prevent persons with disabilities from applying, even though they may be able to perform all duties of the position.



## Statement of Commitment

The County of Simcoe is committed to ensuring equal access and participation for people living with disabilities. We believe in integration and we are committed to meeting the needs of people living with disabilities in a timely manner. We will do so by removing and preventing barriers to accessibility and meeting our accessibility requirements under the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 and Ontario's Accessibility laws.

The County of Simcoe is committed to meeting its current and ongoing obligations under the Ontario Human Rights Code respecting non-discrimination. The County understands that obligations under the AODA and its accessibility standards do not substitute or limit its obligations under the Ontario Human Rights Code or obligations to people living with disabilities under any other law. The County is committed to excellence in serving and providing goods, services or facilities to all customers including people with disabilities. We take pride in the fact that our accessible customer service policies are consistent with the principles of independence, dignity, integration and equality of opportunity for people living with disabilities.

The County of Simcoe recognizes that fostering accessibility means ensuring inclusive processes and outcomes are at the heart of County operations and services. The Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 and the Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulation (O. Reg. 191/11) are legislative baselines and not simply targets to meet. We must do more than we are required if we are to truly embrace accessibility in all aspects of our business. Our understanding of disability has progressed significantly since the AODA was first implemented in 2005. Disabilities are not an inherent quality of an individual, but a socially manifested construct. Barriers create disability, and without barriers disability would not exist. The County is committed to overcoming barriers but recognizes that far more work needs to be done to do so. Consultation with people living with disabilities is essential to understanding the deficiencies and barriers in our services, programs and facilities and a collaborative approach is needed to overcome them. The County is focused on emphasizing experience and outcomes for all people who engage with our services.

Most of all, fostering a culture of accessibility means not just being in compliance with accessibility legislation, but continually working towards making Ontario a better place to live and grow for us all.



# County of Simcoe Joint Accessibility Advisory Committee

The County of Simcoe Joint Accessibility Advisory Committee was established in 2003 to advise County Council on matters regarding the accessibility of County owned and operated facilities as well as programs and services offered by the County of Simcoe. The County seeks to always work collaboratively with its Accessibility Advisory Committee to better understand the barriers in its services, programs and facilities and find solutions that tangibly improve the lives of people living with disabilities. More than half of the committee's members are persons living with a disability.

The Terms of Reference for the Joint Accessibility Advisory Committee is attached as **Schedule 2**.

Members of the 2022 to 2026 Joint Accessibility Advisory Committee are listed in the table below.

| Committee Member    | Position  |
|---------------------|---|
| Doug Mein           | Chair   |
| Lisa Cohen          | Citizen Member                                  |
| Caleb Brohm         | Citizen Member                                  |
| Lindsay Ann Cox     | Citizen Member                                  |
| Jan Dobson-Rose     | Citizen Member                                  |
| Matt Garwood        | Member/Councillor Township of Springwater       |
| Gerard La Chappelle | Member/Councillor Township of Tay               |
| Sean Miskimins      | Member/County Councillor                        |
| Ron O'Leary         | Member/Councillor Township of Adjala-Tosorontio |
| Melissa Swales      | Citizen Member                                  |
| Robert Young        | Member/Councillor Township of Oro-Medonte       |



# Guiding Legislation

## **Ontario Human Rights Code**

The Ontario Human Rights Code provides for equal rights and opportunities and freedom from discrimination based on grounds of race, ancestry, place of origin, colour, ethnic origin, citizenship, creed, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, age, record of offences, marital status, family status or disability. It recognizes the dignity and worth of every person in Ontario and applies to employment, housing, facilities and services, contracts and membership in unions, and trade and professional associations.

It also states that customers, clients, and tenants with disabilities have the right to equal treatment and equal access to facilities and services such as restaurants, shops, hotels and movie theatres, as well as apartment buildings, transit and other public places.

Under the Ontario Human Rights Code, the County of Simcoe has a legal obligation to accommodate any person with a disability, regardless of whether they are an employee, volunteer, or resident.

## **Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2001**

The Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2001 (ODA) was designed to improve opportunities for Ontarians with disabilities by identifying, removing and preventing barriers that may limit their ability to participate in society. This Act legislated municipalities such as the County of Simcoe to prepare an annual accessibility plan. The Act stipulated that the plan needed to highlight the policies, procedures, programs, services, and building improvements that were done to improve accessibility for persons with disabilities as well as any planned initiatives and that the annual plan be made available to the public.

The Act also legislated the formation of an Accessibility Advisory Committee to advise Council in each year about the preparation, implementation and effectiveness of its accessibility plan.

## **Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005**

In 2005, the Ontario government passed the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 (AODA), which outlined a strategic direction to make the province accessible to those with disabilities by 2025. The Act reiterated the requirements under the ODA to maintain the completion of annual accessibility plans and Accessibility Advisory Committees. The AODA also provided for the province's implementation of various standards, including those for customer service, information and communication, employment, and transportation, and further indicated that additional standards could be developed over time and passed as Regulations under the AODA.

## **Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulation (O. Reg. 191/11)**

The Ontario government combined standards for information and communication, employment and transportation into the Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulation (O. Reg. 191/11). This Regulation included a phased in approach to many standards that have now all passed.

The Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulation also includes general requirements which includes a multi-year accessibility plan. The Regulation requires the County of Simcoe to establish, implement, maintain and document a multi-year accessibility plan that outlines the County's strategy to prevent and remove barriers and meet the requirements of the Regulation.

The regulation was amended in December 2012 to add a fifth AODA standard. The Design of Public Spaces Standards establish requirements for spaces in the built environment, including beach access routes, recreational trails, exterior paths of travel, outdoor play spaces, outdoor public use eating areas, parking, and areas for obtaining service.

# Accessibility Achievements

Over the last five years, there have been significant accessibility achievements that have helped people living with disabilities better navigate and participate in various aspects of life. A selection of notable accessibility achievements is included below:

- The County completed the construction of new social housing facilities in the Town of Collingwood, Town of Wasaga Beach and Victoria Harbour in Tay Township. These properties were developed and constructed with accessibility at the forefront, adding a total of 47 barrier free housing units to the County's housing supply
- The LINX and LINX+ transit system was developed and expanded County wide linking communities throughout the region. Rollout was completed in compliance with all accessibility legislation and with accessibility of customers as a key priority
- Learning from the COVID-19 pandemic, the County has adapted to the needs of residents by expanding the use of alternative communication formats such as a greater emphasis on email, text messaging, and phone calls over in person services
- The County rolled out a new waste cart program that included a personalized accommodation process for individuals who expressed difficulty in utilizing the new carts
- The Community Paramedicine Program was expanded to include patient navigator funds to assist patients with the purchase of needed accessibility devices such as mobility aids and hearing aids.
- The County opened a 1km fully accessible trail adjacent to the Simcoe County Museum to allow all visitors to enjoy the Museum grounds
- The County of Simcoe initiated a Positive Aging Strategy which provides an Age Friendly Seniors Housing Grant Program and an Age Friendly Business Recognition Program intended to assist businesses assess whether their environment is set up to serve everyone
- The County hands out the Age-Friendly Business and Age-Friendly Individual Recognition and Achievement Awards annually to recognize organizations that have taken action to become more accessible for seniors and individuals who demonstrate outstanding commitment to creating age-friendly communities



- Ontario Works services have been expanded to include accessibility for people with difficulty accessing technology including those living in shelter situations by providing on-site service
- The County hosted an Accessibility Tradeshow Event which included participation from eighteen Simcoe County based organizations highlighting and promoting the incredible accessibility related work being done in the region
- Live streaming of Council and Committee of the Whole Meetings began to provide the opportunity for members of the public to view Council meetings as they occur without the requirement to be physically present
- The County of Simcoe in connection with the Accessibility Advisory Committee completed various facility and site plan reviews to obtain feedback on public spaces and facilities to ensure their accessibility
- The Warden completed annual proclamations in recognition of the International Day of Persons with Disabilities and National AccessAbility Week as well as other significant accessibility related events that arose

The County of Simcoe completes annual accessibility status reports which outline the initiatives that have improved accessibility and removed barriers within the County's facilities, programs and services.



## 2024-2028 Accessibility Plan

The County of Simcoe continually strives to make a more inclusive and accessible community through the ongoing identification and removal of barriers and by planning for impactful change over time. With the County's population expected to rise significantly over the next five years, the County's Multi-Year Accessibility Plan aims to provide tangible targets for improvement while ensuring the County is meeting its legislated requirements. All actions identified are not immutable, but subject to review and revision over time as new barriers or challenges are identified. This plan aims to be responsive and adaptable with the overall goal of breaking down barriers and ensuring Simcoe County can be enjoyed equally by all.

The following highlights the County of Simcoe's priorities for the next five years to meet the requirements of accessibility legislation, as well as how the County will go above and beyond to remove and prevent barriers within the County's facilities, programs and services. The list is organized to reflect the five standards of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005, as well as initiatives that address general barriers faced by persons with disabilities and the County's overall commitment to accessibility and accessibility awareness.

## County Initiatives

### Identify and Bridge Technological Barriers

The County of Simcoe recognizes the increased shift of information relayed over the internet and social media and the impact that may be felt by people living with disabilities. This changing manner in how we communicate can present difficulties for many residents of Simcoe County unfamiliar with the technology or otherwise unable to engage with it. The County will ensure a consistent, accessibility minded approach to communication to ensure clear messaging is provided to all its residents.

## Key Initiatives

- Release updated County website with a greater emphasis on ease of navigation and the inclusion of comprehensive accessibility features
- Planning for implementation of Next Generation 911 which will reduce barriers in making 911 calls by incorporating texting with 911 available for all users
- Review means of including subtitles on videos produced by the County including all County Council meetings
- Design technology with accessibility in mind from the start. This means considering the needs of users with disabilities during the development process and incorporating features that can help to address their unique challenges
- Regularly test and evaluate County technology and websites for accessibility issues and make necessary changes

## Continue to Improve Attitudinal Barriers

Attitudinal barriers are negative beliefs or attitudes towards individuals with disabilities that can lead to exclusion or discrimination. Attitudinal barriers are the most pervasive barrier that exists and the hardest to overcome. They can frequently contribute or amplify other types of barriers and are exhibited as personal attitudes, feelings and behaviours that negatively impact how we interact with people living with disabilities. The County will work to overcome attitudinal barrier in its operations and emphasize breaking down preconceived notions of people living with disabilities.

## Better Obtain Feedback from People Living with Disabilities

The County of Simcoe will continue to encourage the involvement and feedback from individuals living with disabilities in processes such as policy development and program planning. This can help to ensure that the perspectives and needs of all residents are considered and that the programs and services provided are accessible and inclusive. Wherever it is collected, feedback may be provided in alternative formats upon request.

The Joint Accessibility Advisory Committee is an invaluable resource for understanding the experiences of people living with disabilities. The County is committed to working with the AAC through the development of annual work plans, soliciting feedback on county facilities and programs, and seeking advice on major accessibility matters and the identification and eradication of barriers.

## Key Initiatives

- Learning from the COVID-19 pandemic, the County will continue to expand many of its services to embrace new forms of communication such as email, text messaging, social media and more. This will limit the necessity for clients to visit County owned facilities to receive the services they require and provide more responsive feedback to staff
- Members of the AAC will continue to conduct regular facility reviews of County facilities and provide feedback on the overall accessibility
- The AAC will review and update the Facility Review Checklist every two years
- Develop policies and procedures around requesting sign language interpreters and other means of accessible communication for Ontario Works clients
- Regularly test and evaluate County technology and websites for accessibility issues and make necessary changes

## Identify Gaps in Policy

The County will undertake a review of its accessibility policies and update and improve them where gaps exist. The County will also strive to include accessibility considerations in all its relevant policies to ensure that accessibility is never forgotten.

### Key Initiatives

- Review and update the County's Accessibility Standards Policy in conjunction with the Accessibility Advisory Committee
- Develop a consolidated best practices document for recreational trail design that will inform accessibility considerations for recreational trails for both the County and member municipalities
- Review and update the County of Simcoe Museum Accessibility Plan with the Joint Accessibility Advisory Committee

## Expand Availability of Accessible Housing

The County provides housing for hundreds of individuals through its social housing and long-term care facilities. Residents of these facilities, particularly senior citizens, are more likely to be living with a disability and their housing should meet their unique requirements. The County recognizes that a deficit of accessible housing exists within Ontario and is focused on increasing the supply. The County is committed to providing safe, affordable and accessible housing for people living and working in Simcoe County.

### Key Initiatives

- Planned social housing facilities in the City of Orillia, Town of Bradford West Gwillimbury and the City of Barrie are anticipated to result in the addition of 61 new barrier free housing units within the next five years
- Review the installation of automatic door openers (ADOs) for all common area doors in Seniors Services buildings such as entrances, laundry rooms, and garbage rooms

## Improve Accessibility of County Facilities

The County owns and maintains many facilities that are open to members of the public. Ensuring accessibility of these facilities allows all residents and visitors to equally access the services and programs that the County provides. The County will take a leadership role in building and retrofitting our facilities to meet or exceed the built environment standards in the IASR and Ontario Building Code.

### Key Initiatives

- The 10-year Paramedic facilities plan shall continue to be implemented and incorporate accessible design standards into the development of new paramedic stations
- Design and install accessible electric vehicle charging stations at various County owned facilities in anticipation of accessible electric vehicle charging station standards
- Procurement, Fleet and Property staff will continue to utilize the in-house project checklist which incorporates accessibility features at the planning stage of a new project

## Focus on Accessible Employment

The County recognizes the incredible barriers to employment that people living with disabilities face in their lives. Improving employment for people living with disabilities not only improves the lives of Simcoe County residents, it makes strong business sense ensuring the widest field of qualified candidates are available for hire. Recognizing the irreplaceable role they play in the community; the County will continue to consult and work with local organizations to encourage employment of people living with disabilities in Simcoe County.

### Key Initiatives

- Review hiring and employment policies to ensure that people living with disabilities are given equal opportunity to excel
- Improve external messaging in employment applications and position advertising to show the County is committed to improving accessible employment
- Improve internal messaging on accessible employment policies and employee accommodation

## Recognize and Promote Accessibility Awareness in Simcoe County

The Warden will complete annual proclamations in recognition of the International Day of Persons with Disabilities and National Access Awareness Week as well as other significant events that arise. The County will explore novel ways to further celebrate these milestones and encourage greater awareness of people living with disabilities in the community.

### Key Initiatives

- In partnership with the Joint Accessibility Advisory Committee, the County will hold Accessibility Trade Shows highlighting local accessibility organizations and encouraging greater awareness of accessibility considerations and barrier removal.
- The County will continue membership in the Simcoe County Accessibility Group, Ontario Network of Accessibility Professionals and the South Western Accessibility Group. This networking will ensure the continued gathering of best practices to help the County in its accessibility initiatives.
- Cultivate additional partnerships with organizations throughout the County of Simcoe to continue improvement of accessibility and disability awareness.

## Focus on Transit Accessibility

The LINX and LINX+ transit network continues to grow and expand, the County is committed to ensuring the continued accessibility of this invaluable service. Wherever possible, the County will seek to incorporate accessible features and ensure effective linkage between its transit service and associated services such as municipal transit system, GO Transit, and neighbouring upper tier transit services. The County appreciates the role that transit plays in the lives of many people living with disabilities and will strive to ensure it keeps accessibility at the forefront of its decision making.

The County recognizes the significance of LINX conventional transit service and LINX+ specialized transit service and its impact on the lives of people living with disabilities. The County maintains a distinct Multi-Year Accessibility Plan specific to LINX Transit attached as **Schedule 1**.



# Legislative Requirements

The County strives to remain fully compliant with all the requirements of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 and the Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulation (O. Reg. 191/11). Since 2021, all the milestones in the IASR have passed and the County now moves to ensure ongoing compliance in its accessibility planning. A selection of specific legislated requirements are detailed below, as appropriate.

## Customer Service

### **Resident Feedback and Requests**

The Customer Service Department will continue to respond to and track feedback, concerns, and requests from residents. Responses will be provided in a timely manner considering each person's needs and the County's abilities to meet such needs.

### **Accessible Customer Service Policies and Procedures**

In addition to the general policy requirements, the County will continue to review existing policies and develop new corporate policies, practices, and procedures in relations to the AODA requirements under the customer service standards as they relate to the provision of goods, services or facilities to persons living with disabilities.

## Information and Communication

### **Accessibility Planning and Reporting**

- Once approved by County Council, this multi-year accessibility plan will be posted on the website and made available in accessible formats, upon request
- An annual status report will be prepared on the progress of the multi-year plan's implementation and will be posted on the website and made available in accessible formats, upon request
- A comprehensive review of this plan will be completed every five years unless significant changes require an earlier revision of the plan
- Annual work plans will be developed for both the Joint Accessibility Advisory Committee and staff to assist with implementation and monitoring of the plan
- Online compliance reports will be submitted to the Accessibility Directorate of Ontario every two years

### **Accessible Formats and Communication Supports**

Upon request, the County will continue to arrange for the provision of accessible formats and communication supports for persons with disabilities.

The County will continue to consult with the person making the request to determine the suitability of an accessible format or communication support.

### **Accessible website and web content**

The County will continue to ensure its website, intranet and web content meets Level AA compliance with the World Wide Web Consortium Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0.

The County will continue advising staff who contribute to the website as well as the intranet on ways to create accessible documents and manage the website in accordance with the standards.

## **Accessible Feedback Processes**

Under the customer service standard, the County uses a customer service feedback process for receiving and responding to feedback with respect to the manner in which the County provides accessible services to persons with disabilities. The forms are available in alternate format and with communication supports, upon request. Customers have options for providing their feedback, and the responses are given in a manner that consider the disability needs of the person providing feedback. The County will continue this practice.

Employees and the public will be notified that accessible formats and communication supports are available, upon request.

## **Employment**

### **Accessible Employment Policies and Procedures**

The County will continue to document, monitor and update employment policies and procedures, where required, to provide the following as necessary:

- Accommodations in the recruitment, assessment, and selection process
- Accessible formats and communication supports for information needed to perform the job, and any information that is generally available to employees.
- Accommodation plans and workplace emergency response information
- Return to work process and related accommodation plans
- Accommodations in performance management, career development and redeployment

The County will inform staff and the public that accommodations are available throughout all stages of employment and advised of policies that support employees with disabilities.

## **Transportation**

The County shall hold an annual public meeting involving persons with disabilities to ensure that they have an opportunity to participate in a review of the transit related aspects of this accessibility plan and that they are given the opportunity to provide feedback on the accessibility plan.

LINX and LINX+ transit maintain policies for receiving and responding to customer feedback with regards to accessibility matters.

Further legislated accessibility initiatives are detailed in the LINX Transit Multi-Year Accessibility Plan attached as **Schedule 1** to this plan.

### **Accessible Vehicles at Long Term Care Facilities (ongoing)**

The County will continue to operate Para-transit vehicles at long-term care facilities. Inspections will continue regularly to ensure accessible and safe transport and to meet requirements of applicable legislation, such as the Highway Traffic Act.

## Built Environment

### Accessible public spaces

The County will continue to consult the Joint Accessibility Advisory Committee on newly constructed and redeveloped public spaces such as sidewalks, pedestrian signals at intersections, on-street and off-street parking spaces, service counters and trails.

### Preventative and Emergency Maintenance of Accessible Elements in Public Spaces

To the extent possible, notice regarding any disruption to accessible elements due to planned maintenance or repairs impacting customer accessibility will be posted in advance, including information about the disruption, its anticipated duration, and a description of alternative accessible elements that may be available. This notice may be provided by posting notices in a public place on County of Simcoe property, website and/or such other method as is reasonable under the circumstances.

Procedures for preventative and emergency maintenance of accessible elements will be reviewed and updated where applicable, along with processes for dealing with temporary disruptions.

### Barrier-free design features in County facilities

The County will continue to meet or exceed the minimum barrier-free design requirements of the Ontario Building Code when constructing any new buildings or completing any renovations on existing buildings.





## Contact & Feedback

Removing barriers and ensuring accessibility is an ongoing process. We want to hear from members of the community ways in which we can make continual improvements to our services, programs, and facilities through to 2028 and beyond.

This Multi-Year Accessibility Plan is available on the County of Simcoe's website and internal Intranet. Printed copies can be obtained from the County of Simcoe's Administration Centre in Midhurst.

This document is available in alternate format or with communication supports, upon request. This may include, but is not limited to, large print, Braille, and electronic formats.

The County of Simcoe welcomes all questions, comments and feedback on the County's Multi-Year Accessibility Plan and accessibility in general.

### Please contact:

#### County of Simcoe

Clerk's Department  
1110 Highway 26  
Midhurst, ON L9X1N6

**Telephone:** 705-726-9300 Ext. 1246

**Toll Free:** 1-866-893-9300

**Customer Service:** 705-735-6901

**Hearing & Voice Carry Over (Bell Relay Service):** 1-800-855-0511

**Fax:** 705-725-1285

**Email:** [accessibility@simcoe.ca](mailto:accessibility@simcoe.ca)

**Website:** [www.simcoe.ca/accessibility](http://www.simcoe.ca/accessibility)

Schedule 1:



# LINX Transit Multi-Year Accessibility Plan 2024-2028

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# Introduction

Simcoe County LINX Transit began operations in 2018 and serves several communities throughout the County and connects with the separated cities of Barrie and Orillia.

Simcoe County is located in the central portion of Southern Ontario, Canada. The county is just north of the Greater Toronto Area, stretching from the shores of Lake Simcoe in the east to Georgian Bay in the west. Simcoe County forms part of the Greater Golden Horseshoe area, a densely populated and industrialized region centred on the Greater Toronto Area. The county's land area is 4,818.93 square kilometres (1,860.60 sq mi). The elevated Niagara Escarpment runs through sections of the western part of the county, and the Minesing Wetlands, a Ramsar Convention wetland of international importance, is located in the central area of the county.

Simcoe County LINX Transit is a public transit system service managed by Simcoe County and operated by First Student Canada, which is responsible for inter-community regional bus service throughout Simcoe County, connecting rural towns and townships to cities in the county such as Barrie and Orillia. The LINX Transit system provides citizens and visitors with a reliable and courteous transit system in safe, clean, and accessible vehicles.

Transit fare can be paid with cash or a reloadable LINX Card. For residents along the routes who cannot board LINX buses due to a physical or functional disability, specialized Transit service LINX Plus is provided. LINX Transit has a conventional fleet of 23 buses and provides Transit service on six (6) fixed routes. LINX Transit also operates seven (7) small-capacity transit vehicles providing specialized service currently branded as LINX Plus.

Demand for LINX Transit's conventional and specialized services grew even during the COVID-19 pandemic. With this increase in ridership demand will come opportunities for improved accessibility. It will be driven by both customer expectations and the continued requirement to comply with legislation, in particular, the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 (AODA)

## Commitment to Accessibility

### **LINX Transit is committed to:**

- Continued improvement of access to public transit service for all persons
- Consultation with people with disabilities in the development and review of its annual accessibility plan and services
- Provision of accessible services to all customers and employees
- Improving the accessibility of its conventional transit to better meet the needs of all customers

## Conventional Service – 2022 Service Profile

### **Type of Service**

- Fixed Route – grid and regional

### **Service Area**

- Rural County of Simcoe

### **Hours of Service**

- Monday to Friday – 5:30 am to 6:30 pm on five routes and 5:30 am to 9:00 pm on Route 4 (Wasaga Beach to Collingwood)
- Saturday – Route 4 – 6:00 am to 9:00 pm.
- Sunday and Holidays (except Christmas Day) – 7:00 am to 9:00 pm.

### **Annual Boarding**

- 195,978

### **Annual Revenue Service Hours**

- 41,985

### **Annual Revenue Kilometres**

- 1,905,905

### **Number of Routes**

- 6

### **Types of Service**

- Conventional

### **Fleet Composition**

- 23 conventional buses

### **Fare Structure**

- Cash fare is the same for all transit riders
- The cash fare ranges from \$2.00 to \$4.00 to \$6.00, depending on the distance travelled.
- Reloadable transit fare card
- Adult fare will be discounted by 10%
- Seniors / Students will receive a discount of 15%

## **Specialized Service – 2022 Service Profile**

### **Type of Service**

- Shared ride, door-to-door pre-booked

### **Service Area**

- Rural - County of Simcoe

### **Hours of Service**

- Monday to Friday – 5:30 am to 6:30 pm on five routes and 5:30 am to 9:00 pm on Route 4 (Wasaga Beach to Collingwood)
- Saturday – Route 4 – 6:00 am to 9:00 pm.
- Sunday and Holidays (except Christmas Day) – 7:00 am to 9:00 pm.

### **Types of Service**

- Dedicated bus

## **Fleet Composition**

- Seven (7) specialized low-floor transit vans

## **Annual Eligible Passenger Trips**

- 1,072

## **Process for estimating demand for specialized services**

### **Staff estimate the demand for specialized services by analyzing the following factors:**

- Past ridership trends
- Review of an incremental annual increase in demand
- Ridership growth levels (both conventional and specialized)
- Anticipated changes to legislation, policies and procedures which may increase demand for service

## **Steps to reduce the wait times for specialized services**

Staff will continue to work on reducing wait times for specialized services. By adding more vehicles and tools, such as automated scheduling, expanded use of mobile apps, and Blaise Intelligent Transportation System (ITS). The ITS will provide additional information to assist in improving scheduling and operations. ITS will offer service coordinators the real-time location of LINX Plus buses, facilitating more efficient handling of schedule changes.

## **Measures have been taken to remove accessibility barriers in previous years**

The plan is to be reviewed every year which involves a review of barriers previously addressed, identifying remaining barriers, developing a prioritized plan to address them, and consultation with primary stakeholders, including the county's Accessibility Advisory Committee. LINX Transit has addressed all requirements under the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA).

## **Barriers addressed in previous years**

### **The following are some of the steps taken to remove accessibility barriers.**

- Ongoing activities related to ensuring access and safety for residents to continue to use public transit services (conventional and specialized) through the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Introduction of a new transfer location between the Bradford GO and YRT.
- Introduction of LINX Smartcard
- Specialized transit software
- Introduction of accurate-time bus tracking
- Service area expansion with new routes
- Providing training on the requirements of the AODA and the Human Rights Code



## Identification of accessibility barriers

LINX Transit is committed to accessible transportation infrastructure and services and recognizes that its infrastructure (bus stops, bus shelters, and vehicles) and customer service may present barriers to some people with disabilities. A list of identified barriers to accessibility is attached at the end of this document (Appendix B).

The availability of resources is a significant factor in determining the pace of progress in reducing or eliminating the barriers identified in consultation with people with disabilities. Resource constraints will mean that not all barriers can be addressed at once, so prioritization of initiatives is required. We are committed to accessible transportation infrastructure and services for all.

## Plan to remove and prevent barriers to accessibility

LINX Transit is committed to the following actions on an annual basis:

- Consulting with people with disabilities to seek their advice on which barriers and which remedial measures should have priority for the coming year
- Making provision in capital and operating budgets to seek funding to address high-priority barriers
- Taking advantage of opportunities to secure funding to extend or accelerate the removal of priority barriers
- Consulting with the county's Accessibility Advisory Committee and other stakeholder groups concerning addressing barriers to accessibility

## Planned Initiatives

LINX Transit is compliant with all requirements under the AODA.

The COVID-19 pandemic changed the focus of attention on several initiatives of LINX Transit. However, we continue to pursue projects to improve accessibility for residents in Simcoe County. The list below highlights several actions planned for 2024 to support LINX Transit's commitment to accessibility:

- Introduction of the Blaise app.
- Bus stop infrastructure improvements
- Continue participating on the GTHA Accessible Steering Committee to improve cross-boundary travel.

## Consultation on the accessibility plan

In the preparation of this plan, LINX Transit will consult with:

- The County of Simcoe Accessibility Advisory Committee to ensure input is received from people with disabilities.
- LINX Transit operating and support staff to ensure that those responsible for the delivery of accessible service provide input

## Communicating the plan

Information about the accessibility plan will be available at the County of Simcoe's Administrative Building and on [Simcoe.ca](http://Simcoe.ca).

## Ongoing review and monitoring of the plan

LINX Transit will monitor progress from the previous year's accessibility plan through an annual review listing the objectives as mentioned above, actions, and results. The document will be used for consultation with persons with disabilities in preparation for updating the annual Transit Accessibility Plan. The review will be produced early in the year to enable talks to be conducted, recommendations formulated, and cost in time to prepare LINX Transit's budget for the following year.

# APPENDIX A

## Accessibility features on LINX Transit Vehicles Procedures for dealing with accessibility equipment failures

### Conventional Transit

Operators are required to perform a pre-operations check of their vehicle before the start of their shift. The pre-operations check includes checking the kneeling function and cycling of the ramp.

Operators document any minor vehicle malfunction in the normal course of operation. This documentation is reviewed daily, and the vehicle is scheduled for maintenance and prioritized by the First Student's Maintenance Manager.

Should the ramp of a conventional bus fail to operate automatically, the driver may manually deploy the ramp for customers to board.

The malfunction of any other accessibility features on a vehicle will be dealt with in the manner described above.

### Specialized Transit

Operators are required to perform a pre-operations check of their vehicle before the start of their shift. This check includes the cycling of the ramp and a review of securement features such as belts, tie-downs, etc.

Operators document minor vehicle malfunctions in the normal course of operation. The First Student Maintenance Department reviews this documentation daily and schedules the vehicle for maintenance by priority. In the case of a failure of the accessibility equipment on a specialized transit vehicle, the driver immediately notifies the Supervisor and the dispatch office. The Supervisor will arrange for an immediate replacement of the vehicle, and the dispatch office will contact the customers impacted.

The vehicle is immediately scheduled for repair.

# APPENDIX B

## Identification of barriers to access to LINX Transit for people with disabilities

### Fleet Barriers

Conventional buses: ramps are not always functioning on low-floor buses. Manual deployment is not always possible.

#### Strategy/Action

LINX Transit has standard operating procedures for cycling ramps during the bus operator's pre-trip inspection. It confirms functionality before the bus enters service each day. Drivers immediately notify a Supervisor of any ramp deployment issues throughout the day.

### Snow removal barrier

Delay in clearing snow and ice from bus stops and shelters.

#### Strategy/Action

LINX Transit contacts the local municipality responsible for removing snow from stops and shelters within 24 hours of the termination of the snowfall. Transit Supervisors also conduct specific checks of high-priority locations to ensure snow, ice and windrows are removed.

### Concrete infrastructure barrier

Boarding and alighting from buses can be difficult because many stops do not have a proper concrete landing pad.

#### Strategy/Action

LINX Transit will continue to work with the local municipalities on its bus stop infrastructure improvements in 2024, working towards greater accessibility and an overall improved customer experience.

### Shelter barrier

Passengers may have to wait for a bus during inclement weather. The absence of a shelter at the bus stop can be a barrier to using LINX Transit.

#### Strategy/Action

LINX Transit will continue to work with the local municipalities to install bus shelters in areas of high demand, pending local budget allocation.

## Road and sidewalk barriers

The walking and wheeling path to/from bus stops may not have sidewalks or curb cuts at corners. Where curb cuts exist, they may be too low to cue a visually impaired person that they are about to step into the street.

### Strategy/Action

The planning and installation of curb cuts are not under the jurisdiction of LINX Transit. However, we will coordinate with local municipalities to assist in improving the accessibility of the pedestrian experience whenever possible.

## Information barrier

There is no integrated system for customer information on transit trips requiring transfer between service providers.

### Strategy/Action

Triplinx (managed by Metrolinx) allows customers using conventional transit to trip plan across the entire GTHA. Customers can obtain information on travel by transit throughout the GTHA through a single source. Also, other providers of apps allow for trip planning across the region, such as the Transit App.



## Joint Accessibility Advisory Committee (AAC)

### Jointly Serving:

The Corporation of the County of Simcoe  
The Corporation of the Township of Springwater  
The Corporation of the Township of Tay  
The Corporation of the Township of Oro-Medonte  
The Corporation of the Township of Adjala-Tosorontio

## Terms of Reference

### Purpose

The Joint Accessibility Advisory Committee (“Committee”) is established by the Corporation of the County of Simcoe (“Simcoe”), the Corporation of the Township of Springwater (“Springwater”), the Corporation of the Township of Tay (“Tay”), the Corporation of the Township of Oro-Medonte (“Oro-Medonte”) and the Corporation of the Township of Adjala-Tosorontio (“Adjala-Tosorontio”) in accordance with Ontarians with Disabilities Act 2001, and the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 (“Acts”), and shall act as an advisory body in accordance with both Acts and all related standards.

### Responsibilities

The Committee shall:

- a. Provide input on the preparation of the multi-year accessibility plans for consideration by the respective municipal Council.  
The plans will address and include steps that each municipality has taken and plans to take with respect to the identification, removal and prevention of barriers to persons with disabilities as required by legislation.
- b. Advise on major accessibility issues related to the significant renovation, operation, purchase or lease of buildings or structures or parts of buildings or structures used as municipal buildings with special attention to those that the public are encouraged to utilize through the review of site plans and drawings as described within the Planning Act that the Committee selects as outlined in the Site Plan Review Guideline document.
- c. Advise on opportunities with respect to the identification and removal of barriers to persons with disabilities at facilities owned or operated by the municipalities.
- d. Advise on ways to improve opportunities for persons with disabilities with respect to programs and services offered by the municipalities.
- e. Perform other functions that are specified in the Regulations of the Acts.

## Composition

The majority of Committee members must be person with disabilities as required under the Acts and must be residents of the County of Simcoe. All members, when eligible to vote, shall have one vote only. The Committee shall consist of ten to twelve members as follows:

- a. non-elected members who are persons with disabilities, with preference given to appoint at least one eligible resident of:
  - “Simcoe”,
  - “Springwater”,
  - “Tay”,
  - “Oro-Medonte”, and
  - “Adjala-Tosorontio”.
- b. Five elected officials. When possible, the elected officials will be persons with disabilities.
  - “Simcoe” Warden (ex-officio), or designate as recommended by the Striking Committee and ratified by County Council,
  - One member of “Springwater” Council,
  - One member of “Tay” Council,
  - One member of “Oro-Medonte” Council, and
  - One member of “Adjala-Tosorontio” Council.

The County may, at their discretion, authorize the appointment of:

- a. One citizen at large who may not be a person with a disability but who has special interest or expertise in the identification or removal of barriers or has specific expertise as a care giver to a person(s) with disabilities; and/or
- b. A representative of an organization representing persons with disabilities.

## Recruitment

All participating municipalities will be responsible for advertising recruitment opportunities through local newspapers, local libraries, and relevant organizations representing persons with disabilities.

The participating municipalities will each be responsible for promoting recruitment opportunities on their respective website and through their social media accounts and gathering applications.

Each of the participating municipalities, at their own expense, may do enhanced advertising.

## Appointment of Members

Elected officials are to be appointed by their respective Council or in accordance with their applicable by-laws or policies.

The respective Councils shall review the applications received within their municipality and appoint one citizen appointee from their municipality and forward that name to the County to form the committee membership.

Should one of the participating lower tier municipalities be unable to appoint their citizen appointee, the County Clerk may forward any remaining applications received by the County for their consideration.

## **Term of Appointment**

- a. Elected Officials:
  - “Simcoe” Council member shall serve for the term of office;
  - “Springwater” Council Member shall serve for the term as specified by his/her Council;
  - “Tay” Council Member shall serve for the term as specified by his/her Council;
  - “Oro-Medonte” Council Member shall serve for the term as specified by his/her Council;
  - “Adjala-Tosorontio” Council Member shall serve for the term as specified by his/her Council.
- b. Non-elected representatives:
  - The term shall coincide with the term of Council.
  - Representatives are eligible for re-appointment.

Members may be required to resign from the “Committee” if they have been absent for three consecutive meetings without good cause.

## **Chair/Vice-Chair**

The Chair and Vice-Chair of the “Committee” shall be elected at the first meeting of the “Committee” every second year.

## **Quorum**

More than half of the members eligible to vote must be present in order to transact business.

## **Meetings**

Meetings may be scheduled as required each year to support staff reporting and the advisory committee providing guidance and conducting facility reviews resulting in improved accessible services and facilities. All meetings shall be held during the day at a location to be determined.

## **Resources**

The Clerk’s Departments for “Simcoe”, “Springwater”, “Tay”, “Oro-Medonte” and “Adjala-Tosorontio” will share the responsibility for administrative support as appropriate, including co-ordination of meetings, compilation of agenda material, and meeting support.

Responsibility for creating and distributing the agendas and record of proceedings will reside with “Simcoe”.

Other staff resources by “Simcoe”, “Springwater”, “Tay”, “Oro-Medonte” and “Adjala-Tosorontio” will be available for their respective facility reviews and as required.

The effectiveness of having a joint “Committee” will be subject to review by all participating municipal Councils at least once per term.

## **Reporting**

The “Committee” shall report to the respective Councils, in accordance with the provisions of their respective Procedure By-laws. The presentation of the Committee’s activities will be in the form of a report containing a record of those present at the meeting, the items considered, and the recommendations of the “Committee”.

The respective Councils may only consider and act on the recommendations within their jurisdiction.

The “Committee” does not have the authority to specifically direct the activities of staff.



## **Remuneration**

Non-elected representatives shall be compensated in accordance with the existing policies of the Corporation of the County of Simcoe. Each participating municipality shall reimburse “Simcoe” for all expenses associated with their non-elected representative for all regular meetings and facility reviews annually, effective January 2021.

Elected officials shall be compensated in accordance with existing policies of their respective municipalities.

Non-elected representatives who are persons with disabilities will be provided, at the expense of their respective municipality, with the resources related to their disability that are deemed necessary for them to fully participate in the “Committee’s” activities. The resources could include such things as transportation, sign language, Braille translation etc. Any equipment shall remain the property of respective municipality.

### **Terms of Reference Approved:**

County Council: November 12, 2019

Township of Springwater: December 4, 2019

Township of Tay: February 12, 2020

Township of Oro-Medonte: November 27, 2019

Township of Adjala-Tosorontio: December 11, 2019



Service Simcoe 2024