

Niagara Region Accessibility Planning

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Committee
August 23, 2024

Community Engagement

- Niagara Region is currently updating its **Multi-Year Accessibility Plan (MYAP)**
- To remove barriers to Regional services for people with disabilities
- In alignment with:
 - Regional Council's Strategic Priority of an **Equitable Region**
 - Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA)
- Community engagement activities - January to June 2024

Purpose and Process

- Seeking feedback about the accessibility of regional services/facilities
- Project information shared internally and externally via:
 - Email blasts
 - Project postcards delivered across Niagara
 - New project webpage on niagararegion.ca
 - Social media and internal Vine site
 - Memos to Regional Council

Focus of Engagement

- Questions were designed to hear about people's experiences and/or access barriers related to the AODA Accessibility Standards:
 - Customer Service
 - Information and Communication
 - Employment
 - Transportation
 - Design of Public Spaces

Activities and Interactions



572 connections



3 in-person sessions, 1 virtual meeting



Survey

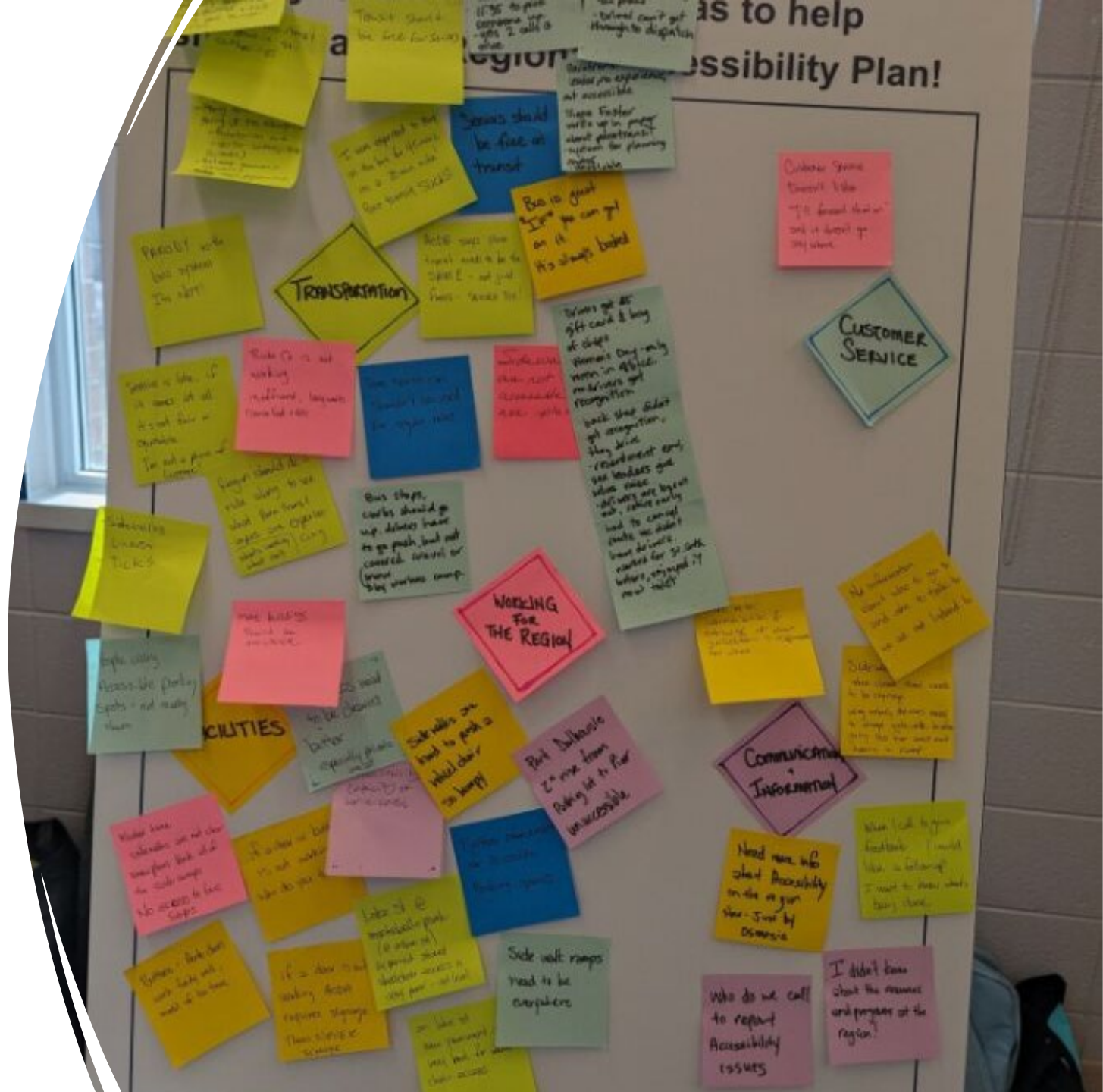
Who We Heard From

- Residents from all 12 area municipalities provided feedback
 - Most respondents from St. Catharines, Welland, Port Colborne, Niagara Falls, or Thorold
 - 60% of survey respondents provided demographic information
- 48% survey respondents identified as having a disability or chronic health concern
- Most reported were chronic illness/pain, mobility, mental health, coordination and dexterity

Accessibility Advisory Committees

- April 23 - met with Niagara Region Accessibility Advisory Committees (AACs)
- All local AACs invited and attended
- 25 regional and local committee members participated
- Reported on feedback received to date
- Committee members provided important additional insights on disability barriers

What We Heard



Transportation



Transit

- Significant feedback about transit accessibility
- Niagara Region Transit will be preparing its own 5-year Accessibility Plan
- Community engagement report shared with NRT, available online
- NRT attended April and July Accessibility Advisory Committee meetings
- Transit specific feedback included:
 - Capacity and Service Routes
 - Customer Service, Booking, and Information
 - Physical Accessibility of Vehicles and Stops

Regional Transportation

- Parking spaces – large enough and close to entrances
- Stricter enforcement for accessible parking spaces
- Tactile paving for safety and multisensory technology
- Ensure sidewalks and curb ramps are well-maintained – especially in winter

Customer Service



Staffing

- Training on AODA - the needs of, and interacting with, people with disabilities
- More staff who speak languages other than English
- Designated in-person point of contact for all services/departments

Standards and Service

Beyond AODA

- Accessibility is multi-dimensional - go beyond the minimum AODA standards
- Provide different types of socially supportive programs

Service Accessibility

- Accessible online versions or other accessible formats for all programs

Information and Communications



Accessible, Timely, Transparent Communication

- Transparent, two-way communication and proactive outreach to disability communities
- Make information about programs and services consistent, easy to access
- Update website
- Implement automatic renewals to reduce administrative burden
- Process requests/monetary reimbursements within a reasonable timeline

Signage

- Create signage that is clear and accessible
- Consistent branding
- Signage near automatic doors when they are out of order
- Signage for accessible detour routes when sidewalks are closed

Public Spaces



Regional Buildings & Facilities

- Enhance physical accessibility (i.e., elevators, automatic doors and opener buttons that are within reach, ramps on all sidewalks and curbs, and large washrooms)
- Trails and paths – welcoming, physically accessible to all
- Regional spaces should be designated scent free
- Rest areas in public spaces for those who experience overstimulation



Employment

Recruitment and Applications

- Hiring policies to promote inclusion
- Offer more accessibility accommodations during the hiring process – physically and virtually
- Provide clear directions on application process and who to contact
- Ensure job postings adhere to AODA guidelines

Interviews

- Provide clear directions on how to request accommodations (at any stage of process)
- Proactively disclose potential accessibility barriers in the workplace
- Support potential candidates with developmental disabilities by considering different interview styles

Hiring Decisions

- Consider, value, and accept lived experiences equally to conventional educational experience
- Follow policies and laws against discrimination when making hiring decisions
- Provide training for hiring managers to ensure an inclusive hiring process

Employee Support

- Sponsor or organize opportunities for professional networking amongst the disability and accessibility community
- Actively solicit employee feedback on accessibility and encourage reflections on accessibility and diversity

Other feedback

Other Feedback

- Equitable housing is also a foundational cornerstone of a high quality of life for all
- Maintain strong relationships with other governments, social service and health providers and accessibility and disability organizations across Niagara

Accessibility Plan - Next Steps



Jan - May

Community
engagement project



June

Engagement report
complete



July - Sept.

Draft 2024-2029
Accessibility Plan



Oct. - Dec.

Reviews and
approvals

Discussion

Is anything missing?

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