

MULTI-YEAR ACCESSIBILITY PLAN 2026-2029

November 2025



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Alternative Formats

If you would like to request this plan in a format other than what is available on our website, use the following contact information to make your request. We'll do our best to provide it to you as soon as possible:

- Email us at customer_relations@viarail.ca
- Call us at 1 888 842-7245 or 1 800 268-9503 for TTY
- Mail us at:
Customer Relations Officer
VIA Rail Canada Inc.
CP/PO BOX, 8116 SUCC CENTRE-VILLE
Montréal (Québec) H3C 3N3

If you have questions, comments, or suggestions regarding this plan, our feedback process, progress reports or anything else related to accessibility, please let us know by contacting us through one of the options above or by following our feedback process mentioned in this document.

What Is Accessibility?

The word “accessible” has many definitions. In the transportation industry, it can mean available, affordable, and easy to reach or easy to understand. At VIA Rail Canada (VIA), “accessible” means all these things and more. For us, it means adhering to best practices and universal accessibility standards. It also means respecting a person’s autonomy, dignity, and the right to choose.

Why Accessibility Matters to VIA Rail

As Canada’s national passenger rail company, we pride ourselves on our customer service and being a top employer. We serve nearly 5 million passengers a year in over 400 communities, and we employ some 4,600 people. We know we play an important role in the lives of people across Canada, and that’s why making our trains, stations, workplaces, communications, products, services, and digital spaces accessible really matters to us.

Also, statistics from the most recent Canadian Survey on Disability (CSD) conducted in 2022 show the need for greater accessibility. The study showed “27% of Canadians aged 15 and older, or about 8 million people, reported having at least one disability. This is an increase from 22.3% in 2017” ([Accessibility and Persons With Disabilities - Canada at a Glance, 2023](#)). With this increase and an aging population, VIA Rail recognizes the importance of eliminating barriers to our passengers. We are committed to enhancing accessibility, not only because it’s the right thing to do, but because it ensures that all people in Canada feel welcomed and valued.

In this accessibility plan, you will find some of the most relevant information about accessibility at VIA Rail, namely, the accessibility projects we’re planning on implementing over the next few years. We are constantly trying to adapt our approach and be as flexible as we can in response to our customer feedback. Keep in mind the projects listed below are only part of the work that VIA Rail does in accessibility.

While we do our best to make VIA Rail more accessible, we are confronted with certain challenges. For example, VIA Rail does not own all its stations, which limits its ability to improve accessibility in those stations. Also, half of VIA Rail’s stations have heritage status, therefore VIA Rail must comply with heritage restrictions. Similarly, all trains operating on the routes outside of the Québec City – Windsor Corridor were built before the creation of accessibility standards and laws in Canada. Thus, little modification can be made to them without affecting their structural integrity. These constraints require VIA Rail to be more creative in its approach to improving accessibility and removing barriers.

Universal Accessibility Policy

VIA Rail published its first-ever Universal Accessibility Policy on June 25, 2020. The policy set forth our vision, principles, and commitments to improve the accessibility of our service.



VIA Rail Universal Accessibility Policy

VISION

At VIA Rail we do more than move passengers. We strive to be Canada's most accessible national and intercity mode of transportation. Our vision is to move people by ensuring access to a sustainable, affordable, and accessible means of transportation. By promoting better accessibility, we are improving the customer experience for all our passengers as part of a barrier-free Canada.

PRINCIPLES OF UNIVERSAL ACCESSIBILITY AT VIA RAIL

VIA Rail acknowledges and strives to provide service that:

- is welcoming for all our passengers;
- provides a safe, comfortable, and convenient journey;
- respects each individual's autonomy, dignity, and independence;
- enables full participation through an inclusive and intuitive environment; and,
- offers meaningful options for passengers.

Our Commitments

VIA Rail values all our passengers and we pledge the following commitments:

Our Culture: We will continue to be agents of transformation to foster a culture of respect and dignity.

Leadership: We aim to integrate accessibility into decision-making processes at all levels of our organization so that we can continually improve the passenger experience.

Continual Engagement: We value the experience of our passengers and will seek their input to imagine new possibilities for travel on our network. We will report back to you regularly regarding the progress we make.

Training: We will equip ourselves with the training and tools needed to serve you well.

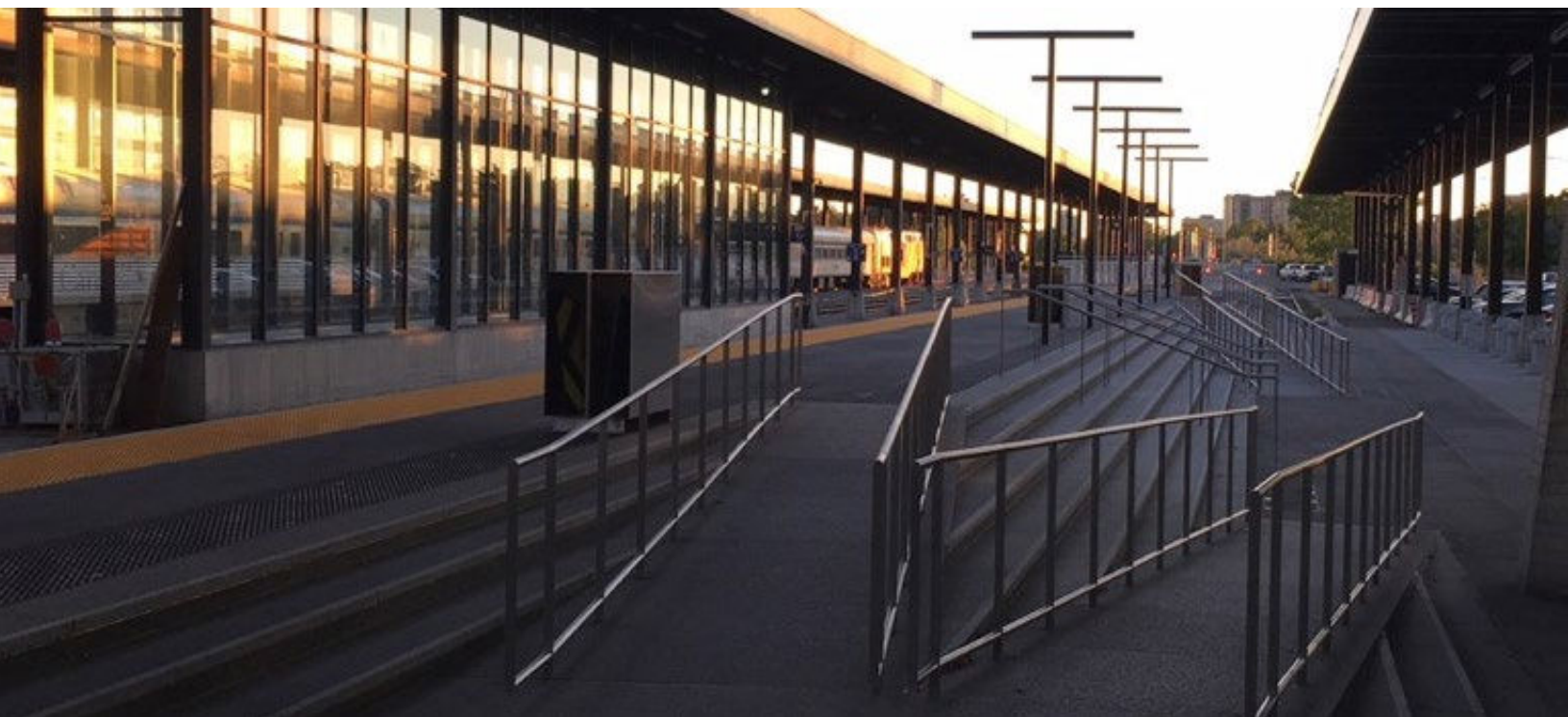
Communications: We will provide clear and consistent information in a timely manner for all our passengers.

Listening to You: We recognize that you know what is best for you and we strive to create an environment where you feel comfortable requesting those services.

Barrier-Free Access: We strive to remove barriers and avoid creating new barriers across all our stations, trains, and digital platforms.

Proactive Design: We will work to provide you with flexible options to access our services.

Collaboration: We will create community partnerships to continuously improve accessibility to our services.



General

Description of Feedback Process and Contact Information

If you have questions, comments or suggestions regarding this plan, our feedback process, progress reports or anything else related to accessibility, please let us know by sharing your feedback, anonymously or by including your name and contact information, through any of the following channels:

- calling 1 888 842-7245 or TTY 1 800 268-9503;
- commenting in the form on our website at viarail.ca/en/contact-us;
- emailing us at customer_relations@viarail.ca;
- sending us a message through one of our social media platforms: [Facebook](#), [X](#), or [Instagram](#); or,
- mailing us at:
Customer Relations Officer
VIA Rail Canada Inc.
CP/PO BOX, 8116 SUCC CENTRE-VILLE
Montréal (Québec) H3C 3N3

Our Customer Relations Officer will acknowledge receipt of your feedback and follow up with you directly (if not anonymous) to take the appropriate actions.

Alternative Formats

You can use any of the methods of communication above to request this plan, a description of our feedback process, or our progress reports in a print, large print, Braille, or audio format. If you communicate using sign language, you can contact us by using a Video Relay Service and our phone number above.

Delivery Time Frames for Alternative Formats

We will provide our accessibility plan, a description of our feedback process, and our progress report to you as soon as possible. For Braille or audio formats, this means at the latest 45 days after the day we received your request. For print or large print formats, this means at the latest 15 days after the day we received your request.

Consultations

VIA Rail has consulted several disability advocacy groups to have the best representation possible in the development of our initial accessibility plan and this updated plan.

For this updated plan, like for our initial accessibility plan, we first created a draft. We then invited the members of the VIA Rail Universal Accessibility Advisory Committee and the Canadian Transportation Agency's Accessibility Advisory Committee member organizations to review and comment on the plan.

Of those who agreed to share their feedback with us, we asked them in which format they would like to receive the plan. We also asked them how they would like to share their feedback with us, for example, by including the information in the document received, or in a virtual meeting.

Here is the list of the people and organizations who agreed to review and provide feedback on our plan and those who also agreed to have their name published in this document. Other individuals also provided feedback but preferred to remain anonymous.

- Inclusion Canada
- Institut Nazareth et Louis-Braille du Centre intégré de santé et service sociaux de la Montérégie-Centre
- Jim Roots, Accessibility Advocate
- Ian Patton, Obesity Canada
- Jamie McCleary, Executive Director, Autism Canada
- Dominique Chabot, Program Manager, Family Support, Autism Canada
- Jim Tokos, National President, Canadian Council of the Blind
- Leo Bissonnette, PhD, 2nd Vice President, Canadian Council of the Blind
- Donna J. Jodhan, LLB, ACSP, MBA, Founder and President Barrier-Free Canada
- Penny Bennett, Accessibility Advocate and Canadian Disability Hall of Fame Inductee



Creating a Culture of Consultation

We know the consultation process is important to ensuring an accessible product or service. We also know the importance of consulting early and often. This is the culture of consultation we are trying to incorporate at VIA Rail. We try to make sure we do this for all our major projects and accessibility-related projects.

As an example of this, in addition to the consultations we do to meet the Accessible Transportation Planning and Reporting Regulations (ATPRR), VIA Rail has also consulted people with disabilities on some of our products and services. A few of the projects we have consulted on in the past include the new trains in the Québec City – Windsor corridor, the sign language videos on our website, the wayfinding solutions used at Ottawa Station, and the trains for the upcoming Long-Distance, Regional and Remote (LDRR) project. There's more on that last project below.

This methodology, in addition to our accessibility training programs, is contributing to a culture of thinking about accessibility first and incorporating it into our DNA.

Universal Accessibility Advisory Committee

To be successful in our accessibility improvements, we must include people with disabilities early and often. With that in mind, we created our first universal accessibility advisory committee in 2021 while creating our initial accessibility plan. At the end of our initial plan in 2025, most members of the committee were still present and active and providing helpful insights for our projects.

The members of the committee continue to represent a broad range of people with disabilities and seniors. The committee meets on occasion to receive updates on past, present, and future projects. The main purpose of this committee is for the members to give advice and feedback based on their knowledge and lived experience to further VIA Rail's ambitions in accessibility.



Planned Improvements

At VIA Rail, we are always working hard to improve our services and make it easier and more enjoyable for you to travel with us. There are many ongoing projects, some of which are specific to accessibility and others which have an accessibility component. Here we have set out our planned projects over the next few years.

The projects below improve accessibility in the following areas:

- transportation;
- the built environment;
- the procurement of goods, services and facilities;
- employment;
- information and communication technologies (ICT);
- communication other than ICT; and
- the design and delivery of programs and services.

By successfully implementing them, we will continue our work towards making VIA Rail one of the most accessible travel options in Canada.

Transportation

Barrier: Current long-distance trains are not fully accessible

Long-Distance, Remote and Regional Fleet Renewal

A new era of train travel is upon us. The new trains in the Québec City-Windsor corridor from our previous accessibility plan have now all been delivered. VIA Rail has now renewed its fleet in the Québec City-Windsor corridor with 32 very accessible trainsets whose designs and features were highly influenced by the feedback of people with disabilities.

Before VIA Rail started to receive these new trains, we had initiated a process to renew our long-distance trains. VIA Rail's long-distance trains are the trains on the routes that go from Halifax to Montréal, from Toronto to Vancouver, and from Winnipeg to Churchill, to name a few. In early 2024, the federal government committed to allow us to begin the process of replacing these trains. To make sure these long-distance trains are also very accessible, we're following a similar consultation process to the one used for the new Québec City-Windsor trains.

In January 2024, we presented the preliminary plans for the trains in a workshop with people with disabilities. This was the first of a series of consultations to be held with our accessibility partners on these trains. Our plan over the next few years will be to hold more workshops to work more closely on the details of the designs as the project progresses.

Built Environment

Barrier: Dated stations with lack of accessibility features

Station Accessibility Analysis

The first step to creating standard, universally accessible stations is to analyze the level of accessibility at every station. To identify, eliminate, and prevent barriers, VIA Rail will conduct an analysis of the accessibility of its network of stations.

This analysis was partially done in our initial accessibility plan. As part of that plan, we were able to take an inventory of the accessibility features in the parking lot and leading to the entrance of about 40 stations. For this updated accessibility plan, we will continue the work we started by taking a similar approach to have a comprehensive understanding of the level of accessibility at the stations in our network.

Procurement of Goods, Services and Facilities

Barrier: Complexity of the accessible procurement process

Accessible Procurement Process (Phase 2)

During the development of our initial accessibility plan, VIA Rail's accessibility team worked closely with the procurement department to establish the company's first accessible procurement process. This project involved reviewing all current and future contracts and developing a toolkit to guide VIA Rail employees in identifying projects with accessibility requirements. The outcome was our accessible procurement process, now integrated into VIA Rail's intranet and employee training programs.

After several years, the accessible procurement process is due for an update. To improve the process, we will be consulting our employees to know how to make it simpler and easier for them to use. The purpose of this project will be not only to facilitate the process, but also, to further our staff's knowledge of accessibility. We'd like to emphasize the importance of it being considered at the start of all VIA Rail projects.

Employment

Barrier: Accessibility gaps in the employment life cycle

Planning and Implementing the Accessible Employment Standard

When people think of accessibility and employment, they often think of accommodation and the physical access to a workplace, but our vision for this plan goes well beyond that. We think the

key to improving accessibility depends on changing mentality and ensuring inclusivity and accessibility throughout the employment lifecycle to promote workplace equity.

Our plan for making employment more accessible at VIA Rail will be to align with Accessibility Standards Canada's new employment standard. The long-term goal of this standard is to create "a work environment that is accessible, inclusive, barrier-free, and discrimination-free for all workers, regardless of their lived experience with disabilities." This goal aligns with VIA Rail's values and our long-term objectives as well.

We think one of the best ways to meet this objective will be by creating an employment accessibility strategy. To create our strategy, we will use the gap analysis and accessible employment road map we developed during our initial accessibility plan. These resources will be essential to mapping out where the organization stands today and where we would like to be as an inclusive and accessible employer down the road.

One of the main tenets of the standard is to integrate disability confidence into organizations. We seek to do this by recognizing the value a diversified staff brings to our organization. We believe the level of disability confidence will grow as we implement our employment accessibility strategy and other accessibility initiatives.

Information and Communication Technologies (ICT)

Barrier: Limited offer of sign language interpretation at stations

Remote Virtual Sign Language in Stations

To improve communication between sign language users and staff at ticket counters, VIA Rail started offering remote on-demand sign language interpreting at the ticket counter in Ottawa Station. This service can be accessed through a digital tablet at the accessible ticket counter. We introduced this service in Ottawa Station in the fall of 2024. We intend on continuing to offer the service while we determine if our customers appreciate it. If so, we are considering adding the service to several other larger stations.

Barrier: Effective signage for sighted people only

Autonomous Wayfinding in Train Stations (Phase 2)

Based on recommendations received during workshops held with our accessibility partners, VIA Rail decided to test an autonomous wayfinding solution in Ottawa Station as part of our initial accessibility plan. GoodMaps in collaboration with the Canadian National Institute for the Blind (CNIB) were the organizations chosen to provide the solution. The solution is a mobile application that helps users locate themselves in a space and then directs them to various points of interest throughout the space by both visual and audio directions.

VIA Rail deployed GoodMaps in the summer of 2024. We conducted user tests with our staff and Universal Accessibility Advisory Committee on several occasions before and after the app was made available to the public. Overall, the users who seemed to benefit from the app the most were users with low vision.

GoodMaps is one of several new wayfinding technologies designed to help people with disabilities navigate spaces autonomously. With that in mind, VIA Rail would like to test at least one other option to determine what works best for our passengers. We will be testing out another app for this purpose starting in 2025.

Barrier: ICT not fully accessible

Planning and Implementing the Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) Standard

In 2024, Accessibility Standards Canada released a standard for ICT. Also, called the European Harmonized Standard, the standard was developed and has been used in Europe for over a decade. The purpose of this standard is to provide guidance in evaluating the level of accessibility of ICT before purchasing them.

In addition to wanting to provide a more accessible experience for our passengers and a more accessible workplace for our employees, VIA Rail is taking steps to adopt this standard because it, “supports the goals of: the [Accessible Canada Act](#), [Accessibility Standards Canada's mandate](#), and the realization of a Canada without barriers by 2040.”

To adopt this standard, we will use a similar approach as the one we are taking for the employment standard. We will start by creating a strategy to identify which departments it impacts and how the information about the standard will be best communicated to them. The main departments affected by this standard will be Procurement and Information Technology. After developing the strategy, we will focus our efforts on raising awareness about the standard and training.

Communication, Other Than ICT

Barrier: Documents for employees only available in standard formats

Alternative Document Process

In our initial accessibility plan, we hired a company specializing in accessibility to examine the level of accessibility of our communications to customers. This was done as part of an accessible communications gap analysis. After the analysis was completed, we created an accessible communication style guide and made it available to all employees. The staff who use it the most are those who communicate with customers and the public. We also trained those employees on the guide to help make VIA Rail’s communications as inclusive as possible.

For this updated accessibility plan, we will build on what was done in the initial plan. Our focus for this plan will be on internal communications to employees. We will recycle the material developed in the first plan and adapt it to internal communications. We’ll also implement a process to make sure employees can request documents in alternative formats. This will require creating a process and communicating across the organization. Finally, we’ll establish a relationship with one or several companies specialized in creating communications in accessible formats.

Design and Delivery of Programs and Services

Barrier: The train is a stressful environment for neurodivergent passengers

Sensory Support Kits

During the last year and a half of our initial accessibility plan, we tested a new service for neurodivergent passengers. We have been offering them a sensory support kit. Sensory support kits are a backpack containing several items to help the passenger self-regulate during their travels.

The way the service works is the passenger places a specific service request about their disability when making their reservation. Then, during the reservation confirmation process, our staff offers them a kit for their trip and their future travels. If the passenger would like the kit, our staff provides it when the passenger is on the train.

These sensory support kits are a one-time offer for any neurodivergent passenger. The service is currently available upon request in the Québec City-Windsor corridor. As part of this updated accessibility plan, we will be continuing this offering as long as it is feasible.

Barrier: Understanding the needs related to a client's invisible disability

Sunflower Hidden Disabilities Program

The Sunflower Hidden Disabilities Program is appreciated by many organizations, particularly those in the transportation industry. It is designed to help staff better identify and serve people with invisible disabilities.

The way it works is a person with an invisible disability wears a sunflower program item, such as a lanyard or pin. This helps them show they have an invisible disability, which in turn can help staff know which passengers might need more attention. The program also provides staff with training on how to best support people wearing a sunflower program item.

For this updated accessibility plan, we will be testing this program in the Québec City-Windsor corridor. If it proves successful, we would like to extend it to the rest of our network and in our workplaces.

Provisions of CTA Accessibility-Related Regulations

VIA Rail is subject to the Accessible Transportation for Persons with Disabilities Regulations (ATPDR)¹ issued by the Canada Transportation Agency (CTA) under section 170(1) of the Canada Transportation Act.

Recap

The above summarizes what we have planned for VIA Rail's second multi-year accessibility plan. We learned a lot in developing and implementing our initial plan. A couple of the lessons we took away from that experience:

- Consultation is paramount to success. The accessibility of the new Québec City – Windsor corridor fleet is a testament to this.
- Raising awareness might be the biggest factor in breaking down barriers and helping make Canada more inclusive and accessible. The feedback we've received from our employees about accessibility training has been overwhelmingly positive and thankful. We see how it has changed perspectives and broadened horizons.

With this plan, we are continuing our responsibility in identifying, removing, and preventing barriers to our customers and staff. We are leading the way to a more accessible Canada with the projects mentioned above and we strive to successfully accomplish them by the end of 2028. However, like in our initial plan, we have no intention of limiting ourselves to what's contained in this document. Should we receive the resources needed to progress accessibility further, we will proceed without hesitation.

If you have any questions, comments, or recommendations, please contact us. You can use the feedback process mentioned in the document for that purpose.

¹ 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 45, 48, 49, 50, 51, 52, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 58, 59, 60, 61, 86, 87, 88, 89, 90, 91, 92, 93, 94, 95, 96, 97, 98, 99, 100, 101, 102, 103, 104, 105, 106, 107, 108, 109, 110, 111, 112, 113, 114, 115, 116, 117, 118, 119, 120, 121, 122, 23, 124, 125, 126, 127, 128, 129, 130, 131, 132, 133, 212, 213, 214, 215, 216, 217, 218, 219, 220, 221, 222, 223, 225, 226, 227, 229, 230, 231, Schedule 1

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