CROSSING PATHS ★ BUILDING FUTURES
THE PEACE BRIDGE

Buffalo and Fort Erie Public Bridge Authority
Accessible Canada Act
Progress Report 2025

About Buffalo & Fort Erie Public Bridge Authority

We (the "Authority") are an international compact entity created pursuant to a compact between the State of New York and the Government of Canada. Our principal asset is the Peace Bridge, which is a major international crossing that spans the Niagara River between Fort Erie, Ontario and Buffalo, New York. In addition to being a principal artery in the Niagara Frontier for travel and commerce between the United States and Canada, the Peace Bridge is a vital link to long distance, interstate travel and international trade.

General

In our initial Accessible Canada Act Accessibility Plan (the "Accessibility Plan" or "Plan") which can be found at the following link https://www.peacebridge.com/accessibility-statement/ we outlined the actions that we planned to take to identify, prevent and remove barriers for persons with disabilities.   This progress report serves to provide updates on the status of the actions taken to address the barriers initially identified, the progress we have made implementing our Accessibility Plan during 2024 and how feedback is helping to guide our efforts.

Our Accessibility Plan serves as our accessibility roadmap until 2026 and is in no way exhaustive. It is a starting point to address the challenges known to the Authority at the time of the Plan's inception. Nevertheless, our Plan seeks to advance awareness and drive positive action toward making the Authority a more accessible and equitable workplace for persons of all abilities.

We are committed to continuing to work towards addressing the unique barriers faced by persons with disabilities and we welcome further feedback on how the Authority can foster and improve accessibility.

This Progress Report highlights improvements we have made thus far and outlines our process for consulting, soliciting and implementing feedback in accordance with our obligations under the *Accessible Canada Act*, S.C. 2019 (the "*ACA*").

How to provide feedback

The Authority's Chief Financial Officer/ Human Resources Manager is responsible for receiving feedback from the public and Authority employees on the Accessibility Plan or any issue related to accessibility.

You can send your feedback by email, phone or mail using the contact information listed below.

For more information on how you can send your feedback, see our feedback process description on our website at https://www.peacebridge.com/accessibility-plan/.

How to request alternate formats

You may request a copy of the Accessibility Plan, this Accessibility Progress Report or the description of the feedback. Contact our Office of Accessibility using one of the methods listed below to request any of the following alternate formats:

- print
- large print (larger and clearer font)
- braille (a system of raised dots that people who are blind or who have low vision can read with their fingers)
- audio (a recording of someone reading the text out loud)
- electronic formats that are compatible with adaptive technology

We will provide the format requested as soon as possible. Braille and audio formats may take up to 45 days. Print, large print and electronic formats may take up to 20 days.

Contact us:

Contact: Karen L. Costa
Mailing Address: 100 Queen Street   Fort Erie, ON L2A 3S6
Email: accessibility@peacebridge.com
Telephone: 905-871-1608
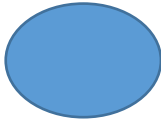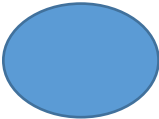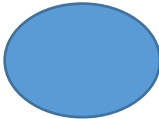**Website:** www.peacebridge.com

Feedback

The Authority created a survey as part of its Accessible Canada Act Accessibility Plan in order to solicit feedback regarding accessibility. We asked Authority employees (via email) and the public (via our website and social media) to participate in the survey. The survey was open for approximately 3 weeks in April 2024.

The survey comprised of approximately 18 questions addressing the relevant areas outlined by Section 5 of the *ACA*.

We received 22 survey responses – 17 respondents identified that they were Authority employees. No respondent identified as a person with a disability. All responses were submitted anonymously.

Based on the feedback received from our initial survey, the areas that respondents provided feedback included the following (the percentage represents the percentage of the feedback responses received – for example, 5% of the feedback received related to the area of Employment):

Employment 5%	Built Environment 9.5%	Information and communication technologies 9.5%	Procurement 5%

We received no feedback related to Communications Other than ICT or Design and Delivery of Programs and Services. The Authority does not engage in "transportation" within the meaning of the *ACA* and therefore the standards for Transportation are not within the scope of our Plan.

The Authority documents and reviews all feedback, questions and suggestions formally submitted by employees and the public, including survey responses. The feedback received was shared with the Authority personnel responsible for implementing our strategy across the key areas outlined in the *ACA*.

All feedback is taken into consideration when evaluating the Authority's priorities and commitments. The Authority uses feedback received to identify barriers and to assess the organization's progress in removing existing barriers and prevent new ones.

Some themes we noted in the feedback received include the following:

- outdated website that did not include accessibility tools;
- employee's lack of knowledge surrounding how to report a disability and discuss accommodation requests;
- alternative communication methods to reach all employees especially older employees who are not "tech savvy"; and
- Concerns with potential lack of physical accessibility in certain areas of the office building.

Consultations

The Authority plans to issue a self-identification survey to all employees in the summer of 2025 that will allow individuals to identify as a person with disabilities, if applicable. This information is confidential and will be managed by the Authority's Human Resources division. Human Resources will then invite those that have identified as an individual with a disability to participate in accessibility team consultations. These consultations will help further the Authority's identification of barriers that exist and potential mitigation strategies.

In addition, the Authority intends to incorporate the findings from its ongoing review of physical assets to identify any accessibility deficiencies or to consider any additional accessibility-related recommendations. Any accessibility deficiencies noted will be incorporated into our overall asset management plan for budgeting and scheduling of renovation. The Authority plans to implement an Accessible Buildings checklist (a comprehensive checklist provided by the Ontario BIA Association) to review accessibility of Authority buildings both for employee and public areas.

In summary, the Authority is proactively engaging with our employees and is planning to engage with accessibility professionals to make our workplace more inclusive and accessible. This ongoing effort is crucial in shaping our strategies and ensuring a welcoming environment for everyone.

Areas in Section 5 of the Accessible Canada Act (ACA)

Employment

Barrier No. 1

Persons with accessibility or disability-related needs apply for employment with the Authority at a lower rate than in the labour market general. The external "Employment"

web pages are not user-friendly and present barriers to prospective candidates living with disabilities; for example, no text-to-speech assistance is available.

Progress Update on Actions

- <u>Action:</u> Enhance the "Employment Application" section of the Authority's website in order to increase the visibility of Authority jobs to Canadians with disabilities.
- <u>Update:</u> Completed. We have updated the Employment page of our website to more prominently display the Authority's statement on applicants with disabilities. https://www.peacebridge.com/employment/

- <u>Action:</u> Conduct a self-identification campaign to educate staff on the importance of self-identification and encouraging staff participation. Encourage applicants to self-identify.
- <u>Update:</u> In Process. We are planning to conducting employee training in the summer of 2025 followed by a self-identification survey.

- <u>Action:</u> Educate hiring managers on accessibility and how they can ensure a barrier-free hiring, selection, and accommodation process.
- <u>Update:</u> In process. The main hiring managers have been trained, additional training to all managers that may participate in the hiring process is planned to be completed in 2025.

- <u>Action:</u> Better aligned current recruitment and selection practices with leading accessibility practices.
- <u>Update:</u> Ongoing.

Barrier No. 2

Current employees and candidates for employment with the Authority reported that they were not aware of the availability and range of accommodation options.

Progress Update on Actions

- <u>Action:</u> Highlight the fact that accommodations are available to candidates while they are applying for positions with the Authority and reiterate this commitment during onboarding.
- <u>Update:</u> We have updated the Employment page of our website to more prominently display the Authority's statement on applicants with disabilities.

- <u>Action:</u> Increase employee awareness on where or how to seek accommodations at work (e.g. utilize the Authority's internal Newsletter to publish articles on

staffing accommodations, how to request an accommodation and the Accessibility Plan)

- Update: Ongoing.

- Action: Increase hiring managers' awareness of the person(s) responsible for accommodating candidates for employment with the Authority.
- Update: All hiring managers are now aware of the process and responsibilities regarding accommodation requests during the hiring process.

- Action: Roll out new training programs for employees and Managers that focus on accessibility and disability.
- Update: Training to be conducted in 2025.

Built Environment

The built environment in which the Authority operates presents unique challenges with respect to identifying and removing barriers to accessibility, as well as preventing the creation of new barriers.

Barrier No. 3

As an international border crossing, the Authority must offer facilities that are generally accessible to all persons irrespective of accessibility or disability-related needs.

Progress Update on Actions

- Action: Review facilities within the Authority's control and identify physical barriers to accessibility (e.g., uneven pavement, raised curbs, lack of accessibility ramps).
- Update: In progress. A complete review of Authority physical assets is currently underway with an inspection report expected later in 2025. Once the report is received, any identified accessibility requirements will be incorporated into our overall asset management plan for budgeting and scheduling of renovation. The Authority plans to implement an Accessible Buildings checklist to review accessibility of Authority buildings both for employee and public areas.

- Action: Increase accessible way-finding for persons with vision impairment (e.g., use of tactile strips, installation of braille text).
- Update: Will begin progress at the end of 2025

- Action: Increase accessibility for persons with hearing impairment to receive assistance at the toll booths (e.g., use of visual communication, installation of keypad for communication).

- Update: In progress. Improved two-way speakers and a clearly labeled help button were installed at the toll booths to assist all customers that need assistance. Additionally, the self-service toll booth kiosks have screens that instruct travelers with words on the screen and graphics to assist with the process to pay the toll. Two-way keypad communication is not available at this time.

- Action: Prioritize and update the accessibility features of employee offices and workspaces including workspaces in the toll booth area.
- Update: In process. A complete review of Authority physical assets is currently underway with an inspection report expected later in 2025. Once the report is received, any identified accessibility concerns will be incorporated into our overall asset management plan for budgeting and scheduling of renovation. For the area leading directly from the employee doors on the first floor to the toll booth/plaza area, while there is curbing access, that access point is more than 20 feet down from the doors due to inadequate space to accommodate curbing access right at the doors. To alleviate this, a temporary curbing access ramp will be purchased to provide more immediate door access.

Information and Communication Technologies ("ICT")

The Authority wants to address barriers to accessibility with respect to the technological tools and processes that it uses to send, store, create, and exchange information.

Barrier No. 4

The Authority's IT personnel are not as well versed in accessibility technology as they could be. In order to foster the inclusion of our employees, the Authority must address this knowledge gap.

Progress Update on Actions

- Action: Implement accessibility training for Authority IT personnel (specific to IT related areas).
- Update: Training of IT staff is in process.

- Action: Ensure that knowledge gaps within the IT team regarding the fundamental principles of digital accessibility are addressed by equipping team members with the necessary skills and understanding to develop and support accessible technology.
- Update: Training of IT staff is in process.

- Action: Make available or increase training focused on accessibility technologies and tools used in the workplace.
- Update: In process. Generalized training for all employees will be completed in June 2025 and additional training is being planned for the end of 2025

- Action: Develop a framework or policy to assist IT personnel when assisting a person with disabilities or accessibility-related needs.
- Update: Will begin progress at the end of 2025.

Barrier No. 5

Individuals must currently request that accessibility features be turned on in order to use them.

Progress Update on Actions

- Action: Ensure that the Authority's website meets web accessibility standards and requirements. (WCAG 2.1 AA).
- Update: Completed. The Authority launched an updated website in early 2025 that is fully compliant.

- Action: Raise awareness of accessibility features.
- Update: Completed. The updated website more prominently displays accessibility features – hopefully making them for users to locate and use.

- Action: Regularly review and update Internal digital systems as new accessibility technologies emerge.
- Update: Ongoing. The Authority is developing an annual checklist to ensure that digital systems are reviewed and updated at least annually as may be required.

- Action: Integrate ICT accessibility requirements into the software development process.
- Update: Ongoing. As new software is developed or employed, ICT integration as available and/or applicable will be integrated.

- Action: Develop an internal process to receive and deal with feedback from stakeholders on ICT accessibility.
- Update: In process. The Authority has established an accessibility email that is monitored by HR.   A company-wide promotion campaign is being planned for 2025 to increase employee awareness of the email and ways to provide accessibility related feedback. On the Authority website https://www.peacebridge.com/accessibility-plan/ there is a form that stakeholders

can complete to provide feedback related to accessibility as well as a phone number to call to provide anonymous feedback.

Barrier No. 6

The Authority implemented certain technologies to assist travellers while they are transiting across the Peace Bridge.

Progress Update on Actions

- Action: Review technologies currently used to facilitate border crossing to ensure that they offer accessibility functions for those who use them. (e.g. visual and hearing impairment).
- Update: In progress. Improved two-way speakers and a clearly labeled help button were installed at the toll booths to assist all customers that need assistance. Additionally, the self-service toll booth kiosks have screens that instruct travelers with words on the screen and graphics to assist with the process to pay the toll.

Communication Other than ICT

The Authority understands that non-ICT communications can impose barriers and restrictions on our employees and other stakeholders.

Barrier No. 7

The Authority does not use a consistent process to ensure that alternative methods of communication are provided to employees and stakeholders in a timely manner.

Progress Update on Actions

- Action: Identify all the alternative methods of communication and create templates, frameworks, and guides with respect to the implementation and availability of these alternative methods of communication. (e.g. visual /audio boards in employee areas to disseminate information).
- Update: Not started. The Authority is currently discussing methods to capture areas of concern and to determine short-term budgetary and scheduling feasibility. The Authority is currently taking preliminary steps to determine best practices for capturing areas of concern and considering the budgetary feasibility of potential alternative methods of communication.

- Action: Create and store commonly issued communications in alternative formats for ease of distribution upon request.
- Update: Will begin progress at the end of 2025.

- Action: The Authority is committed to providing alternative formats as soon as possible and within a reasonable timeframe as defined within the *ACA* and its regulations. Alternative formats include:

  - Large print

  - Hard copies

  - Braille

  - Electronic formatting

  - Read-aloud options.

- Update: Ongoing. The Authority has not had any request for alternative formats in the past year but remains committed to providing them when requested.

- Action: Reduce the use of PDFs on the Authority's website and use accessible content (HTML) and/or provide alternate format for PDFs currently posted on the website.
- Update: In process. The Authority launched an updated website in early 2025 that has incorporated the use of HTML and has eliminated virtually all use of pdfs on the website. Further use of pdfs is being limited and we are converting as much as possible to HTML format.

Procuring Goods, Services, and Facilities

The *ACA* requires the Authority to consider the accessibility requirements for procurement and includes accessibility as part of the provision of goods, services, and facilities where appropriate.

Barrier No. 8

The Authority does not explicitly assess accessibility considerations during the procurement process.

Progress Update on Actions

- Action: Review and revise the Authority's procurement policies in order to reinforce that accessibility be considered when procuring goods and services.
- Update: In process. The Authority is currently reviewing its procurement policies.

- Action: Review and revise the Authority's RFP process to ensure that solicitations are easily accessible and available in alternate formats.

- Update: In process. The Authority is in the process of updating its RFP posting process on its website to ensure that procurement documents are available in electronic formats allowing for use of accessibility aids.

  https://www.peacebridge.com/vendors/

- Action: Embed accessibility considerations into procurement templates to inform vendors of the requirement to abide by the requirements of the *ACA*.
- Update: Will begin progress at the end of 2025.

Design and Delivery of Programs and Services

The Authority should strive to deliver its internal and external programs and services in a manner that fosters accessibility and inclusivity. Beginning with the planning stage, the Authority must incorporate accessibility considerations.

Barrier No. 9

The Authority does not currently have a standard or consistent approach to ensuring that all of our programs and services take accessibility into account.

Progress Update on Actions

- Action: Create curated checklists for programs and services and systematically conduct checks to ensure that they are accessible and barrier-free.
- Update: Completed. The Authority's biggest interaction with the public is through the self-service toll booth kiosks. After review of its programs and services, the Authority has integrated accessibility consideration within the ICT section of this Plan.

- Action: Consult with employees with disabilities and external organizations who support accessibility in creating and reviewing the accessibility of programs and services used or offered by the Authority.
- Update: Ongoing. The Authority conducted a survey of employees in 2024 and plans to repeat the survey in 2025 along with promoting employee self-identification of disabilities.

- Action: Develop guidelines and frameworks on how to promote and apply accessible alternatives to Authority policies and services.
- Update: Will begin progress at the end of 2025.

Transportation

As outlined in our initial Accessibility Plan, despite being a major international toll crossing, the Authority does not engage in "transportation" within the meaning of the *ACA*.

Conclusion

The Authority will continue to monitor and measure our progress on the action items identified to ensure that we are meeting the remaining accessibility goals and removing or preventing the remaining barriers that were identified in our Accessibility Plan.

We will continue to elicit feedback from employees and other stakeholders that we will use to assist in implementing our Accessibility Plan, identification of any new barriers and measure how we are doing in completing the actions identified in our Plan.

In 2026 we will issue another progress report on the status of the implementation of our current Accessibility Plan and subsequently we will begin work on a new accessibility plan that builds on the barriers and actions identified in the initial Plan and progress reports.