

Nova Scotia Accessibility Advisory Board
Meeting Minutes
Friday, June 12, 2025 – 10:00 a.m. to 12:15 a.m.
1:30 p.m. to 4:00 p.m.
Virtual Meeting by Zoom

Board Members: Max Chauvin (Chair), Ellen Johnson (Vice-Chair), Birgit Elssner, Earl Muise, Linda Campbell, Amy Lays, Louise Gillis, Shellene Sparks, Denise Pictou Maloney, Rob Patey.

Regrets: Sarah Moore, Melissa MacKenzie.

Staff: Dawn Stegen, Amy Middleton, Ashley Gaudet, Sumona Sonda, Lisa Jacobs, Terri Lynn Almeda, Jenny Thornhill, Hannah McDougal, Chloe Fine, Meghan Murphy, Maddi Adams, Briget Beswick-Escanlar.

Guests: Colin Carrigan, Department of Public Works

1. Welcome and Introductions

Max Chauvin, Board Chair welcomed everyone to the Accessibility Advisory Board (Board) meeting and opened with a Mi'kmaq and African Nova Scotian land acknowledgement. Max highlighted the importance of Pride Month, National Indigenous History Month, and the intersections of accessibility, pride, and indigenous resurgence and reviewed meeting protocols and practices.

2. Board Operations

a. Review of Agenda: The agenda as previously circulated was accepted with an addition of correspondence received from the Disability Partnership.

b. Minutes Review: The March 21, 2025, minutes were reviewed and were approved.

c. Outstanding Board Business (Dawn)

Dawn Stegen, Executive Director, provided several updates.

The Statement of Work for the Board Coordinator position is being finalized.

Minister Druhan approved the Board's recommended changes to the Information and Communication SDC membership and terms of reference.

The layout and design for the Board's recommendations for an accessibility standard in goods and services is complete.

Dawn highlighted compliance efforts focused on prescribed public sector bodies updated accessibility plan required by April 1. The Board heard that 76% are compliant.

Dawn addressed the roll out of the Built Environment Standard, the success of Access Awareness Week 2024, the release of the 2025-28 GNS Accessibility Plan.

Dawn mentioned Minister Durhan announced a new Minister's table on gender-based violence that will bring together victims and government departments and decision makers and families.

2d. Changes to the Building Code

Accessibility Directorate staff left the meeting due to the sensitive nature of conversation.

Max provided context on the proposed changes to modular off-site builds. Discussion followed. Max recommended that the Board write the Minister of Growth and Development and copy Minister Druhan expressing concern and ask for details on accessibility exemptions for modular off-site builds.

Max put forward a motion: *"The Accessibility Advisory Board provide a written response, as well as a letter of advice to the Minister of Growth and Development, to address proposed changes to the building code announced on May 31, 2025."* Motion approved by Ellen Johnson and seconded by Earl Muise. The motion was passed unanimously.

2e. Board Vacancies

Accessibility Directorate staff attending today's meeting rejoined the meeting.

Three first terms end in October and one board members is completing two terms in December. The Minister will consider all four positions. Discussion followed regarding the upcoming vacancies and the Board's advice to Minister.

Max put forward a motion *"to provide advice to the Minister of Justice on upcoming Board vacancies, emphasizing the importance of having a diverse and knowledgeable board member."*

The motion was approved by Louise Gillis and seconded by Shallene Sparks. The motion was passed unanimously

2f. Communication and Engagement Working Group

Rob Patey, Chair of the Communication and Engagement Working Group, provided an update. The Communications and Engagement Working Group met April 9 with members Shellene, Birgit, Linda, Denise, and Rob in attendance. Key topics included increasing Board visibility through website updates, social media, use of the new logo and engagement.

Access Awareness Week 2025 was discussed, and the next scheduled committee meeting is June 25, where youth engagement will be a central focus of discussion. A matter raised in the Accessibility Act Review findings. The committee will bring recommendations forward to the Board on ways to engage and include the voices of youth with disabilities.

Updates were also provided on website analytics, which showed 600 users over three months, with most visiting Board member bios and the standards pages. The upcoming release of the Goods and Services Standard recommendations is expected to boost traffic.

A draft presentation with speaking notes has been created to help members promote the Board's work and recruit new members; feedback is requested.

Members were reminded to make use of distributed resources such as the annual report and are encouraged to share feedback or request additional materials to support outreach efforts.

3. Nova Scotia Disability Employee Network

Speaker was unavailable. Presentation moved to a future Board meeting.

Special Agenda Item: Disability Partnership

Max shared correspondence received this week from Joanne Bernard, the President and CEO of Easter Seals Nova Scotia, and member of the advisory board of the Disability Partnership.

Discussion followed.

ACTION: Max will review all documents received and follow up with Joanne Bernard and Max will update the Board on next steps.

6. GNS Accessibility Plan 2025-28, Hannah MacDougall

Hannah MacDougall provided an overview of the approved 2025-2028 Government of Nova Scotia Accessibility Plan, highlighting its development process and key commitments. Hannah discussed the consultation process, including engagement with the Board and the Nova Scotia Disability Employee Network.

Following the overview, the Board discussed the inclusion of indigenous communities in accessibility commitments, supports for student with disabilities, and removing and preventing public transportation barriers.

Lunch Break

4. Department of Public Works – Colin Carrigan

Colin Carrigan, Senior Architect at the Department of Public Works (DPW), reviewed the importance of barrier-free design in public infrastructures and physical spaces. He reviewed the work of the DPW focusing on the accessibility audit handbook, which is used to conduct building audits and provide feedback to departments for accessibility improvements.

Colin explained the process of auditing government buildings, including prioritizing buildings, conducting audits and provided examples of non-compliance. Challenges such as resources, retrofitting historic buildings, maintaining accessible playgrounds were discussed along with the need for continued support for these efforts.

ACTION: Colin agreed to send a copy to the Accessibility Handbook to Board member Rob Patey.

5. Linda Campbell's Presentation on the Society of Deaf and Hard of Hearing Nova Scotia (SDHHNS)

Linda provided background of SDHHNS and explained their recent current reorganization, highlighting the diversity and community involvement. The services provided by SDHHNS were explained, such as interpreting services, deaf literacy training, and language acquisition. The recent challenges faced by SDHHNS, including staff renewal, and the need for more diverse interpreters, were highlighted.

Linda presented on opportunities for collaboration and support, identifying work opportunities for deaf and hard of hearing individuals as well as the importance of partnerships and community engagement (youth) in addressing accessibility challenges.

Linda suggested the SDHHNS provide yearly updates to the Board.

ACTION: The Accessibility Directorate will follow up with SDHHNS.

7. Standard Development Committee Overview

a. Information and Communications Jeff Overmars (Chair)

Jeff Overmars (SDC Chair) provided an update on the Information and Communication SDC, including the first voice panel, March 31st in person meeting. He briefly discussed the small working group meetings on digital accessibility and assistive and augmentative technology, accessible formats in plain language, sign language and visual access to language and way finding and signage.

Draft recommendations will be shared with the Board prior to public consultation in early winter.

7b. Public Transportation – Ellen Johnson (Vice Chair)

The Public Transportation SDC divided into six small working groups to draft the initial recommendations, and they have been busy since March. The SDC continues to meet to discuss the draft recommendations.

7c. Guidance

Jenny Thornhill and Lisa Jacobs with the Accessibility Directorate presented on behalf of the Comms and Information and Public Transportation SDCs. They are seeking direction on language continuity in the standard recommendations and are inquiring if they should be using language that's already been approved by the Accessibility Advisory Board.

Additionally, the two SDC's are seeking approval from the Board to have a shared consultation for their draft recommendations. The rationale for this amalgamation is overlap of content, consultation fatigue and ability to expand the number of people that would be consulted through shared expenses and resources. Discussion followed

ACTION: Max put forward a Motion: *"The Board approves the recommendations from staff to use previously approved language unless there is a good reason not to and to have a shared consultation for draft recommendations from the Public Transportation and Information and Communication SDCs."*

Approved by Ellen Johnson and seconded by Birgit Elssner. The motion was passed unanimously

7d. Education Standard and Goods and Services SDC – Meghan Murphy

Meghan Murphy, Senior Policy Analyst, provided an update on the draft of the education standard. When the proposed standard is ready, we will seek approval to share it for public comment for at least 60 days.

The recommendations for a Goods and Services Standard were approved the Board in March of 2025, and recommendations have been designed and translated into French with summaries in ASL and plain language. Recommendations will be posted to Board's website, and the public will be notified of the recommendations. A proposed accessibility standard in service delivery will be drafted by government and prepared for public review.

e. Employment Standard – Bridget Beswick-Escanlar

Bridget introduced herself as the newest member of the Accessibility Directorate leading the employment standard. The Interdepartmental

Working Group (IDWG) has been established and begun reviewing the Board's recommendations.

The IDWG consists of subject matter experts from the Public Service Commission, Labour Skills and Immigration, Opportunities and Social Development, Executive Council Office (Labour Relations) and the Office of Equity and Anti-Racism.

8. Round Table Discussion

Max shared a new policy requiring Board, Board working groups and SDC members to confirm their attendance (RSVP) at least 72 hours in advance.

Ellen Johnson noted having participated in accessibility training for the Bluenose staff and discussed her experience. Louise Gillis discussed the success of her curling team, mentioning they beat Team Canada once and were awarded the silver medal.

Birgit Elssner provided an update on the Quality-of-Life index for people with disabilities. Birgit represents the Board on the coordinating committee. The plain language version of the draft index and all indicators were presented recently. Birgit participated in the *Rebuilding HOPE* Conference (Remedy) in Middleton, which was informative and provided valuable insights.

The next meeting of the Board is scheduled for **September 25, 2025**. It will be a virtual meeting both morning and afternoon. Minister Druhan has been invited to attend to talk about compliance and discuss updates on standards.

9. Meeting Adjourned 3:40 p.m.

Board Chair Max Chauvin thanked the participants for their attendance and adjourned the meeting.