

# 2025

## Accessibility Progress Report



*Figure 1: A Vancouver Island Coach Lines bus is parked on a wet gravel lot under a cloudy sky. The bus is white with dark tinted windows and company branding on the side.*

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*Smith Transportation is grateful to be on the shared, unceded territory of the Coast Salish Peoples, the traditional territories of the Snuneymuxw First Nation. We respect and commit to deeply considering their history, culture, stewardship, and voice.*

## General

### Executive Summary

Smith Transportation Ltd., doing business as Vancouver Island Coach Lines & School Bus Company (hereon 'VICL'), is committed to building a culture of inclusivity and accessibility. Not only is this part of our company culture, but opening access to all is imperative to our continued growth and competitiveness in the transportation sector. We will contribute to a barrier-free Canada for everyone by building an accessibility framework that will support employees and the public we serve to have the best experience possible without services, products, and facilities.

Our efforts to achieve accessibility are deeply connected to and mutually reinforced by:

VICL's priorities include ongoing work in support of equity, diversity, and inclusion legislation, such as the *Canadian Human Rights Act*, the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, the *Canadian Labour Code*, and the *Employment Equity Act*.

We recognize that accessibility is an ongoing and central element of being an inclusive organization. That is why the plan we have developed to continue improving our accessibility builds on our inclusive mindset and practices.

Through the development of the initial Accessibility Plan published in 2024, we identified barriers and actions to improve accessibility in the priority areas under the Accessible Canada Act.

This Progress Report outlines the progress made on the barriers identified in the Accessibility Plan and the steps taken to progress accessibility practices. In addition, this progress report outlines how feedback and additional consultation have and will continue to shape the initiatives and priorities of VICL.

### Your Input and Feedback

VICL welcomes feedback on our Accessibility Plan and Progress Report from the public, clients, employees, and our stakeholders. This feedback is valuable to us, as it helps breakdown accessibility barriers, and build on our commitment to accessibility and inclusion. If you have any inquiries or feedback, please use one of the contact methods below. We will respond to all feedback in a timely manner. If you require support while providing feedback, please let us know, and we will do our best to accommodate your needs.

Email: [HR@gowilsonsgroup.com](mailto:HR@gowilsonsgroup.com)

Mail: 1925 Blanshard St, Victoria, BC V8T 4J2

Phone: 778-405-0231

An alternative format of this Accessibility Plan or Progress Report can be requested through any of the provided methods.

## Public Communication Channels

VICL participates in multiple forms of formal and informal communications, including websites, social media, face-to-face, phone, chat (website and social media), surveys, and newsletters. In all forms of communication, we strive to prevent and remove barriers to accessibility and can provide alternative formats upon request.

For a full list of public communications channels, see Appendix A

## The Accessibility Team

The accessibility leadership team includes managers and executives who play a key role in communicating to employees and the public regarding accessibility. This team is responsible for the oversight of accessibility in all aspects of the business, while ensuring the execution of the Accessibility Plan and the prevention of new barriers when possible.

**Ali Spillette, VP People and Culture** (receives/distributes feedback and primary accessibility contact)

**Chelsea Crowther, Operations Manager**

## Our Accessibility Statement

At VICL, we are committed to making our organization and the services we provide accessible to all, including persons with disabilities. All individuals have the right to benefit from our services equally, and those who work with us have the right to perform their duties free of barriers.

## Acknowledgements

We want to thank everyone who participated in our consultations. Without learning about those lived experiences, we would not be able to reach our goal of being barrier-free by 2040.

## Reporting Our Plan and Progress Report

As required by the *Accessible Canada Act*, we will publish a status report annually that measures our progress against our commitments. We will also review and update our Accessibility Plan every three years.



Figure 2: A group of smiling adults is seated on a bus, enjoying the view through large side windows.

## Addressing Areas Identified in the Accessibility Canada Act (ACA)

### Employment

VICL provides Charter Services for groups, private functions, scheduled, and school bus services. Being a family-owned and operated company, our employees are what make VICL thrive, therefore, we must ensure accessibility is present at every stage of employment. This means accommodation must be available upon request as reasonably possible, with accessibility in mind when creating new policies, processes, and practices as necessary.

Feedback from the 2025 consultation process highlights that those accommodations already available – or easily implemented – during recruitment are not being clearly understood or effectively communicated.

#### **Our Desired Outcome:**

- VICL attracts qualified candidates with disabilities according to their availability on the labour market for our occupations.
- Ensure that employees with disabilities feel respected and treated equally to all other employees.
- Ensure employees and job seekers are aware of accommodation and face minimal barriers during the employee lifecycle, with no stigma or trepidation present when asking for accommodation.

#### **Barriers Identified in Accessibility Plan:**

- Expand understanding of the range and variety of accommodation options available to persons with disabilities.
- Our current number of job applicants and employees hired with disabilities is lower than labour market availability.

#### **What We Have Achieved:**

- Consulted with organizations that support employment in the Nanaimo area.
- Enhance the careers section of our website to increase visibility of VICL among Canadians with disabilities and signal our commitment to their inclusion in our workforce.
- Implemented recruitment policies to ensure all job advertisements include communication with individual candidates, allowing them to request accommodation during the recruitment process.
- Increased ease of access to our job postings through the implementation of an applicant tracking software (ATS) and enhancements to the careers page on our website.

#### **Next Steps:**

- Educate our Operations Manager and Dispatcher on accessibility and how they can ensure a barrier-free hiring, selection, and accommodation process.
- Promote open conversation about the benefits of utilizing different workplace setups to ensure everyone is aware of the accommodation options and availability.

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## The Built Environment

The Built environment comprises human-made structures, features, and facilities—it's the physical environment where people live and work.

VICL leases and conducts business out of various locations. Although we have tried to create a welcoming, accessible, and inclusive work environment, this process has given us a chance to update our existing work sites.

We are using a phased approach over the next several years, based on existing and planned projects. Such as prioritizing barrier-free facilities to fast-track accessibility for staff and clients first. In addition, we will be focusing first on high impact projects and changes that have low costs and completing larger-scale upgrades over the longer term.

Since the publication of the Accessibility Plan, VICL's business strategy has changed due to economic factors outside of the company's control, resulting in a change in the plan for its facilities and equipment.

### **Our Desired Outcomes:**

- Ensure all VICL buildings that we lease or operate from are easy for employees, visitors, and customers with disabilities or mobility issues to access.
- Build an environment where we can accommodate those with invisible barriers. Such as sensitivity to noise, lights, communications, etc.

### **Barriers in Accessibility Plan:**

- The walkways at 2230 McGarrigal Rd are narrow and inaccessible due to added optional fixtures that prevent mobility aids from entering easily.

### **What We Have Achieved:**

- Relocated shelving and supply boxes to create more space in the office and ensure walkways are wide enough for mobility aids.
- Bathroom facilities accessed by customers and employees of Mount Washington Ski Bus and Vancouver Island Connector (service operated by VICL) have been renovated to include the installation of a gender-neutral facility equipped with mobility grab rails and space for mobility aids. This location now also includes metal transition striping that is in place to reduce mobility issues for members of the public and employees.

### **Next Steps:**

- Review accessibility challenges with employees at 2230 McGarrigal Rd and all yards to further reduce barriers. At this time, no members of the public, customers, or other stakeholders have access to these areas.

## Information and Communication Technologies (ICT)

Information and communication technologies refer to the various technological tools and resources used to transmit, store, create, share, or exchange information.

As society relies more on sharing and communicating information digitally, we will work to make sure that accessibility is considered at the beginning of every marketing project. We want to make sure that our information and communications technology products, services, and digital content can be accessed and used by all.

We understand the importance that everyone, including people with disabilities, can access what they need through our websites, communications, software, and hardware.

### **Our Desired Outcomes:**

- An increase in available self-serve technology and accessibility features enhances employee independence and participation.
- Ensure persons with a disability have full access to using our technology, as reasonably possible.
- An increase in accessibility features for both employees and customers, including translation, visual aids, and more.

### **Barriers Identified in the Accessibility Plan:**

- We currently lack an efficient or consistent way to ensure alternative formats of communication are issued to frontline employees who do not have company emails or MS Office. We want to increase availability and provide a convenient, timely, and accessible way to communicate with these individuals.

### **What We Have Achieved:**

- In 2024, a new HRIS (Human Resources Information System) was implemented. This system allows employees access to company information and policies more easily. This increases the accessibility of documents for frontline staff that do not have company email. This also allows staff to use online translation functionality and review employment documents at their own pace in different languages.
- Employee newsletters are sent out quarterly in multiple formats, including email and hard copy.
- Promoted the features and access to the HRIS platform Rise People in quarterly newsletter, email, and on-site formats.
- New employees are onboarded using Rise People throughout the recruitment and onboarding process, which has promoted the use of this platform throughout the employee lifecycle.
- Procured and implemented a new dispatch and sales software, which has increased ease of accessibility for both clients and employees with a more user-friendly interface, client portal, and driver portal, allowing for increased types of communication and booking.



**Next Steps:**

- Evaluation of websites- in progress as of the publication date of this report.
- Implement the use of additional features on the Rise People platform, including vacation, time away, staff scheduling features allowing employees more options to interact with company admin processes.
- Work with product vendor Rise People to ensure all features used by employees on Rise People are available in the app and web version, allowing for more flexibility in staff communication.
- Add language features to all websites making website content available in: Afrikaans, Albanian, Amharic, Arabic, Armenian, Azerbaijani, Basque, Belarusian, Bengali, Bosnian, Bulgarian, Catalan, Cebuano, Chichewa, Chinese (Simplified), Chinese (Traditional), Corsican, Croatian, Czech, Danish, Dutch, English, Esperanto, Estonian, Filipino, Finnish, French, Frisian, Galician, Georgian, German, Greek, Gujarati, Haitian Creole, Hausa, Hawaiian, Hebrew, Hindi, Hmong, Hungarian, Icelandic, Igbo, Indonesian, Irish, Italian, Japanese, Javanese, Kannada, Kazakh, Khmer, Korean, Kurdish (Kurmanji), Kyrgyz, Lao, Latin, Latvian, Lithuanian, Luxembourgish, Macedonian, Malagasy, Malay, Malayalam, Maltese, Maori, Marathi, Mongolian, Myanmar (Burmese), Nepali, Norwegian, Pashto, Persian, Polish, Portuguese, Punjabi, Romanian, Russian, Samoan, Scottish Gaelic, Serbian, Sesotho, Shona, Sindhi, Sinhala, Slovak, Slovenian, Somali, Spanish, Sudanese, Swahili, Swedish, Tajik, Tamil, Telugu, Thai, Turkish, Ukrainian, Urdu, Uzbek, Vietnamese, Welsh, Xhosa, Yiddish, Yoruba, Zulu.

**Communication, other than ICT**

This communication priority area recognizes that people give, receive, and understand communication in diverse ways. An organization is expected to take these differences into account and provide communications in various accessible formats for people who require them. Examples of communication products include signs, wayfinding, documents, forms, bills, and receipts that are not technologically based.

**Our Desired Outcomes:**

- Ensure the accessibility of key documents, internally and externally, for people who request them in an alternative format.
- Respond to requests for key resources or publicly available documents in an accessible format in the same amount of time as for other document requests, or as directed by applicable legislation.

**Barriers Identified in the Accessibility Plan:**

- VICL does not have a uniform process to ensure alternate formats, such as braille or captioned audio, for the information and communications it issues to employees and customers.

**What We Have Achieved:**

- Posting hard copies of employee communication and safety documents at operational sites. Including QR code and text format to allow employees to use translation apps as required.
- Updates to safe operating practices and safety programs to provide documentation that includes more pictures and diagrams.

**Next Steps:**

- Continue updates to the company safety program and onsite signage to include more easily accessible information.
- Increase alternative formats available for internal and external documentation without the need for a special request.
- Catalogue and store documents and materials requested in alternative formats.

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## Procurement of Goods, Services, and Facilities

The *Accessible Canada Act* requires us to consider accessibility requirements for procurement and include accessibility as part of the provision of goods, services, and facilities, where appropriate (e.g., accessible technology, materials, and amenities).

As a small company, we do not have the scale of procurement activities when compared to other transportation companies. Furthermore, due to the current economic climate, procurement has been slowing from what was initially anticipated for 2025, meaning the next steps activities are limited in the section of the report.

**Our Desired Outcome:**

- Accessibility becomes a part of our procurement expectations, and the goods and services we purchase are accessible from the beginning.
- The procurement process allows us to reduce barriers currently present and prevent new barriers from forming.

**Barriers Identified in the Accessibility Plan:**

- Accessibility requirements are not considered in VICL's current procedures and practices.

**What We Have Achieved:**

- Designed and implemented an Accessible Procurement Checklist used by the operations manager in procurement activities.
- Procured a new group booking and dispatching software. The previous software was proprietary with limited updates. However, the new software will decrease the barrier to use for employees and customers. Accessibility requirements were reviewed as part of the procurement phase of this project.

**Next Steps:**

- Continued use of the Accessible Procurement Checklist.
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## The Design and Delivery of Programs and Services

Accessibility is highly considered when designing and delivering VICL's internal and external programs & services.

**Charter Service:** VICL has a range of fleet vehicles and can provide groups with wheelchair lifts equipped with buses.

**Scheduled Transportation Service:** When we initially implemented the Mount Washington Ski Bus and Vancouver Island Connector in 2016, we endeavored to align the policies and accessibility features with those of other scheduled services in the area. The Vancouver Island Connector is the connecting service between BC Ferries Connector and other provincial programs. To ensure that we are inclusive of accessibility, we are working with the Travel Assistance Program operated by Health BC, and ensuring specific procedures are in place for mobility aids and guide dogs.

As our services and programs have not been significantly updated since before the creation of the initial Accessibility Plan, with no immediate substantial changes or new service offerings expected, this section of the Progress Report focuses on delivery changes rather than the design of innovative programs and services.

**Our Desired Outcome:**

- Collaborate with staff to identify and implement the delivery of programs and services that go beyond our legislated requirements, are beneficial, user-friendly, and increase productivity.

**Barriers Identified in the Accessibility Plan:**

- Currently, there is a limited and outdated standard approach for ensuring all programs and services have taken accessibility into account.

**What We Have Achieved:**

- Due to changes in the operating environment for VICL, limited progress has been made in this area.

**Next Steps:**

- Refresh older approaches and create a new accessibility checklist to help ensure key accessibility considerations are considered when services are reviewed or created.
  - Increase awareness training to support frontline staff in promoting and providing accessible services.
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## Transportation

VICL owes its ongoing success to the professional individuals who make up our team. We view our personnel as valued members of our family and are committed to supporting them in all matters of employment and accessibility.

During the consultation, which took place before the publication of this Progress Report, barriers related to the ability to become a coach operator were highlighted. In addition, the inadequacies of public transit and other transportation methods required to get the coach operators to work on time and at the times required to operate effective services.

### **Our Desired Outcomes:**

- Better understand gaps in transportation systems.
- Study barriers to affordable transportation and how they can impact equity groups in Canada.
- Ensure all coach operators are well-trained in assistive equipment.

### **Barriers Identified in the Accessibility Plan:**

- VICL's fleet has a variety of transportation options, which are not all equipped with the same added features. As a result, coach operators are not all trained in utilizing unique accessibility features on all vehicles, such as operating the lift and accommodating and supporting customers with mobility aids (such as walkers, wheelchairs, motorized scooters, etc.).

### **What We Have Achieved:**

- Partnered with Perkopolis to provide employee discounts on gas and other transportation services.
- Implemented a new travel policy including a clear process for the use of fleet vehicles, reimbursement for travel expenses, and use of personal vehicles.
- Provided one-on-one training to some Drivers on utilization of accessibility features in vehicles.

### **Next Steps:**

- Collaborate with agencies to support persons with accessibility changes in gaining access to our services.
- Provide more consistent and streamlined onboarding with new Drivers and Customer Service Staff at stations to support proper use and knowledge of accessibility features.
- Implement annual Customer Service Training to decrease barriers to accessing transportation services due to staff interactions.
- Ensure drivers are retrained and refreshed in how to use accessibility features on the vehicles they drive and how to support passengers with accessibility challenges.

## Culture

As a family-owned and operated business with deep roots in the community where we live and work, VICL is committed to fostering a culture grounded in diversity, inclusion, and shared values. Community is one of our core principles, and we take pride in giving back to the communities we serve.

### **Barrier Identified in Accessibility Plan:**

- As an equal opportunity employer, there is currently no flexible accommodation for employees who follow different calendared holidays.

### **What we Have Done:**

- The implementation of the new HRIS platform in 2024, designed for managing holidays and employee communication, will streamline the promotion of cultural initiatives going forward.

### **Next Steps:**

- In an effort to make VICL more culturally inclusive, we propose implementing a policy that allows employees to substitute a federally recognized statutory holiday with a religious or cultural day of personal significance. For example, an Australian employee who wishes to observe Anzac Day instead of Victoria Day could work on Victoria Day at their regular rate and receive statutory holiday pay on Anzac Day.
- Increase the internal and external celebration of cultural events.

## Consultation

To align with VICL's commitment to accessibility and in compliance with the *Accessible Canada Act*, we have developed this Progress Report in consultation with internal and external stakeholders to support the identification, removal, and prevention of barriers for our employees, clients, and members of the public who use our services.

The Company understands that collaborating with persons with disabilities is a crucial factor in continuing to progress our accessibility programs. With this in mind, we have taken steps to seek out meaningful consultation using a variety of formats.

The first facet of our consultation included surveys (available in multiple formats). These surveys were used to identify new or continuing barriers, as well as feedback on the changes made since the initial Accessibility Plan was published. This portion of the consultation included persons with accessibility challenges and went out to members of the public, clients, employees, and partner organization.

The second portion of this process included specific informational interviews with several organizations who support persons with accessibility challenges including: universities, nonprofit organizations and government-funded programs and crown corporations (most individuals consulted did not want their name and title published in this report). These interviews were conducted mostly by video call; alternative formats were available.

## Consultation Results

- 44% of external stakeholders who participated in the consultation identified as someone with accessibility challenges.
- 25% of external stakeholders notice an improvement in accessibility in the past 12 months.
- 23% of external stakeholders indicated they were aware of the accessibility features offered.
- 18% of external stakeholders indicated they were very satisfied or satisfied without existing accessibility features, and 18% indicated a neutral response.
- Through the interview process, barriers related to employee's (or potential employees) ability to get to work, and changes to work environment and location, were highlighted by several organizations as key areas to address in decreasing accessibility barriers. They additionally highlighted areas already implemented since the Accessibility Plan was published illustrating that we need to communicate what we have already achieved.
- Of the 20 people employed by VICL, only 2 participated in the consultation, none of whom had accessibility challenges or noticed any change in accessibility features provided. 1 indicated they would like more training on accessibility features in the fleet.

The results gathered informed the progress report and many of the “Next Steps” headings in each section of this report. For example, we have indicated in several areas of the report that we will continue to work on employee training to support this deficiency highlighted during consultation. VICL currently only has 3 full-time staff and several part-time and casual employees. This combined with turnover, decreased the amount and depth of employee consultation.

## Feedback

While we did not receive formal feedback through the process outlined in the 2024 Accessibility Plan, we did receive informal input from community organizations and employees. This feedback has played a key role in shaping the priorities and development of VICL's accessibility strategy. Some suggestions have already been implemented and documented in the “What We Have Achieved” sections of this report. Other relevant and measurable feedback is currently in progress and outlined under the “Next Steps” section of this report. A small portion of the feedback received was either not applicable to the organization or beyond our scope of control.

To encourage greater feedback moving forward, we have updated the placement and wording of this section on our website to make it more visible and accessible.

## Conclusion

VICL continues to take deliberate action toward building a diverse, inclusive, and accessible organization equipped to provide transportation service to the public and breakdown barriers to employment. This commitment along with our company core values (safety, community, teamwork and excellence) will serve as driving forces to set goals in 2026.



## Definitions

**Accessibility** – Refers to the needs of persons with disabilities being intentionally and thoughtfully considered when products, services, and facilities are built or modified so they can be used and enjoyed by persons of all abilities.

**Barrier** – The Accessible Canada Act defines a barrier as “anything – including anything physical, architectural, technological, or attitudinal, anything that is based on information or communications or anything that is the result of a policy of a practice – that hinders the full and equal participation in society of persons with an impairment, including a physical, mental, intellectual, cognitive, learning, communication, or sensory impairment or a functional limitation.

**Disability** – The Accessible Canada Act defines a disability as “any impairment including anything physical, mental, intellectual, cognitive, learning, communication, or sensory impairment, or a functional limitation, whether permanent, temporary, or episodic, or evident or not, that, interaction with a barrier, hinders a person’s full and equal participation in society.



*Figure 3: A coastal cityscape shows a harbor filled with boats, surrounded by tall buildings and dense forested hills. This scene is calm and clear, with water stretching into the distance.*

***Even small changes can have huge impacts***

## Appendix A

### Websites:

<https://mtwskibus.com/>

<https://vicoachlines.com/>

<https://viconnector.com/>

<https://victoriacruiseservices.com/>

### Instagram:

@mtwashinton.ski.bus

### Facebook

<https://www.facebook.com/mtwskibus/>