

November 29, 2019

Re: B.C. Accessibility Legislative Framework

We appreciate the opportunity to provide feedback to the B.C. Accessibility Legislative Framework; we support the approach the B.C. Government is taking in engaging stakeholders that will be affected by the legislation.

At BC Hydro, we are committed to creating an inclusive culture and building a workforce that reflects the diversity of the Province because we understand that hiring people with different backgrounds and ways of thinking will help us innovate, make good decisions and better serve our customers. We are in the process of reviewing the accessibility in our built environment and are engaged in ensuring our workplace culture is welcoming and inclusive. We understand that a working culture of inclusion is foundational for employee health, wellness and safety and in our ability to deliver on our objectives.

As a Crown Corporation, BC Hydro is prepared to lead by example in the application of principles of inclusion, adaptability, diversity, and collaboration – and is committed to share learnings and encourage businesses of all sizes to participate in making B.C. the most progressive province in Canada for people with disabilities.

BC Hydro has participated in the Consultation for Business session and has participated as a member organization in the President's Group submission to the B.C. Government on the upcoming accessibility legislation.

BC Hydro is educating leaders and employees engaged in work with Government on the Comprehensive Review about Gender-Based Analysis Plus (GBA+) and seeks, in partnership with government, to ensure that energy plans for the Province are responsive to the diverse needs and circumstances of all British Columbians. We are also seeking opportunities to embed the GBA+ framework into the work we do to meet external customer needs, such as in our stakeholder consultation process and in our work with Indigenous Relations.

We agree with the Government of B.C. in supplementing the protections of human rights already in place, including the B.C. Human Rights Code and the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, and are implementing the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) in the context of the work we do.

RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS IN THE FRAMEWORK

MODEL & SCOPE

What is important to BC Hydro about accessibility legislation for BC?

It is important that our customers, unions, intervenors and our regulator understand why investments to support accessibility are required and their associated benefits.

Implementation of accessibility initiatives will require a clear and consistent definition of disability and plainly worded standards, regulations and reporting requirements.

What do you think about the suggested model for legislation and the scope of legislation?

BC Hydro supports the approach described in the Framework. We agree that developing standards and regulation by collaborating with persons with disabilities, experts and other stakeholders will lead to the best outcomes.

Do you have other ideas for the model for legislation and the scope of legislation you would like considered?

BC Hydro has had positive experiences with the Canadian Council for Aboriginal Business 'Progressive Aboriginal Relations' designation. The recommendations resulting from this type of process help companies focus on progress – rather than on compliance. It has an accountability-by-design effect because the renewal of the designation requires a report-out on the recommendations of the previous cycle.

Similarly, the Rick Hansen Foundation Accessibility Certification™ program helps provide employers with a clear understanding of how their workplace functions for people with disabilities. Once rated, a site may be certified at one of two levels: 'RHF Accessibility Certified' or 'RHF Accessibility Certified Gold.' Organizations can then publicly list their certification level to signal that the location is accessible. One of the most useful parts of the assessment is a report with clear recommendations for improvement.

We recommend creating an "Accessible Employer Designation". It would signal to job seekers with a disability that accessibility is a priority and that the work environment and culture would be welcoming. It could also provide employment for people with disabilities in partnering with companies of all sizes on adjudication processes developed to support small, medium and large businesses.

PURPOSE & PRINCIPLES

What do you think about the suggested purposes and principles for legislation?

BC Hydro supports the purpose and principles in the Framework, specifically the emphasis on collaboration with the community of people with disabilities in the development of standards and regulations.

Do you have other ideas about the purposes and principles that should guide accessibility legislation?

To ensure adequate collaboration, it may make it easier for business to have a guide for engaging stakeholders from the community of people with disabilities.

STANDARDS

What do you think about the suggested approach to accessibility standards?

BC Hydro supports the areas for Accessibility Standards as described in the Framework.

TIMELINES

What do you think about the suggested approach to timelines for accessibility legislation?

BC Hydro supports the approach of using timelines outlined in the Framework.

Do you have other ideas about the development of accessibility standards or timelines for accessibility standards?

BC Hydro recommends developing support for meaningful engagement with the community of People with Disabilities. Examples are:

- A brief on how to respectfully and effectively engage with people with various disabilities.
- A guide on how to find, engage and perform adequate stakeholder engagement.
- A presentation template clearly explaining the scope, roles of the parties and objectives.
- Additional resources to support business if communication tools need to be adapted for stakeholders with disabilities.

GOVERNANCE

What do you think about the suggested approach to governance for accessibility legislation?

BC Hydro supports the governance structure as described in the Framework.

Do you have other ideas about governance for accessibility legislation?

We recommend that business should have a single point of contact for reporting progress.

INCENTIVES, COMPLIANCE & ENFORCEMENT

What do you think about the suggested approach to incentives, compliance and enforcement of accessibility legislation?

BC Hydro supports the approach to incentives as described in the Framework.

On compliance, we are concerned about the potential problem that many organizations will be seeking the input and involvement of the same community in the creation of plans and validating progress, which may place undue pressure on the community of people with disabilities.

On enforcement, BC Hydro supports consistency with other jurisdictions but would encourage flexibility in respect to progress on implementation; especially as it relates to the built environment or requisite technology implementation.

Do you have other ideas about how to achieve the right mix of incentives and compliance/enforcement tools for accessibility legislation?

On incentives, we recommend a government awareness campaign about the legislation and its priority for the Province.

On compliance and enforcement, we recommend self-reporting requirements that are meaningful but not onerous and establishing mechanisms for appeal or escalation.

LEGISLATIVE REVIEWS

What do you think about having reviews of accessibility legislation?

BC Hydro supports periodic legislative reviews as described in the Framework.

If you support legislative reviews, how often should they occur?

We recommend legislative reviews every 5 years.

BEYOND LEGISLATION

What other initiatives or actions would you recommend to promote a culture of accessibility?

We recommend a means for employers to self-assess their readiness to integrate people with disabilities into their company. It will be essential to the success of improving the employment outcomes of people with disabilities that the environment is welcoming and supportive.

Employers may need help in determining the types of accommodation or identifying what kinds of technology, tools and resources are available to support employees with a disability.

Employers may need help in training their current employees how to work with someone with a disability.

Employers may need help to creating a working culture of respect and inclusion.

How else can accessibility legislation support cultural change and vice-versa?

Accessibility legislation signals to British Columbians with a disability that government understands their right to full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms.

The co-creation of plans and the validation of progress between the business community and people with disabilities will increase understanding, dialogue and problem-solving. Research has proven that that diversity in groups, with their unique heuristics and life experience leads to better outcomes. Cultural change comes as behaviours and norms begin to shift, and this legislation is a nudge to business to increase their efforts to include people with disabilities in their workplaces.

As business integrates more people with disabilities and people without disabilities have the chance to work with them and get to know them, it will establish a new workplace norm. Further, as people with disabilities see themselves represented across all business sectors, they will gain confidence that employers value their skills and potential contributions to their business.

CONCLUSION

BC Hydro appreciates the opportunity to provide feedback on the Framework for Accessibility Legislation in B.C.

As a Crown Corporation, we are prepared to lead by example in the application of principles of inclusion, adaptability, diversity, and collaboration – and we are committed to share learning and encourage businesses of all sizes to participate in making B.C. the most progressive province in Canada for people with disabilities.