



SURREY BOARD OF TRADE

ACCESSIBILITY FRAMEWORK RESPONSE

THE NEED FOR A COMPREHENSIVE ACCESSIBILITY
LEGISLATION THAT WORKS WITH
BUSINESS AND FOR THE ECONOMY

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1. INTRODUCTION

The Surrey Board of Trade (SBOT), a not-for-profit organization with a membership of over 6,000 business contacts and nearly 3,000 businesses, supports business and attracts business. Our role is to enhance economic opportunities. The Surrey Board of Trade contributes to city-building initiatives that enhance livability in the region.

The BC Government has called for public consultation on a Framework for Accessibility Legislation. “The purpose of this Framework for Accessibility Legislation is to begin a conversation about accessibility legislation for B.C. Currently, BC does not have comprehensive legislation to help identify, remove, and prevent barriers experienced by persons with disabilities. This document outlines ideas about what accessibility legislation in BC could look like. However, these ideas are not finalized. There are several accompanying questions in this document and your input and feedback will help guide the subsequent development of BC’s accessibility legislation.

The Surrey Board of Trade asked its membership through a survey for their input on the BC Government’s proposed legislation.

As indicated by Statistics Canada, approximately one in seven Canadians report living with a disability that affects their mobility, cognition, sight, hearing, learning or mental well-being. Whether we know it or not, all of us love someone who lives with a disability. It is our responsibility to help ensure these individuals feel like valued members of society.

For small-business owners, the prospect of costly modifications to their physical or virtual place of business may be especially daunting. Implementing these changes will come back to businesses in a positive way, financially. People with disabilities are not unique in that if they feel their business is appreciated, they will be repeat customers for life. Nearly every Canadian will face a challenge to their accessibility at some point in their lifetime.



Adults at the age of 65 and older outnumbered children in Canada for the first time in 2018 a clear illustration of our country's aging population. Statistics Canada further predicts that by the year 2031, one in every four Canadians will fall into the 65-plus demographic. Although their mobility may be limited, seniors want to stay active and engaged in their golden years and they often have monetary resources to spend on these endeavours. Consider the lucrative small-business opportunities this could present for savvy entrepreneurs. Simply integrating accessibility into a business plan could help engage a loyal customer base.

The conclusion: There is overwhelming support for the proposed framework. The business community in Surrey declared that the accessibility framework would be beneficial to the economy in the long run by allowing full employment and improving standards across the board. Not only can there be solutions to help minimize skills shortage, but there will be increased economic activity. Making Canadian businesses architecturally, physically, technologically and attitudinally accessible will significantly help their bottom line. After making reasonable accommodations, business owners will also find that they can recruit from a new pool of highly skilled workers.

2. RESULTS SUMMARY

A survey was distributed to the Surrey Board of Trade’s membership and network.

The survey contained four questions:

2.1 Do you think accessibility is important to business and the economy?

All respondents to this question shared the same sentiment – the importance of accessibility has been



downplayed in the past. Current legislation and practices do not provide adequate opportunities for people of varying abilities. There are an increasing number of people in B.C. that have disabilities. As our population ages, this number will be growing. The B.C. government must work with local

governments and businesses to ensure that accessibility to places, spaces and workplaces are strengthened.

Businesses that employ people of varying abilities demonstrates inclusivity. A large aspect of the accessibility legislation must be focused around inclusion. The economy will see the benefits as employment rates are reduced, and there is more spending in the economy. Additionally, there will be less reliance on government funding and thus increased government revenue to spend on enhanced accessibility.

2.2 What should be included in accessibility legislation to help businesses and their workplaces?

The general trend of the respondents was to ensure that businesses be accessible. As this survey was sent to business organizations, many of the respondents were concerned that costs would be borne on building and business owners.

The BC Government needs to take a leadership role in ensuring that funding or incentives are available to businesses and building owners to update and build accessible spaces.

It was noted that respondents wanted to see all new buildings be built to specifications that allowed for full accessibility. There are many programs offered by the Rick Hansen Foundation, for example, that describe and outline accessibility standards. These standards should be adopted by B.C. building codes as the minimum requirement for new buildings.

The accessibility legislation should also provide incentives to businesses in hiring people with varying abilities. Programs need to be in place that support the business community. Without government and businesses working together on this effort, the legislation will face challenges when implemented.

Finally, appropriate consultation with business organizations such as Boards of Trade and Chambers of Commerce are needed prior to development of the legislation.

2.3 Incentives: What do you think about the suggested incentives, compliance, and enforcement for accessibility legislation?

The B.C. Government has plans to implement incentives, and compliance enforcement options for employers.



Enforcement measures could be available in case of non-compliance and could include:

- Accessibility inspections;
- Mediation;
- Publication of information about known barriers to accessibility; and/or
- Monetary penalties.



Business Education Opportunities:

Survey respondents wanted some guidance and education that could be in partnership with business organizations. A summary:

Customer Service Standards Checklist *Establish policies on serving people of all abilities. *Allow people to use their own personal assistive devices, along with any other assistive tools or services your organization offers. *Communicate with the person with a disability in a way that takes their needs into account. *Welcome service animals in those areas of your business that are open to the public. *Permit a support person to accompany the customer. *Post a notice if admission fees are charged for a support person. *Provide notice of disruption of service when facilities or services that people with disabilities rely on to access your business are unavailable. *Train staff, volunteers, contractors, and any other people who interact with the public on your behalf, on accessible customer service standards. Ensure that anyone involved in developing policies, practices, and procedures (e.g., managers) also receives training. *Establish a feedback process that allows customers with disabilities to comment on their experience. Establish Policies Small businesses must develop, implement, and maintain policies about how they will serve people with disabilities. *Guidance on Accessible Employment Policies

Accessibility legislation would also introduce measures to ensure individuals and public and private organizations are compliant with the legislation. Measures that could be considered include:

- Accessibility plans and progress reports prepared in consultation with people with disabilities;
- Creation of new channels for employees, customers, or members of the public to provide feedback about accessibility; and/or,
- Creation of community hubs offering tools, resources and training to support accessibility.”

We asked our members for their thoughts on the above items. The general response was that the plan is a good approach. It was noted that any incentives be able to substantially offset the cost of upgrades and new buildings. This will ensure compliance. Other respondents noted that any upgrades and new building requirements should be funded by government and so the timeline may be extended but it will ensure compliance.

Any fine should be scaled to the size of the business. Small businesses should receive lesser penalties than that of large conglomerates or corporations.

3. CONCLUSION

The Surrey Board of Trade concludes that Surrey's business community, as well as local, provincial and federal governments have much to gain from implementing accessibility legislation. Skills shortage can be addressed in a strategic way, resulting in increased economic activity. Ensuring that buildings are accessible is essential in any legislation considered.

All new buildings should be built to specifications that allowed for full accessibility. There are many programs offered by the Rick Hansen Foundation that describe and outline accessibility standards. These standards should be adopted by B.C. building codes as the minimum requirement for new buildings.

Compliance, enforcement, and incentives must be carefully considered, and with the consultation of businesses and business organizations. An overburden on the small-medium enterprises (SMEs) will see a negative effect on the overall economy.