

Improving Accessibility on Campus

Group 1 Progress Report

Prepared for:

Dr. Emeka Oguejiofor, FEC, P.Eng

Paul Doiron, P. Eng

Prepared by:

Jacob Daniels

Luke Drohan

Kerilyn Kennedy

Sara Murrin

Department of Engineering

St. Francis Xavier University

Design & Communications II

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1. Introduction

Since the Project Proposal, we set specific goals and objectives to complete over the past few weeks. We managed to hold a meeting with the head of Facilities Management to start a conversation on what St. Francis Xavier University's (StFX) plans are for the future, regarding making campus more accessible. We have also conducted more in-depth research into accessibility standards and legislature. Since the proposal we have managed to refine all our ideas and narrow them down to a select few that we will pursue and continue to improve for accessibility.

2. Meeting with Head of Facilities Management (Leon Maclellan)

On Tuesday, February 11th our group met with the head of Facilities Management, Mr. Leon MacLellan. We met with Mr. MacLellan to better match our ideas to St. FX's future plans, current plans, and thoughts on accessibility. Mr. MacLellan began the meeting by explaining the lack of legislature on what standards to use. He talked about what the nationwide standards for accessibility are, he believed the 'gold standard' to be the Rick Hansen standards. He also went on to discuss the problem they have balancing accessibility and security. They must find a balance between making buildings and services accessible to all without compromising the security.

One of the main topics that Leon addressed was the communication between Facilities management and a student with a disability. He emphasized the importance of the student reaching out to Facilities Management so that they can make the proper arrangements to make campus more accessible for them. For example, they had a previous situation where two separate visually impaired students had guide dogs to help them travel around campus. One dog was allergic to natural salt and the allergic to artificial salt. Facilities Management had to plan out two separate routes across campus, corresponding to the locations of their classes, so that the two dogs wouldn't cross paths. Another way in which Facilities Management accommodate disabled students is by implementing beds that can vibrate when the fire alarm is activated. This is used when a student with hearing disabilities live on campus so if they cannot hear the fire alarm they will be awoken to the bed vibrating.

Leon mentioned their current projects, which include the demolition of Lane Hall and shortly afterwards the construction of the new Centre for Health Innovation that will be located at the same spot. After the completion of the Centre for Health Innovation, they plan to demolish the Annex. This was useful to know as now that we know the Annex is closing, we will pay more attention to other accessibility problems around campus. With regards to the future plans that StFX have to make campus more accessible was disappointing. StFX currently has no future plans to make campus more accessible as they are waiting for the government to release the provinces accessibility standard.

3. Research into Legislature and Standards

The Accessibility Act enacted by the government of Nova Scotia in 2017 has created a basic framework to plan the future of accessibility standards in the province. It is essentially a preliminary plan for the overall process and includes what decisions need to be made. The standards will surround the identification, removal, and prevention of barriers. The standards can be general or specific and limited to a time and place and apply to different classes of groups. The Act does not include the standards themselves or any dates, it is only an outline.

The Nova Scotia government has published their own research into accessibility needs across the province since the Accessibility Act of 2017. The document, called “What we heard”, was a summary of the results from focus groups, online questionnaires, public engagement sessions, stakeholder meetings, and direct submissions. 63% of respondents to the surveys had a disability. They determined that their goal is to be inclusive and equitable, barrier free, and safe and respectful. Their top priorities are reducing barriers for education and in infrastructure, which means StFX needs to focus on removing key barriers.

A formal timeline of the government’s plan has been released in a document titled “Access by Design”. The timeline shows that the education and built environment standards will be enacted in 2021, as they are currently in development. In 2022, these standards will be implemented. Please see figure 1 for more details. The document also outlines how Nova Scotia has more disabilities than the Canadian average and seeks to create a place where someone with a disability is fully supported. The aim of the standards is stated as to achieve that “persons in Nova Scotia have equitable access to inclusive public and post-secondary education”.

In addition, the government has begun releasing resources for municipalities, including a toolkit that outlines making town committees, planning, consulting, and removing barriers.

The most recognized and inclusive accessibility standards that currently exist are the Rick Hansen Standards. The Rick Hansen foundation has published a wealth of resources available for creating accessible spaces and certifying infrastructure as accessible. There are articles about what to consider for accessibility, such as curbs, sidewalks, elevators and automatic doors. There are also guides available for making specific things more accessible, such as elevators, entrances and doors, ramps and washrooms. Most importantly, the foundation provides a Professional Handbook which gives specific details and requirements for ramps, doorways and parts of a building accessible. This handbook outlines down to the millimeter the specifications, which we intend to use as our main reference when designing.

For example, the Rick Hansen standards recommend a 1:20 ramp slope, while the National Building code requires 1:12. For the purposes of our project, we will aim to achieve the recommendations set out by the Rick Hansen Foundation, which surpass the normal codes.

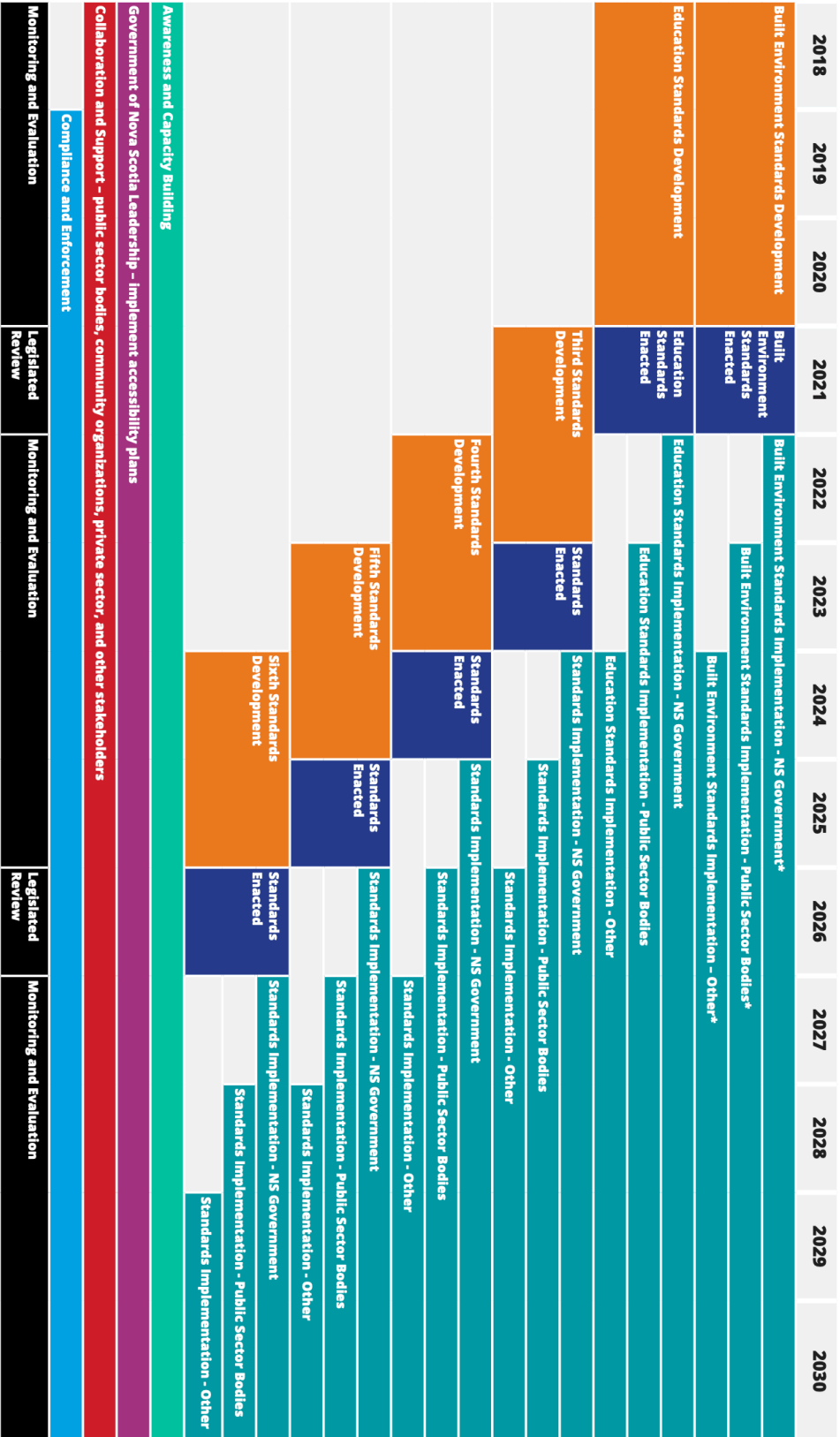


Figure 1: Timeline of Accessibility Standards from “Accessible by design”

4. Refined Ideas

Since our proposal the ramp at the Annex, skywalk, external elevator and conveyor belt projects have all been scrapped. The conveyor belt and skywalk ideas were impractical and overly expensive solutions to a problem that could ultimately be solved using ramps. The two ramps we intend to design at Schwartz and Bloomfield will create two new paths connecting the upper and lower sections of campus, greatly improving accessible routes. The external elevator idea was only relevant to Mackinnon Hall, Cameron Hall, Somers Hall, and Power Hall and was cut after our meeting with Facilities Management since there are more accessible residences that people with permanent disabilities would be placed in instead. Since the Annex is set to be torn down in the near future, a ramp construction project is not a logical solution. Plans can be made to move classes in the Annex before the semester starts and professors can meet elsewhere on campus if a student with a permanent disability requires access to the building. As for students and faculty with temporary disabilities accessing the annex, in the past they have used the freight elevator and can gain access to the key should they need it.

Our projects going forward will include installing automated door operators around campus, improving signage around campus including a detailed campus map and constructing ramps at Schwartz and the Bloomfield Center (view figures 2 and 3 for photos of ramp locations). The focus of our signage project will be elevator locations in buildings that have elevators such as J.B.B and Bloomfield and accessible entrances to buildings such as Immaculata. We chose this focus based on information gathered in our survey that indicated poor signage and lack of knowledge of accessible routes. The focus for the automated door operators is the Oland Center, as recommended by L'Arche in the meeting we had.



Figure 2: Schwartz Ramp Location



Figure 3: Bloomfield Ramp Location

5. Goals for the Remainder of the Project

During the final weeks of the project, we plan to research in depth about how to build a ramp. This research will contain but is not limited to rules and safety guidelines, space and landing requirements, and choosing appropriate ramp materials. We intend to accompany this research with a meeting with a local architect as well as a Bird Construction engineer. After taking measurements and doing calculations, drawings will be conducted. Output files such as AutoCAD drawings will be created to support our drawings. A cost analysis will be conducted for each of the individual projects. We also plan to continually update our project website as the project progresses.

6. Sources

<https://novascotia.ca/accessibility/consultation/what-we-heard-accessibility-in-Nova-Scotia.pdf>

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