

Access for People with Disabilities

CityPlan

Riley Park/South Cambie RPSC

Vancouver enjoys a reputation as being one of the most accessible cities in the world. Whether using wheelchairs, white canes or hearing aids, Vancouver leads the way in making the area a more livable place for people with disabilities through its progressive transportation systems, innovative housing and recreational opportunities.

City Role

The City, along with other levels of government and agencies, is active in many areas to improve access for persons with disabilities, including mobility, visual, or hearing impairment.

More than 1 in 10 Vancouver residents have physical disabilities. There are approximately 37,000 disability placards issued to residents of the Lower Mainland, including roughly 10,000 within the City of Vancouver.

This fact sheet outlines some of the key City programs and initiatives which improve access for people with disabilities.

Council's Special Advisory Committee on Disability Issues

The objective of this Special Advisory Committee is to make the city more livable for disabled residents through the removal of physical and social barriers that impede their full participation in city life.

The committee's role is to provide advice to staff and Council, on matters which affect people with disabilities, and to monitor City programs to ensure the needs of persons with disabilities are considered.

Public Streets and Sidewalks

Every journey begins and ends with a pedestrian trip. Making all downtown streets more accessible, comfortable and safe is crucial to developing a liveable city where the street becomes a place of interest and focus for the community. Proposed policies will create a core network of downtown greenways and pedestrian arterials that connect neighbourhoods, transit stops, activity centres, places of work and leisure, and regional greenways.

Significant pedestrian improvements are proposed on streets such as Helmcken, Carrall, Granville and Homer and may include:

- widening sidewalks;
- creating corner bulges;
- improving pedestrian lighting;
- safer sidewalk crossings at lanes and intersections;
- enhancing weather protection; and,
- creating curb ramps.

Additional pedestrian improvements may include:

- removing pedestrian holds (advance right-turns for cars);
- eliminating cross-walk restrictions;
- improving crosswalk design and width;
- providing street furniture including benches, drinking fountains and public art.

The following are some features that are designed to specifically enhance accessibility to public space.

Curb ramps at intersections

Over 65% of curbed street corners in the city have ramps. In the downtown core, this number rises to 90%. The City's goal is to provide curb ramps at all street corners over the next 50 years.

Individuals and groups can bring priority locations to the attention of City engineers by phoning 604-871-6131.

Audible traffic signals

Roughly 150 intersections in the city have audible signals. The annual budget for installing these signals is \$50,000, enough to retrofit 5 to 10 intersections per year, depending on the type of signal. About 80% of audible installations are done in response to requests from residents.

Each request for audible signals is reviewed with the Canadian National Institute of the Blind (CNIB). Consideration is given to the type of nearby pedestrian traffic generators, such as the CNIB office, hospitals, clinics, schools that offer classes to visually impaired students, major transit transfer stops, and areas with a high number of seniors.

In 1990 it became policy that all new pedestrian-activated traffic signals be installed with an audible feature.

Audible signals are also in place at intersections where traffic signals are vehicle-activated.

For 2000, a new state-of-the-art audible touch-oriented signal button will be installed at some crossings. This unit emits a regular audible beep that helps hearing-impaired individuals locate the button. A vibrating arrow indicates to people with hearing impairments when it is safe to cross in a given direction.

Crossing times at signalized intersections Crossing times are set to meet the needs of a wide range of pedestrians, including children and seniors. Requests for increased crossing times, if approved, effect the duration that the “flashing hand” is active.

Requests for longer crossing times can be made by calling Engineering staff at 604-873-7910.

Housing Programs and Projects

Non-Market Housing

The Province's BC Housing Management Commission provides funding for non-market housing and requires that 5% of the units be accessible, or adaptable, for disabled people. Accessible units have wider doorways, lower counter tops and grab-bars to enable independent living. The City facilitates non-market projects by providing city-owned land at a reduced cost.

Attendant Care:

Through the Province's Share Care Program, severely disabled people are eligible for attendant care. To get a 24-hour, full-time attendant, six units are needed. Recently, units like these have been provided through rezonings in a private-public partnership, where the City provided a density bonus for desired items such as accessible housing.

Special Needs Housing

Since the mid 1970s, City Council has strongly supported the right of people with disabilities to live in the community. Many group homes accommodate people with disabilities - see the fact sheet on Special Needs Households and Homes for more information.

Vancouver Building By-law

The Building By-law for large-scale residential, commercial, and institutional buildings requires many provisions to accommodate persons with disabilities, including:

- access ramps;
- adequate hallway widths;
- refuge areas for emergencies; and
- accessible bathrooms.

The By-law also requires accessibility measures to be provided if significant renovations or change of uses occur within existing buildings.

Vancouver Parking By-law

In July, 2001 City Staff proposed revisions to Vancouver's Parking By-law to implement changes to enhance parking accessibility. Proposed changes includes: to increase the number of access parking spaces, to introduce separate standards to various users or groups of users, to increase the dimensions of disability parking spaces and to improve requirements for accessibility of ticketing equipment in parking facilities in Vancouver.

Community Centres and Recreation

Improving access to community facilities is a priority for the Park Board. The Board allocates part of their capital budget each year to improve accessibility in parks, community centres, and other facilities. Priorities are set so that the limited budget will be used in locations where the most benefit will be realized. Some community centres have provided matching funds, raised by the centre, to improve access.

All centres have accessible washrooms and signed parking.

Many of the Park Board's recreational programs have been adapted to enable people with various disabilities to actively participate in recreational activities. For a complete list of adapted programs contact Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation at 604-257-8400.

Accessible equipment provided by at Park Board facilities include:

- Aquatic Pool Lifts are available at all indoor pools (except Britannia)
- Aquatic Wheelchairs are for use at all swimming pools. Ask a lifeguard or pool staff for assistance.
- Ice Sledges are available at rinks at no cost. Wheelchairs are welcome during public sessions; participants must wear helmets and the person pushing the wheelchair must be on skates. Contact Rink Programmer for availability.
- Soft Path Kit is a temporary pathway over soft sand for wheelchairs to have beach access. Ask for the kit at the Life Guard Station at English Bay and Spanish Banks West.
- Golf Xpress Cart is for experienced golfers who have upper body mobility and ability to bear weight. Call in advance to book at the Pro Shop at McCleery, Fraserview and Langara courses.
- The summer Shuttle Bus in Stanley Park is accessible and stops at 14 locations.
- The Stanley Park Train and Beaver Lake Trail are wheelchair accessible. Call 604.801.5515 for more info.
- The horse-drawn tours of Stanley Park are wheelchair accessible.

The Riley Park Community Centre has entry at grade and automatic front door; accessible washrooms and adapted social and fitness programs.

The Douglas Park Community Centre has various adopted social programs and in progress to create accessible fitness programs. They have an automatic front door and accessible washrooms.

Transit and Taxi Service

In 1990, Vancouver became the first city in Canada to provide scheduled bus service to people with disabilities. More than 50% of all Lower Mainland buses are accessible, with plans to have all routes covered by 2007.

All rapid transit SkyTrain stations, except Granville Street, are also accessible. The Special Advisory Committee continues to follow plans impacting the currently inaccessible Granville SkyTrain.

Many new Translink buses are equipped with wheel-chair ramps.

Translink also runs an on-call wheelchair-accessible mini-van service (the Handy-Dart). Several taxi companies offer specially designed taxis to accommodate wheelchairs.

For more information on Handy-Dart Services call 604-430-2692.

Sources

- "Vancouver 92: An Overview of City Programs and Services for People with Disabilities"
- City of Vancouver Building By-law
- City of Vancouver Parking By-law
- Vancouver Park Board
- Tourism Vancouver
- City of Vancouver's Downtown Transportation Plan