

THE REGIONAL MUNICIPALITY OF YORK

Community Services and Housing Committee

October 19, 2005

Report of the

Commissioner of Community Services and Housing

PROGRESS REPORT ON *MOVING FORWARD*: YORK REGION'S 2005 ACCESSIBILITY PLAN AND APPROVAL FOR THE DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK FOR THE 2006 ACCESSIBILITY PLAN

1. RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that:

1. Council approve the proposed framework for developing the Region's 2006 Accessibility Plan and evaluating the Region's progress as outlined in Sections 4.2 and 4.3 of this report.

2. PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the status of York Region's implementation of the *Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2001 (ODA)* including a mid-year progress report on the implementation of *Moving Forward: York Region's 2005 Accessibility Plan*. This report also provides information on the development of York Region's 2006 Accessibility Plan.

3. BACKGROUND

The *ODA* includes specific requirements for all municipalities, including York Region. One key requirement is the development of an annual accessibility plan. Under the *ODA*, the annual accessibility plan must address the identification, removal and prevention of barriers to persons with disabilities in municipal by-laws, policies, practices, programs, services and facilities. The *ODA* also requires that the accessibility plan is developed in consultation with persons with disabilities and made available to the public. Since the enactment of the *ODA*, the Region has worked with the York Region Accessibility Advisory Committee (YRAAC) to develop two accessibility plans.

On March 31, 2005, Regional Council approved and released *Moving Forward: York Region's Second Annual Accessibility Plan*. This plan was prepared under the requirements outlined in the *ODA* and integrated with the Region's 2005 Business Planning and Budget process. The plan was widely distributed across the Region and also made available on the Region's website. This second Accessibility Plan includes

initiatives from every Regional Department as well as the York Regional Police and encompasses every aspect of the Region's business including programs, services, regional facilities, policies, practices, by-laws and procedures.

The *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 (AODA)* was proclaimed on June 13, 2005. The AODA will eventually replace the current ODA. However, the Province has indicated that the ODA will remain in effect for the foreseeable future while the AODA is phased in. A separate report entitled "Parallel Implementation of the *Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2001* and the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005*" provides an overview of the new Act.

4. ANALYSIS AND OPTIONS

4.1 Progress Report on Moving Forward: York Region's 2005 Accessibility Plan

Implementation of the initiatives included in *Moving Forward* is underway in all Regional departments including the York Regional Police. Each regional department developed a departmental accessibility plan outlining the initiatives that the department would take in 2005 to identify, remove and prevent barriers in its core businesses. All regional departments identified two sets of initiatives within their 2005 Accessibility Plans: Barrier Identification and Barriers to be Addressed. *Moving Forward* contains 39 Barrier Identification initiatives and 52 Barriers to be Addressed initiatives. While the Region still continues in its efforts to better understand and identify the barriers that may exist in its programs and services, the focus of the 2005 Plan is on taking action and addressing various types of barriers.

The following provides a summary of the progress and implementation status of the initiatives in *Moving Forward* since its release in April 2005. The summary also highlights some of the initiatives undertaken by individual departments, and provides an overview of the Region's progress towards enhancing accessibility for people with disabilities.

4.1.1 Implementation Status

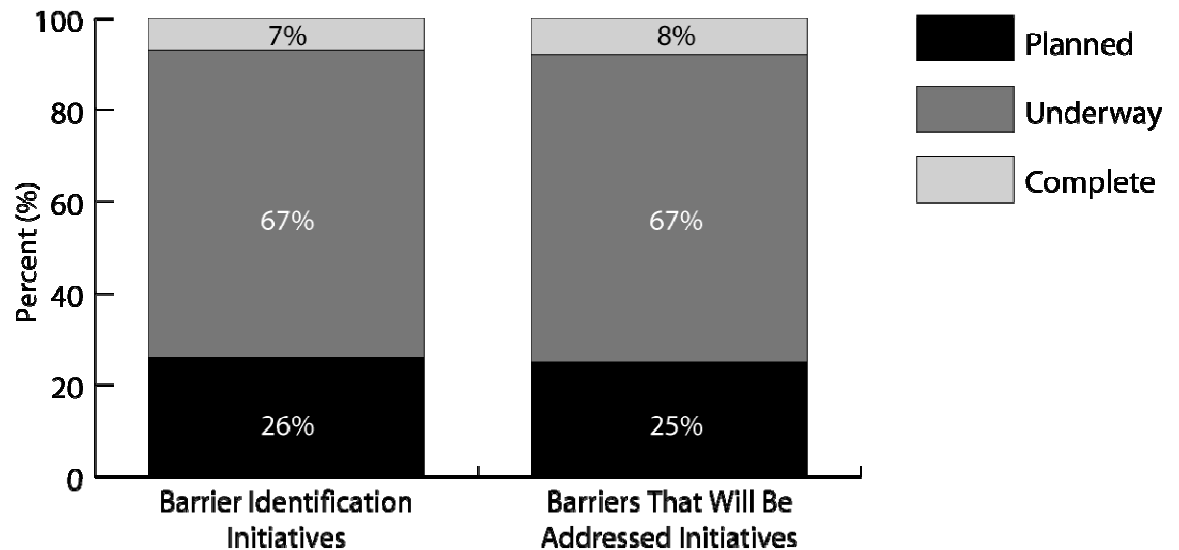
The majority of initiatives in the Region's 2005 Plan are currently underway or planned for completion by the end of 2005 and a small group of initiatives have already been successfully completed. In total there were 91 accessibility initiatives in the 2005 Accessibility Plan.

Below is a summary (followed by a graph) illustrating the status of the Region's 2005 accessibility initiatives:

- **Barrier Identification:** Of the 39 *Barrier Identification* initiatives included in the 2005 Accessibility Plan, 26% (10) are complete, 67% (26) are underway and 7% (3) are planned.

- **Barriers that will be Addressed:** Of the 52 *Barriers that will be Addressed* initiatives, 25% (13) are complete, 67% (35) are underway and 8% (4) are planned.

Figure 1
Percentages of Completed, Underway and Planned Initiatives in 2005



4.1.2 2005 Key Themes and Highlights

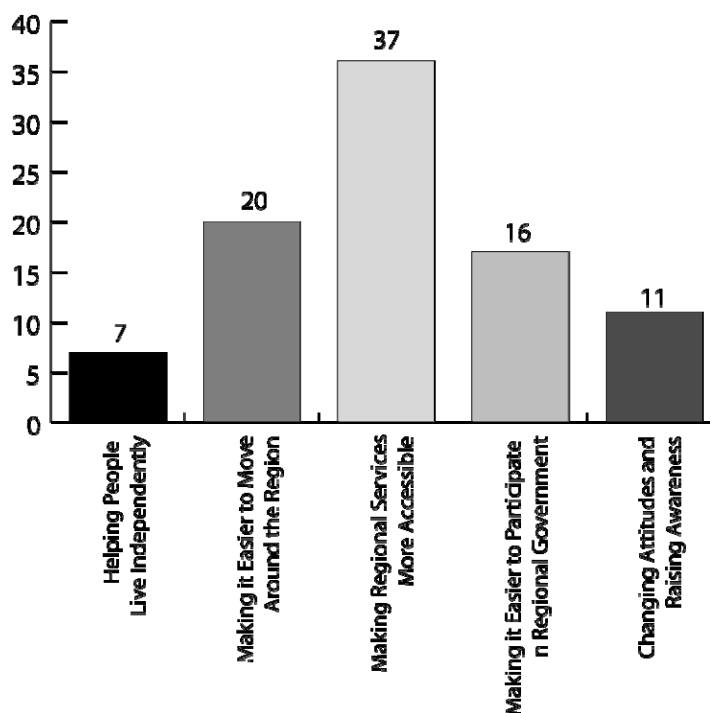
For the purposes of developing the 2005 Accessibility Plan, each initiative put forward by departments to identify, remove and prevent barriers was grouped into one of five key themes. The themes reflected the feedback from the YRAAC and the public consultation of the key areas that impact the lives of people with disabilities in York Region.

The themes are:

1. Helping People Live Independently.
2. Making it Easier to Move Around the Region.
3. Making Regional Services More Accessible.
4. Making it Easier to Participate in Regional Government.
5. Changing Attitudes and Raising Awareness.

Figure 2 provides a breakdown by theme of all 2005 Regional initiatives.

Figure 2
2005 Initiatives by Theme



The initiatives in the 2005 plan clearly demonstrate that the Region is committed to enhancing accessibility to its programs and services to support the key areas that impact on the lives of people with disabilities. For example:

- Corresponding to the theme of *Helping People Live Independently*, the Community Services and Housing Department in partnership with Health Services Department is developing up to 60 new, affordable units for seniors in the City of Vaughan. A plan has also been initiated to renovate 14 units at Hadley Grange, a seniors building in the Town of Aurora. Health Services will provide supportive housing services to those seniors and adults with physical disabilities who reside in these renovated units.
- In order to *make it easier for people with disabilities to move around the Region*, York Region Transit will have purchased 45 new buses by the end of 2005, all of which will be accessible. In addition, it has purchased 85 rapid transit buses. By the end of 2005, 100% of the Rapid Transit fleet and 67% of the conventional fleet will be accessible.
- To ensure that the content of the Falls Prevention Workshop is accessible for people with visual impairments, Health Services has developed workshops which are available for any low vision group. An audiotope is also being created to complement

the workshop. This initiative has helped to *make regional services more accessible for people with disabilities*.

- In order to *make it easier to participate in Regional government*, the Finance Department is investigating the possibility of implementing corporate TTY technology to allow staff to communicate directly with citizens who use TTY equipment.
- Corporate Services, in collaboration with the Community Services and Housing Department developed a number of activities in recognition of National Access Awareness Week (May 29 – June 4, 2005) including:
 - Released a special edition of the *Here to Serve You* newsletter which focused on serving customers with disabilities. It was published in recognition of National Access Awareness Week and included articles and tip sheets on serving customers who have disabilities.
 - Fifty-eight managers and supervisors representing all regional departments participated in a workshop entitled “Building Awareness: Persons with Disabilities in the Workplace”.
 - Information displays were set up at the Regional Administrative Centre and the South Services Centre where copies of resource materials and tips for providing good customer service to people with disabilities were available to staff and the public.
- The goal of these initiatives was to increase staff awareness and sensitivity when providing customer service to people with disabilities and highlights the theme of *Changing Attitudes and Raising Awareness*.
- In order to *make regional services more accessible*, Corporate Services has retained an accessibility consultant to review twelve facilities to identify and remove barriers. A signage study has also been completed and is in the process of being implemented to ensure effective communication to all persons.
- In order to make policing *services more accessible* for persons who are deaf or hard of hearing, the York Regional Police have developed a list of “signers” within their personnel and have included the list on the website (found under YRP Net-YRP Info-Personnel Skills). Members are encouraged to become signers and are given opportunities to take courses.

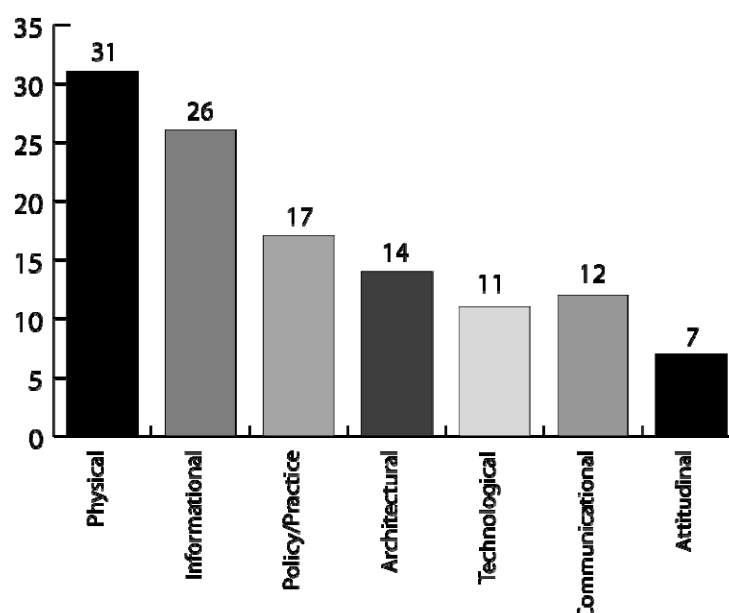
4.1.3 Types of Barriers That Are Being Addressed in 2005

One of the key goals of the ODA is to encourage people and organizations to go beyond addressing physical barriers to finding ways to remove invisible barriers that also impact on people with different types of disabilities. Invisible barriers are those

that are communicational, attitudinal, informational or technological, as well as those barriers contained in an organization's policies and practices.

In 2005, a total of 118 barriers were identified. As illustrated in the graph below, in 2005, the Region continues to make progress in removing both invisible barriers and the more visible, physical barriers.

Figure 3
2005 ODA Implementation: Types of Barriers That Are Being Addressed



A few examples of barriers that are being removed in 2005 are below:

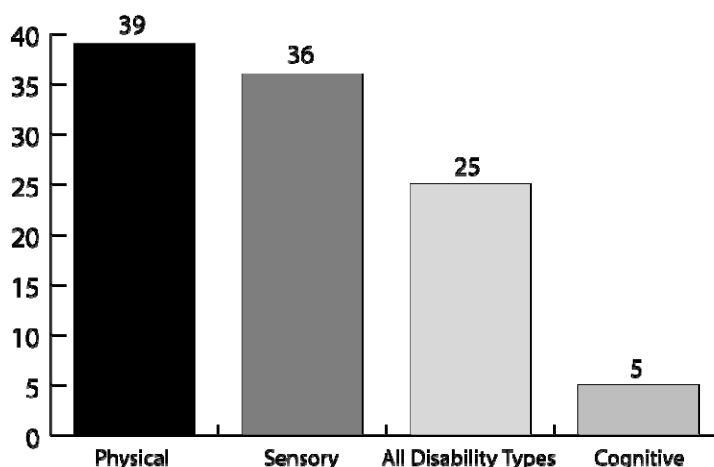
- York Region Transit is in the process of ensuring that all conventional buses have specialized seating for seniors with physical disabilities, to ensure that they are able to safely use public transit. This highlights an initiative to remove a *physical* barrier.
- The Planning and Development Services Department is in the process of modifying its website in order to accommodate people with sensory disabilities, in order to eliminate a *technological* barrier.
- Corporate Communications is investigating the feasibility of providing alternate formats for communications materials to people with disabilities in order to remove an *informational* barrier.
- The Community Services and Housing Department is working to develop a centralized waiting list for households requiring modified housing units, which addresses a *policy/practice* barrier.

- Corporate Services reviewed the existing flooring in the Administrative Centre to identify any *sensory barriers*. The installation of new flooring which will remove physical elements and outline and define routes has been approved.
- Health Services is planning renovations to the Maple Health Centre day program areas in order to better accommodate wheelchairs and other assistive devices, thereby removing an *architectural barrier*.
- The York Regional Police have established an enhanced Mobile Adult Crisis Team that combines mental health issues and law enforcement expertise in order to address an *attitudinal barrier*.

4.1.4 Initiatives by Disability Type

Under the *ODA*, municipal accessibility plans must address a broad range of accessibility issues taking into account the full definition of disability under the *ODA* and the Ontario Human Rights Code. In 2005, the Region's accessibility initiatives addressed the full range of disabilities that exist including physical, sensory and cognitive disabilities. As illustrated below, in 2005, the Region continues to be successful in addressing the needs of people with a range of disabilities.

Figure 4
2005 ODA Implementation: Disability Types That Are Being Addressed



Some initiatives that highlight the various disability types that are being addressed are listed below:

- York Region Transit has ensured that all YRT fare media and ticket vending machines meet the physical access requirements of the *Americans with Disabilities Act* so that they are accessible for people with physical and sensory disabilities (e.g., riders with visual impairments and riders who use a wheelchair).

- The Community Services and Housing Department is currently revising the employment information presentation that is given to all Ontario Works applicants in order to make the information more accessible for people with cognitive disabilities (e.g., a learning disability).
- Corporate Services has several initiatives underway within the Administrative Centre to enhance accessibility for people with physical and sensory disabilities. These include: installing power assist doors in the washrooms and parking garages, installing automatic flush and hands-free faucets in the washrooms, improvements to lighting in elevators and other dark areas, and improvements to parking spaces, crosswalks and doors (such as repainting doorframes to add contrast).
- The Health Services Department has enhanced accessibility to prenatal classes for people who are deaf, deafened or hard of hearing, by enlisting the help of sign language interpreters and TTY service.

4.2 Development Framework for York Region's 2006 Accessibility Plan

In addition to the work underway to implement *Moving Forward*, in order to meet the ongoing ODA requirements, planning is also underway for the development of the Region's third accessibility plan. The development of the 2006 Accessibility Plan will continue to be integrated with the 2006 Business Planning and Budget Cycle and timelines. It is proposed that the 2006 Accessibility Plan be developed using an approach similar to the development of 2004 and 2005 Accessibility Plans, with some modifications. The proposed modifications are outlined below.

4.2.1 Modifications to the 2006 Accessibility Planning Process

Under this modified approach, it is proposed that the 2006 Accessibility Plan be developed along the five themes endorsed previously by the Region and the YRAAC. This will allow progress to be tracked on these key themes and outcomes.

In previous years, in addition to seeking advice from the YRAAC, the Region has held public consultation sessions on its accessibility plans. Opportunities have also been provided to the public to provide feedback and input on the Region's accessibility plans through a comment form and online survey. The comment form also asks residents to provide information on barriers and issues faced by people with disabilities in York Region. This public input, along with the advice from the YRAAC provides an excellent opportunity for regional staff and Council to learn about the potential barriers faced by people with disabilities in accessing regional government programs and services.

As of June 2005, the Region is now required to both implement the new requirements of the AODA, as well as continue to meet its legal obligations under the ODA. Regional Council had previously committed to hosting a workshop on the AODA for local AACs and municipal staff, once the new Act was proclaimed. A final date for the workshop

will be set once the Province releases more details on the standards and other requirements of the *AODA*. For this year, it is proposed that: the Region continue to provide opportunities for the public to provide their input and feedback on the 2006 Accessibility Plan through a comment form and online survey; and that the public be invited to the *AODA* workshop in the Fall/Winter 2005/06, where they will be given an opportunity to learn more about the *AODA*, as well as provide any other information to the Region on barriers to regional programs and services. Regional departments will also continue to work with their own customers and clients to identify, remove and prevent different types of barriers that impact on people from receiving services or accessing various programs.

These proposed modifications to the 2006 accessibility planning process have been endorsed by the YRAAC.

4.2.2 Ongoing Participation by the York Region Accessibility Advisory Committee (YRAAC)

In keeping with its legislated mandate, the YRAAC continues to provide direct input into the implementation activities of the 2005 Plan. For example, members of the YRAAC recommended that Regional Council recognize National Accessibility Awareness Week, which was subsequently endorsed by Regional Council in May 2005; they provided tips for the special edition of the "Here to Serve You" customer service newsletter on how to provide superior customer service to people with disabilities; the AAC Chair represented the YRAAC at the Access Ontario conference in Burlington in June 2005; they provided advice to the York Regional Police on accessibility to the York Region Community Safety Village; and participated in a workshop for all Accessibility Advisory Committees in York Region hosted by the Town of Newmarket.

In the fall and winter months, the YRAAC will continue to provide advice on the implementation of the 2005 Plan and in the development of the 2006 Plan.

It is also important to note, that with the proclamation of the new *AODA*, the role of the YRAAC will expand and evolve from advising Council on their annual accessibility plans and implementation, into a role of auditing the Region's compliance with the new standards and other requirements of the *AODA*.

4.3 Evaluation and Assessment of Accessibility Planning in York Region

Evaluation is a key part of program planning and as the Region prepares for the impact of the *AODA* and enters its third year of accessibility planning, staff have begun the process of evaluating in a more focused way how and what has been done to improve accessibility to programs and services for people living with disabilities in York Region. Using the five key themes all accessibility initiatives from 2004 onwards will be evaluated against these themes and outcomes. These findings will assist the Region in identifying trends and possible priority areas that will assist future accessibility planning. It will also allow the Region to better prepare for the standards that will come into law under the new *AODA*.

4.4 Relationship to Vision 2026

Regional Council has taken a strategic approach to accessibility planning that is grounded in Vision 2026. This approach has enabled the Region to focus its efforts in a way that supports and balances the needs of York Region residents.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Ongoing costs to administer and manage the ODA implementation were approved as part of the 2005 Business Plan and Budget. Costs of the individual initiatives are contained within the budgets of the specific departments who are responsible for the initiative. Future costs related to the 2006 Accessibility Plan will be identified as part of the annual budget process.

6. LOCAL MUNICIPAL IMPACT

As directed by Regional Council, the Region continues to share information and work with local municipalities on *ODA* implementation. The Region will also be hosting an information workshop on the *AODA* for local municipal staff and Regional Accessibility Advisory Committees in the fall/winter 2005/2006.

7. CONCLUSION

As outlined in this report, the Region continues to make significant progress in addressing the needs of persons with disabilities in York Region by making its programs and services easier to find, access and use under the five key themes that impact the lives of people with disabilities. The positive steps taken by the Region in accessibility planning will assist the Region in its preparations to meet the challenges of the newly proclaimed *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 (AODA)*.

However, the actual impact that the new *AODA* may have on the Region and its various program mandates, can only be assessed once the standards including their timelines have been established and sent out by the Province. This has yet to occur.

The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report.

Prepared by:

Lois Davies
Senior Policy Analyst

Lisa Gonsalves
Senior Program Manager, ODA

Reviewed by:

Recommended by:

Cordelia Abankwa-Harris
Director of Policy and Program Support
Services

Joann Simmons
Commissioner of Community Services and
Housing

Approved for Submission:

Michael R. Garrett
Chief Administrative Officer

October 3, 2005

LD/kn
Version 4-2003-5-30