



GREATER
**VICTORIA
HARBOUR**
AUTHORITY

Greater Victoria Harbour Authority Accessibility Update

Creating an Accessible Working Harbour

May 2025

This document describes GVHA's progress in meeting accessibility obligations under the Accessible Canada Act (ACA) and the Accessible Canada Regulations (ACR).

Acknowledgement

The Greater Victoria Harbour Authority respectfully acknowledges that we manage and operate properties on the traditional, ancestral, and unceded territories of the Ləkʷəŋən' People, known today as the X̱wəpsəm (Esquimalt) Nation and Songhees Nation. The Nations' connection to these lands continue to this day and the knowledge and guidance of the Ləkʷəŋən People have supported the stewardship of the harbour since time immemorial. As visitors and residents, it is important that we recognize and pay respects to the Ləkʷəŋən' People, be mindful of our impact on the land and be gracious and respectful guests in Ləkʷəŋən territory.

Background

The Greater Victoria Harbour Authority (GVHA) is a not-for-profit organization that is committed to the stewardship and sustainable growth of Victoria's dynamic working harbour. GVHA owns and operates 11 waterfront properties in Victoria, B.C., including the Breakwater District at Ogden Point, with its cruise ship terminal, Fisherman's Wharf, the Lower Causeway, Ship Point Pier, a fuel dock, a public boat launch, and Inner Harbour marinas. The properties include public and private spaces, marine assets, upland areas, employment centres and visitor destinations.

GVHA also has a corporate office and a maintenance shop. It currently employs 40 full-time employees, two co-ops and seven seasonal employees.

As a federally regulated organization, GVHA is committed to complying with the Accessible Canada Act (ACA).

GVHA works with SSA Marine, a third-party company contracted to manage its cruise ship business, to operate the deep-water terminal at Ogden Point. The terminal operates under the jurisdiction of Transport Canada. The terminal facilitates the transportation of members of the public arriving on cruise ships into Greater Victoria. SSA Marine is responsible for publishing its own accessibility plan and updates relating to these cruise terminal operations.

General

In May 2024, GVHA published its first accessibility plan, which is publicly available on the organization's [accessibility webpage](#).

It states: “Our vision is to create a strong and vibrant working harbour that everyone has the ability to enjoy and experience. That vision is only possible through a strong commitment to creating accessible spaces as part of everything we make and do. We have developed this Plan to support our vision for a strong working harbour, to making a commitment to accessibility for not only our public spaces, but also our commercial and digital spaces with design excellence and infrastructurally sound spaces. The Plan is a working document that outlines our approach to build accessibility into our existing structures and policies, providing guidance on the unique elements specific to our properties, including public boat launches, private marinas and waterfront walkways. The focus is the creation of an approach to eliminate accessibility barriers so everyone living with a disability, or supporting someone with a disability, can fully participate on any of our waterfront properties. The Plan will be applied to all future infrastructure and digital projects at the direction of our leadership team and board.”

The plan was developed by GVHA’s Accessibility Committee. After publication of the plan, GVHA created teams to address key barriers to accessibility and develop solutions. A Work Plan, which is internal to GVHA, tracks actions.

Contact Us

GVHA welcomes feedback on accessibility matters regarding all elements of our business.

We accept feedback in the following ways:

- Online survey: <https://gvha.ca/accessible-survey/>
- Email: IDEAS@gvha.ca
- Telephone: 250-383-8300
- In Person: GVHA, 100-1019 Wharf Street, Victoria, BC V8W 2Y9.
- Social Media: [Facebook](#), [LinkedIn](#), [Instagram](#) and [X](#).

GVHA employees, who are recognizable by their uniforms, also receive feedback in person from the public at our properties. GVHA also hosts public-facing engagement sessions on a variety of topics, including cruise and planning initiatives.

GVHA’s accessibility report is available as a webpage and an accessible PDF. GVHA has indicated that anyone requiring a copy in an alternate format is able to contact the organization and we will strive to provide a copy in the preferred format within 20 days, although Braille and audio formats may take longer.

Consultations

In 2024, GVHA commissioned Copley Inclusive Solutions (CIS), a Victoria, British Columbia-based company that has a proven track record in assisting individuals, corporations, and governments achieve their goals in implementing access to the built environment, to create a report into how accessibility could be improved at GVHA's corporate office and its maintenance shop.

Douglas Copley of Copley Inclusive Solutions is a *Rick Hansen Foundation Accessibility Certification*[™] (RHFAC) Professional having worked at the Rick Hansen Foundation for three years and conducted more than 150 accessibility assessments.

GVHA also met with the executive director of Victoria Disability Resource Centre (VDRC) in 2024. VDRC is an important advocate for its community in Greater Victoria.

Since May 2024, GVHA has offered an online survey to collect feedback on accessibility. This survey is on-going. It has been made available to the public via our website, email newsletter and social media. It asks about barriers to access at GVHA properties and its website and asks for suggestions for how barriers can be removed. It collects feedback from anyone who wishes to share thoughts, comments or experiences.

Below is a selection of responses from the survey:

Washrooms:

- *"I'm a resident of James Bay and find the lack of toilet facilities around Ogden Point and the Breakwater, especially during the fall and winter months, to be unacceptable."*
- *"Lack of public toilets around Ogden Point and the Breakwater area."*
- *"Breakwater District is in desperate need of public washrooms."*
- *"There are no public washrooms available at Ogden Point, be it for those with or without a disability."*

Parking:

- *"More parking spots please. Lobby the city to stop removing parking spots. The bike lane around the downtown wharf area is difficult to navigate."*
- *"Not enough accessible parking spots, various places don't have ramps or they are too far from destination."*
- *"More clearly marked accessible parking spots, more accessible friendly ramps."*

General accessibility:

- *"Access consultants could visit and give feedback about what specific improvements could be made at the above locations. There are many groups and agencies that have lived experience and ideas to offer. Improvements to*

accessibility benefit moms with strollers to the elderly and all ages and ability levels.”

- *“There is a lot of accessibility work to be done at all of the above locations to make these places universally accessible to all including people who have hearing, vision, speech, developmental, physical and other invisible disabilities. While improvements have been made, there is much more work to be done.”*
- *“Stairs prevented access to lower breakwater to access fishing using wheelchair. Inner harbour has limited access for wheelchairs with very steep access at causeway.”*

Marinas:

- *“At Ship Point, the locks on the gates don't work properly.”*
- *“I have paralysis in my hands, so I have difficulty accessing my card. The harbor has shown hesitancy in providing me a code to enter the gate.”*
- *“Excessive crowding at Fisherman’s Wharf commercial area.”*
- *“There is no loading zone or temporary parking access to Wharf Street marina. Even if just stopping temporarily to offload supplies, you have to pay for an hour of parking or risk a ticket.”*
- *“The washroom facilities are a very long walk away from the marina. Some days it’s just too difficult for me to make it all the way there.”*

Environment:

- *“Using pictures, different colours for pointing signage is always good and ways to get down without going down a big hill would be really helpful like a ramp.”*
- *“Too many large trucks and buses coming and going at Ogden Point. It is unfriendly when walking as the marked pathways are too limited. When there are no cruise ships, one should be able to comfortably navigate throughout the parking lot area.”*
- *“The volume levels of music at venues are excessively loud. The music overpowers all other activities in the area, not everyone is in the district to take part in the music.”*

Technology:

- *“Stronger Wi-Fi, perhaps with boosters, so all GVHA customers have equal access.”*
- *“The website is needlessly heavy, it ought not to take so long to load on a slow connection.”*

Feedback is also received on GVHA’s general email address and via social media. This feedback has included the need for washrooms, the difficulty of walking on the Breakwater due to misuse by cyclists and comments about benches and seating.

This feedback has been used to inform GVHA's identification of barriers to accessibility and our decision-making on actions to remove barriers.

The following sections of this document address barriers and actions for the key areas of employment, the built environment, information and communication technologies (ICT), communication (other than ICT), procurement, programs and services, and transportation.

Employment

GVHA's objective is the promotion of employment opportunities for people with disabilities, elimination of physical barriers to employment with GVHA and training on abilities and access for all employees.

Barrier 1: Open positions were not advertised via channels for people with disabilities.

Progress update: The Inter-cultural Association of Greater Victoria (EDI focused) job board was added to GVHA's roster of external job boards. GVHA's job board list is now reviewed annually.

Barrier 2: HR staff and managers did not have access to accessibility learning resources.

Progress update: Managers were provided with Accessibility Canada resources, and a broader list of training resources was created and shared.

Barrier 3: Job descriptions did not include offers of accommodation for candidates with disabilities.

Progress update: GVHA created an Accommodations Policy and guidelines. Wording of accommodation is now available to job applicants during the recruiting process.

Barrier 4: Exit interviews did not ask about accessibility issues.

Progress update: GVHA now asks about accessibility issues in exit interviews.

Barrier 5: Employee surveys did not adequately address issues of accessibility.

Progress Update: GVHA updated its employee surveys to address accessibility, and wider issues around equity, diversity and inclusion.

Barrier 6: The Copley Report identified that GVHA's corporate office and its maintenance shops had accessibility issues in their built environments.

Progress update: At GVHA's corporate office, GVHA consulted with its landlord on accessibility improvements, which resulted in the addition of contrast slip/fall strips to entry nosings, improved washroom directional signage and the marking of an architectural feature/tripping hazard. At the maintenance shop, the First Aid kit was moved to a more

accessible location, signage was moved to be more visible, evacuation route obstructions were reduced, seats with and without arms were introduced and the kitchen microwave was moved to be easier to access.

Barrier 7: Hearing protection was not available to all staff.

Progress update: Corporate office staff were equipped with headsets to minimize ambient noise. Two private work pods were introduced. Two meeting spaces were made available as quiet spaces.

Barrier 8: Employees could not relocate or redesign their workspaces to accommodate needs.

Progress update: Staff can now request sitting or standing desks and any other special equipment.

Barrier 9: Meeting rooms did not accommodate employees and/or guests who use mobility devices or require visual or auditory support.

Progress update: An additional wheelless chair was added to one meeting room. More wheelless chairs will be added in 2025/26.

Barrier 10: Emergency evacuation and workplace accident procedures did not consider the needs of people with mobility and sensory disabilities.

Progress update: Pathways through the corporate office were widened to make evacuation routes more accessible. Evacuation signage was updated to be easier to read.

In addition, several accessibility initiatives are on-going, including investigating closer parking options at the maintenance shop, investigating improved general accessibility throughout the maintenance shop, a review of key HR policies in terms of accessibility, introducing corporate training programs and creating an accessibility handbook to help seasonal crew while working on docks.

Information and Communication Technologies

GVHA's objective is to improve communication means, methods and styles to make information accessible to everyone

Barrier 1: Communications staff lacked knowledge about the best practices for accessibility in digital communications.

Progress update: Communications staff reviewed multiple resources related to Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG), including video tutorials and attended a digital

accessibility training course. This resulted in the creation of best practices implemented in GVHA digital communications.

Barrier 2: GVHA's website lacked alt tag descriptions on many of its images and graphics, making it difficult for people using screen readers.

Progress update: GVHA conducted an audit of its website, which resulted in alt tags being added to more than 100 images and graphics. All images added to the site since July 2024 have included alt tag descriptions.

Barrier 3: Images posted to social media lacked alt tag descriptions.

Progress Update: Since July 2024, all images posted to social media have alt tag descriptions.

Barrier 4: Images and graphics used in email newsletters lacked alt tag descriptions.

Progress Update: Since July 2024, all images and graphics in email newsletters have alt tags and/or descriptive captions.

Barrier 5: Job descriptions were posted to the GVHA website only as PDFs without accessibility tagging.

Progress Update: Since September 2024, all job descriptions posted to the GVHA website have been offered as a HTML page and an accessible PDF.

Barrier 6: Staff struggled to incorporate Ləkʷəŋən (the local Indigenous language with a unique alphabet) wording into digital content.

Progress Update: Staff were provided with access to a Ləkʷəŋən keyword in September 2024.

In addition, the audit of the GVHA website revealed a number of problems, including colour contrast issues, headlines that were difficult to read after being placed over images, a difficult-to-use navigation that creates problems for screen readers and general users, sections of the site that are not mobile-friendly, hard-to-understand content, and PDFs that lack accessibility tags and lack webpage alternatives.

GVHA is investigating implementing a new website designed to meet accessibility requirements, with an updated design and revised content, and provide an overall better user experience for all users regardless of what device they are using to access the site. This is a major project and will be on-going.

Other on-going projects include improving Wi-Fi access across GVHA properties and improving accessibility at GVHA events.

Procurement

GVHA's objective is to ensure that opportunities for contractual and vendor-based relationships with GVHA are equitably accessible to all.

Barrier 1: Staff lack knowledge about the best practices for enhanced accessibility in procurement.

Progress update: Staff will research the best practices to develop accessible procurement policies, define accessibility requirements for new and renewed purchases and licences, and build accountability into contracts and bids.

Barrier 2: Bid documents are not offered in accessible formats.

Progress update: Working with GVHA's communications team, all bid documents will be offered as HTML pages and accessible PDFs from June 2025 onwards.

Barrier 3: Accessibility initiatives are not coded into GVHA's financial reporting.

Progress update: GVHA will add an accessibility initiative code into financial reporting for fiscal 2025-26.

Communication (Non-ICT)

GVHA's objective is to apply accessibility principles to internal and external communications to ensure ease-of-access for all.

Barrier 1: GVHA has 11 waterfront properties with extensive signage and wayfinding experiences. In some cases, signage and wayfinding do not adhere to accessibility requirements.

Progress update: GVHA will audit signage and wayfinding experiences to identify areas for improvement. Due to the scope of this project involving hundreds of signs and dozens of wayfinding points across 11 properties, this work will be on-going.

Barrier 2: Staff lack knowledge of the best practices in creating accessible signage and wayfinding experiences, and, in turn, GVHA lacks processes and policies for creating accessible signage and wayfinding experiences.

Progress update: GVHA will research the best practices on accessible wayfinding and signage best practices and establish guidelines and processes.

Barrier 3: GVHA is unaware of government grants that offer subsidies for adaptive technologies.

Progress update: GVHA will research grants for subsidies.

Built Environment

GVHA's objective is to focus on short-term actions to reduce and remove existing barriers and incorporate universal design into long-term facility planning.

Barrier 1: The Breakwater District, Ogden Point and Ship Point Pier are historic properties that do not conform to accessibility requirements. For instance, wheelchair users and people who struggle to use stairs can only access the Lower Causeway and Ship Point Pier via a steep slope.

Progress update: GVHA will research short-term and long-term options, including cost and feasibility, to improve all types of visitor access to all properties. This work is on-going.

Barrier 2: Marina docks are accessed via gangways, which vary in steepness according to the tide. Many visitors are unfamiliar with low tide schedules to understand when the gangway is at its most acute angle.

Progress update: GVHA will investigate ways of providing tide information to visitors such as on its website and physical signage.

Barrier 3: At all properties, there is demand from the public for washrooms or additional washrooms.

Progress update: GVHA will continue to share information on the need for additional washrooms with the City of Victoria. This work is on-going and will be included in long-term infrastructure planning.

Barrier 4: Historically, accessibility has not been considered in GVHA infrastructure planning projects.

Progress update: When planning infrastructure projects, GVHA will now use a methodology called Integrated Planning to ensure co-ordination with key partners. Integrated Planning will include accessibility needs in all new projects. This work is on-going.

Barrier 5: At all properties, there is demand from the public for seating and benches to allow people to rest and find shade.

Progress update: GVHA is adding additional rest spaces. In March 2025, benches were installed at the public boat ramp. In May 2025, benches were installed near the entrance to the Breakwater. This work is on-going.

Barrier 6: GVHA's lifejacket program on marina docks only caters for children.

Progress update: GVHA will investigate ways of increasing the variety of life jackets available on marina docks. This work is on-going.

Programs & Services

GVHA's objective is to establish partnerships with First Nations, municipal, provincial, federal and public partners to ensure that property development and business operations are carried out with accessibility in focus.

Barrier 1: GVHA lacks a cohesive strategy for working on accessibility issues with key local partners such as the City of Victoria, the Province of BC and other adjacent landowners to our properties.

Progress Update: GVHA will form an accessibility working group with key partners as part of GVHA's Integrated Planning work. This is a long-term project.

Barrier 2: GVHA's accessibility committee is unfunded.

Progress Update: GVHA will investigate funding its accessibility committee.

Barrier 3: GVHA clients are not encouraged or contracted to improve accessibility while operating on GVHA properties. In addition, GVHA is unsure of how existing lease and contract agreements can be adjusted to comply with ACA regulations.

Progress Update: GVHA will audit its existing contracts and leases for accessibility requirements and research industry best practices and ACA regulations to become better informed about opportunities to drive accessibility improvements through programs and services. This work is on-going.

Transportation

GVHA's objective is to realize the best practices and improved standards with regards to barrier-free transportation in areas over which GVHA has oversight.

GVHA is not directly involved in providing transportation. SSA Marine, which manages the cruise terminal operations, coordinates transportation providers to ensure passengers can transit from the terminal to the downtown area or onto excursions. SSA Marine will provide its own accessibility update.

Barrier 1: GVHA and SSA Marine do not have shared processes for highlighting accessibility issues and opportunities at the terminal, including with transportation clients.

Progress Update: GVHA and SSA Marine will investigate creating shared processes to gather feedback and improve accessibility at the terminal.

Barrier 2: The cruise terminal's wayfinding scheme and signage are not clear to visitors arriving via cruise ship.

Progress Update: GVHA will include the terminal's wayfinding and signage in its signage audit and share findings with SSA Marine.

Barrier 3: Information about the cruise terminal's layout, access points, parking and services is difficult to find for anyone wishing to visit the terminal.

Progress Update: GVHA will make improvements to its website to better explain the terminal's design, facilities and services. This work is on-going.

Conclusion

Accessibility remains a priority. GVHA will continue to collect and monitor feedback, which will inform decision-making and guide our actions. We will continue to identify barriers to accessibility and work to remove them. We will look for solutions that can be implemented in the next 12 months and ensure accessibility is part of our long-term work, especially in our Integrated Planning work to ensure the future and sustainability of our 11 properties. GVHA will publish its next accessibility update at the end of May 2026.