

What the MS Society recommends:

The Ontario government should immediately implement the Accessible Transportation Standard to ensure that Ontarians with disabilities can access the goods, services, and activities that they need to lead happy and healthy lives.

Throughout implementation of the standard, the Accessibility Directorate of Ontario (ADO) should provide education, training, certification and support to transportation providers. As well, the ADO should monitor and evaluate implementation to better address implementation challenges as they arise.

The ADO should also inform the public, and specifically people with disabilities, of the new accessible transportation requirements, and should work with people with disabilities and multi-sector stakeholders to address gaps in the Accessible Transportation Standard.

Background:

People with MS, and other people with disabilities, face several challenges in using public and private transportation to access the businesses, services, and activities that they want and need. These challenges include, but are not limited to:

- Adequacy – there are limited options for accessible transportation, and those options that are available do not always meet the needs of people with disabilities in terms of design and service-provision.
- Affordability – the cost of accessible transportation options, particularly private transportation options, can be exorbitant. These options are especially challenging, and in some cases prohibitive, for the many people with disabilities who live on limited incomes.
- Capacity – the development of public and accessible mass transit systems is not feasible in many smaller, rural, and remote parts of the province; creativity to develop accessible transportation options is needed.
- Choice and flexibility – accessible public transportation options are sometimes limited in flexibility with respect to travel times and routes, often requiring advanced scheduling, long waits, and restricted service hours. Private transportation providers, if affordable and accessible, play an important role in providing accessible transportation options.
- Education and training – staff of both public and private transportation providers are not well-trained on how to serve and assist people with disabilities, often resulting in poor customer service, lack of respect, and safety concerns for disabled passengers.
- Interconnectedness – accessible transportation goes beyond accessible vehicles: it involves the infrastructure that surrounds and supports transportation systems and vehicles, as well as policies and practices that improve access to the systems.
- Inter-jurisdictional – travelling between municipalities is often difficult. Few accessible transportation systems work together to ensure seamlessness of travel; to create shared eligibility criteria, review, and approval processes; and to develop smooth points of transfer between systems. This is of particular concern given that people with MS often have to travel to, and through, urban centres to attend medical appointments.

Basic Facts:

- The final proposed Accessible Transportation Standard has been submitted to the Minister of Community and Social Services for consideration as law.
- This standard is the only one that is sector specific, that is, it relates specifically to modes of transportation that come under the jurisdiction of provincial and municipal governments, as well as private transportation providers, such as taxis.
- A standards development committee, made up of representatives from the disability and business communities, developed the proposed standard.
- It was released for public review from June 27, 2007 to September 28, 2007. The committee used the feedback received during the review period to shape the final proposed standard, which was submitted to the government for consideration in fall 2008.

Recommendations

Ontario needs to be more accessible to people with disabilities. It makes good sense - economically and socially. – Ontario's Ministry of Community and Social Services¹

The MS Society agrees with the Ministry of Community and Social Services: accessibility does make good sense economically and socially. Yet the delay in implementation of the Accessible Transportation Standard is slowing Ontario's ability to create truly accessible communities, will make it difficult to reach the Government of Ontario's goal of making Ontario accessible by 2025, and increases the isolation of people with disabilities in Ontario.

To this end, we call on the **Government of Ontario** to:

- Immediately implement the Accessible Transportation Standard that is being considered by the Minister of Community and Social Services.
- Through the Accessibility Directorate of Ontario:
 - Provide education, training, certification, and support to public and private transportation providers to ensure that they implement elements of the standard appropriately and in a timely fashion.
 - Monitor, enforce, and evaluate implementation of the standard, and address implementation challenges as they arise. Municipalities should not be responsible for enforcement.
 - Provide information and education to the public and, specifically, to people with disabilities about the new standard to ensure that these individuals are aware of and, where necessary, can reinforce the requirements.
- Work with people with disabilities, transportation providers, and multi-sector stakeholders to ensure that gaps in the Accessible Transportation Standard are addressed in a timely and pro-active fashion.

Likewise, **municipal and regional governments** should:

- Work with each other to develop best practices in the provision of accessible transportation and share information for implementation of accessible transit programs, including service provider training.

¹ Taken from Ontario's Ministry of Community and Social Services accessibility Web page at <http://www.mcsc.gov.on.ca/en/mcsc/programs/accessibility/>