



VIA Rail Canada

# **Multi-Year Accessibility Plan: Year Two Report**

**December 2024**

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# 2024 Progress Report

The purpose of this document is to report on the progress we have made in the second year of our first-ever Multi-Year Accessibility Plan. VIA Rail acknowledges there are barriers in our service, and this progress report summarizes the actions we are undertaking to remove them.

## **Background**

According to the 2022 Statistics Canada Canadian Survey on Disability, 27.0% of Canadians aged 15 and older, or 8 million people, had at least one disability. This represents an increase of 4.7 percentage points from 2017. With this in mind, VIA Rail is committed to tailoring our services to these changing demographics by being one of the most accessible mobility options by providing a smarter way to move people. We understand the importance of offering barrier-free transport, which is why we have taken important actions to create an environment in which all people can travel autonomously and confidently.

VIA Rail is committed to improving accessibility and creating a seamless experience, from booking your trip, arriving at our station, boarding the train, and accessing on-board services, until you arrive at your destination. Improving accessibility will not only improve the experience for people with disabilities but will create a better experience for many other passengers as well. This includes people travelling with young children, passengers with heavy luggage, and older adults. We are transforming VIA Rail to be more welcoming, comfortable, and dignified for all our passengers.

# Universal Accessibility Policy

VIA Rail published its first-ever Universal Accessibility Policy on June 25, 2020. The policy, presented below, sets forth our vision, principles, and commitments to improve the accessibility of our service.

## VIA Rail Universal Accessibility Policy

### Vision

At VIA Rail we do more than move passengers. We strive to be Canada's most accessible national and intercity mode of transportation. Our vision is to move people by ensuring access to a sustainable, affordable, and accessible means of transportation. By promoting better accessibility, we are improving the customer experience for all our passengers as part of a barrier-free Canada.

### Principles of Universal Accessibility at VIA Rail

VIA Rail acknowledges and strives to provide service that:

- is welcoming for all our passengers;
- provides a safe, comfortable, and convenient journey;
- respects each individual's autonomy, dignity, and independence;
- enables full participation through an inclusive and intuitive environment; and,
- offers meaningful options for passengers.



## Our Commitments

VIA Rail values all our passengers and we pledge the following commitments:

- **Our Culture:** We will continue to be agents of transformation to foster a culture of respect and dignity.
- **Leadership:** We aim to integrate accessibility into decision-making processes at all levels of our organization so that we can continually improve the passenger experience.
- **Continual Engagement:** We value the experience of our passengers and will seek their input to imagine new possibilities for travel on our network. We will report back to you regularly regarding the progress we make.
- **Training:** We will equip ourselves with the training and tools needed to serve you well.
- **Communications:** We will provide clear and consistent information in a timely manner for all our passengers.
- **Listening to You:** We recognize that you know what is best for you and we strive to create an environment where you feel comfortable requesting those services.
- **Barrier-Free Access:** We strive to remove barriers and avoid creating new barriers across all our stations, trains, and digital platforms.
- **Proactive Design:** We will work to provide you with flexible options to access our services.
- **Collaboration:** We will create community partnerships to continuously improve accessibility to our services.

## General

### Description of Feedback Process and Contact Information

We continue to listen to you and welcome your comments on this progress report, our plan, our feedback process, or any other issue you encounter.

Our feedback process is easy. Simply share your comments, anonymously or by including your name and contact information, through any of the following channels:

- calling **1 888 VIA-RAIL (1 888 842-7245)** or TTY **1 800 268-9503** for people who are deaf, deafened, or hard-of-hearing;
- commenting in the [form on the website](https://www.viarail.ca/en/contact-us) (<https://www.viarail.ca/en/contact-us>);
- emailing us at [customer\\_relations@viarail.ca](mailto:customer_relations@viarail.ca);
- sending us a message through one of our social media platforms: [Facebook](#), [X](#), or [Instagram](#);
- mailing us at:

Customer Relations Officer  
VIA Rail Canada Inc.  
CP/PO BOX 8116 SUCC CENTRE-VILLE  
Montréal (Quebec) H3C 3N3

Our Customer Relations Officer will acknowledge receipt of your feedback and follow up with you directly (if not anonymous) to take the appropriate actions.

### Alternative Formats

You can use any of the methods of communication above to request this progress report, our plan, or a description of our feedback process in a print, large print, Braille, or audio format. If you communicate using sign language, you can contact us by using a Video Relay Service and our phone number above.

### Delivery Time Frames for Alternative Formats

We will provide our accessibility plan, the description of our feedback process, and our progress report to you as soon as feasible, but, at the latest, 45 days after the day on which the request

was received, in the case of a request for a document in Braille or audio format; or in the case of a request for a document in any other format, 15 days after the day on which the request is received.

## Consultations

### Progress Report

To be successful in our accessibility improvements, we must include people with disabilities early and often. With that in mind, we created a Universal Accessibility Advisory Committee. The members of this committee represent a broad range of people with disabilities and seniors. They kindly lend their knowledge and lived experience to VIA Rail.

Since this group is the most aware of the work we are currently carrying out, we've asked them if they would like to give their feedback on this progress report. We did this by sending each member a copy of the report. We asked them to provide any recommendations or feedback on the progress report. We also asked these committee members to tell us how they would like to provide their feedback, for example, by email or in a virtual meeting. We brought together all the feedback in a central file for reference and included the information in the "Feedback" section below.

### Consultation on our Projects in 2024

In addition to the consultation on this report, we also consulted on several projects in the second year of our Multi-Year Plan.

- **Renewal of Long-Distance Trains:** VIA Rail held a workshop for the fleet renewal of all trains outside of the Quebec City – Windsor Corridor, also known as the Long-Distance Regional and Remote Trains (LDRR). This consultation was the first in a series for this project. Some 15 participants attended the workshop in Ottawa in January 2024.
- **Autonomous Wayfinding App:** VIA Rail held a series of tests with our staff and accessibility partners in Ottawa Station on the GoodMaps mobile navigation application. Over 20 people participated over the course of the tests. We will test the application again with our community partners in early 2025 to determine their appreciation of the application.

- **VIA's New Mobile App:** In October 2024, VIA Rail launched a simpler and updated mobile application. Before the launch, VIA asked its Advisory Committee to test the app and provide any feedback for improvement. We have used the feedback to improve the app.
- **Accessible Travel Packages:** In search of ways to make vacation experiences more accessible, VIA rail met with a handful of stakeholders to ask what would make their vacations more accessible. We were able to gather some feedback and are exploring options for offering an accessible travel package.

## Feedback

This section provides the feedback we received from our Universal Accessibility Advisory Committee members on our progress report as well as general feedback we received about accessibility at VIA Rail over the second year of our Multi-Year Plan.

### Feedback on This Progress Report

Here is some of the feedback provided by VIA Rail's Universal Accessibility Advisory Committee on the progress VIA Rail has made related to its Multi-Year Accessibility Plan:

#### Positive Feedback

- A comprehensive accessibility report.
- It is very heartening to see the steady progress being made!
- An accessibility progress report that is well done and complies with Canadian Transportation Agency (CTA) requirements.
- Much progress has been noted in meeting and, in many cases, surpassing requirements outlined in the Accessible Canada Act (ACA).
- VIA Rail's training is excellent and makes all the difference.
- We congratulate VIA Rail on its efforts to serve all customers with dignity.

#### Recommendations

- To get more customer feedback, it could be a good idea to provide a discount in exchange for feedback.
- Provide a nut-free environment to keep children and adults safe during their travels.



- VIA Rail asked Committee members to book a free ticket to see how well the reservation system worked with screen readers. VIA Rail said they would make changes based on this feedback.
- The departure concourse in Union Station in Toronto is still completely inaccessible for people who can't hear voiced announcements; there are no visual information updates. Also, the signage in Union Station has gotten worse with time. It's not easy to go from the train to the subway.
- Employees need better training on the hearing loop system.
- Communication of onboard announcements should be displayed on overhead electronic screens instead of printing announcements.

### **Feedback on Accessibility at VIA Rail**

Customer experience is incredibly valuable to us at VIA Rail. Our reputation is built on the service we offer and our caring and friendly staff. That said, the feedback customers submit about their experiences helps us identify barriers to accessibility.

Some feedback we've received during the second year of our Multi-Year Accessibility Plan relates to:

- offering on-demand sign language interpreting;
- making sure specific service requests are met;
- changing our emotional service dog policy;
- changing our seat selection policy;
- the excellent accessibility training program we offer to our employees.

Receiving this feedback is important to us. In addition to helping us identify barriers, we use it to find solutions to prevent the creation of new barriers and remove existing barriers. While there's not always an easy fix to eliminating barriers, it doesn't stop us from trying to remove the barriers and finding a temporary solution in the meantime.

When we receive positive feedback, we make sure the information is sent to the appropriate person, so they get the recognition they deserve. When we receive constructive feedback, the VIA Rail Accessibility Team reviews it to determine what is the cause of the barrier or issue.

Then, we discuss our options to address it. When appropriate, we ask our Advisory Committee members for their advice or recommendations.

Here's a detailed explanation of our complaints and feedback process. After getting a better understanding of the barriers related to the feedback received from our customers, we evaluate our options to resolving the issues and preventing them from happening again. If the barrier is related to a process, procedure or operational fix, we make the necessary adjustments to the document or process and then communicate it to the people affected by the change. This is often done through a bulletin, reminder, or meetings. This process was used to address most of the feedback listed above.

If the solution requires us to purchase a product or service, we must first secure funding for the new product or service then launch a public competitive bidding process. After the new solution has been implemented, communications are sent internally, and sometimes externally, depending on the subject. One example of a service we are currently testing to improve communication with sign language users is the on-demand interpreting we introduced at Ottawa Station ticket counter in October 2024. If this project works well, we would like to extend it to more stations in our network.

## Update on Our Progress

The projects below include improvements in accessibility for our trains, stations, services, and communications. We've provided the description of our objectives and initial timelines for each project. Below that, we are updating you on the progress we've made since we published our Multi-Year Plan. You will notice some project timelines start before the official launch of our plan. We were able to get an early start on our projects because VIA Rail understands the importance of accessibility and removing barriers.

## Built Environment

### **Station Accessibility Analysis (2021-2022)**

The first step to creating standard, universally accessible stations is to analyze the level of accessibility at every station. To identify barriers, prevent the creation of new barriers, and

eliminate existing barriers, VIA Rail will conduct an analysis of the accessibility of its network. Having an inventory of the level of accessibility each station offers will allow us to create a plan to update and standardize the stations. The largest and most frequently used stations will be prioritized.

### **Progress Update**

We've gotten off to a great start with the Station Accessibility Analysis. We've inventoried the level of accessibility of the stations from the arrival at the location to the station entrance.

The analysis and inventory of these stations focused on:

- assessing the condition of the parking lot and curb ramps;
- counting the number of dedicated accessible parking spots;
- determining the safest and most accessible route of travel from the dedicated accessible parking spots to the station entrance; and,
- determining which station doors should be updated with a push-button automatic door.

### **Station Accessibility Improvements (2022-2025)**

The station accessibility analysis conducted will inventory and highlight areas in and around stations that need improvement. This will be done through a customer-journey approach by considering the site and building accessibility as well as building navigation. A few necessary upgrades are already known. Over the next few years, our major stations will see improvements such as updated curb ramps and automatic doors. The end goal of this plan is to prevent and remove barriers and standardize our stations as much as possible.

### **Progress Update**

We've updated the majority of stations included in the scope of this project. The accessible parking spots and the path of travel from these parking spots into the station's building have been made compliant with the Canadian Standards Association's "Accessible design for the built environment" (CSA B651-18).

The process of this upgrade has made the accessible parking spots safer, larger, and more noticeable. The curb ramps have been improved by relocating them to the most accessible path

of travel, by making sure the slope is compliant with the B651-18, and by adding tactile walking surface indicators. Also, entrances to these stations have received ramps with railing (where needed), tactile walking surface indicators at stairs and ramps, and push-button automatic doors at the station's entrance. In total, at the end of year two of our Multi-Year Plan, we've completed 27 stations.

## Procurement of Goods, Services and Facilities

### **Accessible Procurement Process (2021-2023)**

VIA Rail is tailoring our services and processes to reflect a more inclusive Canada. We are improving the purchasing process by including an accessibility lens. By changing the culture for all employees to be more aware of accessibility, we will ensure that universal accessibility is considered in the initial stages of all projects.

#### **Progress Update**

VIA Rail's Accessibility Team and Procurement Department have worked together to create VIA Rail's first accessible procurement process.

To help VIA Rail staff understand the importance of considering accessibility when purchasing goods and services, our team began by raising awareness. After making presentations on the importance of accessibility to all the teams this affects, our team focused on the procurement process.

We added accessibility checkpoints to the procurement process. One of the checkpoints we've added is a new accessibility section to VIA Rail's business case document for the purchase of new products and services. This means anytime someone tries to make a large purchase, they must fill out a section related to accessibility before requesting proposals.

In the accessibility section of the business case, we've also included an accessible procurement toolkit that has been shared with the entire company. This toolkit explains what accessible procurement is and provides examples of accessibility considerations for the procurement process. It walks the user through the process of assessing accessibility. The toolkit also provides contact information for users who need assistance when assessing accessibility.

Another checkpoint that has been added to the procurement process is the Procurement Department's accessibility validation. The procurement officer responsible for the project must validate that the VIA employee making the purchase has considered accessibility in their project. If there are any questions at this stage, they are directed to the Accessibility Team, who helps guide the VIA employee and procurement officer with their request. Finally, over the course of 2024, we've added accessibility requirements to several projects that would not otherwise have the criteria if the process were not in place.

## Design and Delivery of Programs and Services

### **Surveys on Communication (2022-2025)**

VIA Rail will conduct surveys on communication changes to make sure communication is good. The responses provided in these surveys will allow us to better serve our passengers.

#### **Progress Update**

The data from our customer satisfaction surveys provide insights into how we can better serve our passengers. Overall, most passengers (70% to 78%) were either satisfied or very satisfied with the service they received related to Specific Service Request (SSR) on our trains. Here is an overview of the SSR data from our customer satisfaction survey through the third quarter in 2024:

- 78% of our passengers with an SSR were either somewhat satisfied or very satisfied with the service for trips in the Quebec City – Windsor corridor.
- 77% of our passengers with an SSR were either somewhat satisfied or very satisfied with the service for trips in the Toronto – Vancouver train corridor.
- 70% of our passengers with an SSR were either somewhat satisfied or very satisfied with the service for trips in the Montréal – Halifax train corridor.

### **On-Demand Sign Language Interpreting at Ticket Counters (2024-2025)**

To improve communication between sign language users and staff at ticket counters, VIA Rail would like to test the service of remote on-demand sign language interpreting at ticket

counters. This service can be accessed through a digital tablet at the ticket counter and a video call placed through a third party's online portal.

### **Progress Update**

VIA Rail introduced this service in Ottawa Station in the fall of 2024. If the service works properly and customers appreciate it, we would like to add the service to several other larger stations.

### **Sensory Support Kits (2024-2025)**

VIA Rail is testing a new service for our passengers and their neurodiversity. To help passengers relieve a sometimes-stressful travel experience, they will be offered a sensory support kit during the reservation process after they place of a specific service request for a cognitive disability. The kit is a backpack containing several items to help them self-regulate during their travel experience. This project is done in partnership with Autism Canada.

### **Progress Update**

In a partnership with one of the member organizations of our Advisory Committee, VIA Rail launched this service in October 2024 for Autism Awareness Month. The sensory support kits are a one-time offer for any passenger with a cognitive disability. The service is available on request in the Quebec-Windsor Corridor and the kits are given to the passengers when they are on the train. We are currently testing the service in the Corridor. If it's successful, we would like to extend the service to additional routes.

## **Transportation**

### **Accessibility Analysis and Reference Guide for Trains (2021-2023)**

VIA Rail wants to prevent and eliminate barriers onboard our trains by using the feedback gathered from people with disabilities to make sure that the trains we purchase or refurbish adhere to best practices for accessibility. We will complete an analysis that considers feedback from workshops we held in 2018, 2019, and 2020 to produce a reference guide that will be used as a baseline for when we refurbish or purchase new trains in the future.

## **Progress Update**

VIA Rail's Accessibility Team has worked with the Rolling Stock Department and our Customer Care Agents to create our first "Accessibility Train Reference Guide." The guide is complete and ready for use. It contains the most important dimensions and accessibility features in our fleet of accessible train cars. This guide will mainly be used by our Customer Care Agents when assisting customers with questions about dimensions and accessibility features in our trains. However, the guide will also be used by VIA Rail staff during the refurbishment or purchase new trains.

## **Corridor Train Delivery (2023-2025)**

One of VIA Rail's most exciting projects to come will be the delivery of 32 new Siemens trains by 2025. Some of the accessibility features on the trains will include: wheelchair lifts; Braille seating numbers; Braille for signage throughout the train; embossed and high-contrast signage; surface transitions; automatic doors; more grab bars and mobility-aid seating options; accessible washrooms; screen displays indicating travel information in text; and an audio redundancy for the on-screen messages.

## **Progress Update**

The delivery of our new Corridor fleet is well underway. To date (November 28, 2024), 19 of 32 trainsets are in service in the Quebec City-Windsor Corridor. The feedback about these trains has been overwhelmingly positive. We look forward to seeing you on board!

# **Employment**

## **Improved Recruitment Process (2021-2024)**

Our human resources team will improve its recruitment process by analyzing its processes to be more inclusive and by training its recruitment staff on unconscious bias.

## **Progress Update**

Our human resources team has been working on ways to improve our recruitment process by making it more accessible and equitable to people with disabilities. To help them in the process, they hired a firm to do a gap analysis and then started to implement the recommendations.

Below are some of the actions we're taking to help ensure a fair and equitable recruitment process:

- Making sure all candidates know they can ask for arrangements in the recruitment process and continued support as an employee.
- Creating an Employee Resource Group (ERG) for people with disabilities.
- Creating a company-wide statement on Diversity and Inclusion with a specific mention of disability.
- Participating in job fairs specifically targeted at people with disabilities.
- Participating publicly in disability and accessibility-related campaigns, events and activities.
- Ensuring marketing and signage includes people with disabilities.
- Increase self-reporting of employees with disabilities.
- Offering mandatory unconscious bias training to employees.
- Document hiring practices to make them more accessible, including having an inclusive written recruitment policy.

## Information and Communication Technologies (ICT)

### **Sign Language Videos (2021-2023)**

VIA Rail will hold workshops to consult with sign language users. Using the information gathered, VIA Rail will create an initial sign-language video to explain our services to sign language users.

Since the publication of its Multi-Year Accessibility Plan, VIA Rail has expanded its initial sign language video project from a single video for our home page to a video for each section on our accessibility page, and a video describing how to use our new reservation system.

### **Progress Update**

We've created several American Sign Language (ASL) and Quebec Sign Language (LSQ) videos. We now have an introductory video on the top of our website that explains the home page and the location of our accessibility page where additional sign language videos can be found. The



most important travel information for our passengers is summarized in the videos on the accessibility page.

There are six videos in each language, for both desktop and mobile versions of the website, for a total of 24 videos.

Our new reservation system will also have a tutorial video in both ASL and LSQ for desktop and mobile phone users. The video walks the user through the reservation process step-by-step to make booking easier for sign language users.

### **Hearing Loops at Ticket Counters (2022-2023)**

Based on recommendations received in the feedback of our Multi-Year Plan and from our advisory committee members, VIA Rail has decided to add hearing loops to ticket counters at select train stations. Once the first hearing loops have been added, we will conduct tests on the technology to assess its effectiveness. If the technology is effective, VIA Rail would like to extend the project to several stations across the country.

#### **Progress Update**

After deploying the first phase of the hearing loops at ticket counters project in Ottawa, Montréal, and Toronto Stations, we've decided to expand the project to nearly half of our stations. Some 35 of our stations are now equipped with a hearing loop at a ticket counter. This new service will facilitate communication for both our passengers and our staff.

### **Autonomous Wayfinding in Train Stations (2023-2025)**

Based on recommendations received during workshops held with our partners in accessibility, VIA Rail would like to test out an autonomous wayfinding solution for its train stations. If the solution proves effective and is a viable option, the organization would like to expand the project to several of its largest stations.

#### **Progress Update**

Ottawa Station has been the chosen location for this project. To help us understand how our customers use the technology and to adjust our solution to best meet the varying needs of our

customers, we have performed user tests with approximately 20 people with various types of disabilities. This project was officially launched in the summer of 2024.

The chosen solution for this project is a partnership between the Canadian National Institute for the Blind (CNIB) and the innovative mobile navigation application GoodMaps. The app uses indoor mapping and audio guidance to help users find their way around the station, locate amenities, and access information.

## Communication, Other Than ICT

### **Improved Accessible Communication (2022-2023)**

VIA Rail will perform an analysis of its accessible communications. After the analysis is complete, VIA Rail will create an accessible style guide for our communications. Employees will then be trained on the guide to make sure VIA Rail's communications are as inclusive as possible.

### **Progress Update**

VIA Rail worked with a consultant to do a benchmark of accessible communications across the world. That benchmark was used as part of a gap analysis conducted on VIA Rail's direct communication to customers. The gap analysis was then used to create an "Accessible Communications Guide" for VIA Rail staff. The Guide is in use across the organization to make our internal and external communications more accessible.

In addition to creating this guide, VIA Rail has updated over 300 writing templates for our customer service staff to make the communications between our customers and staff simpler and more inclusive. These staff members will also receive a training course on the dos and don'ts of accessible communication.

## Provisions of CTA Accessibility-Related Regulations

VIA Rail Canada is subject to the following regulations the Canada Transportation Agency (CTA) has made under 170(1) of the Canada Transportation Act: Accessible Transportation for Persons with Disabilities Regulations (ATPDR).<sup>1</sup>

At VIA Rail, we are aware of the work expected of us to improve accessibility. To improve the accessibility of our services and our infrastructure, we must first identify the barriers to people with disabilities, then remove these barriers, and prevent the creation of new barriers to accessibility. We plan to continuously learn from our passengers to remove barriers and prioritize sustainable solutions. Below is our initial starting point, which highlights some of the changes underway as we begin to address the barriers outlined above.

### Trains and On-Train Services

VIA Rail is addressing the barriers in our trains head-on with this multi-year plan and the recent purchase of 32 new Siemens trains at a cost of nearly one billion dollars. These actions set in motion the initial steps for VIA Rail to change the course of its history regarding train accessibility and include the following.

- **Quebec City-Windsor Corridor trains:** A new fleet of trains for the Quebec City-Windsor Corridor. During the train design phase, VIA Rail held workshops with accessibility partner organizations to discuss the needs of persons with disabilities and the improvements to make to the design of our new trains. Later, these same partners were invited to test the new accessibility features on a full-scale model of the train cars. Lastly, to wrap up the consultation process, some of these partners were able to give us their feedback on their experience in the new train during tests conducted in August 2022. Participants' comments informed the final design of the trains.

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<sup>1</sup> 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 45, 48, 49, 50, 51, 52, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 58, 59, 60, 61, 86, 87, 88, 89, 90, 91, 92, 93, 94, 95, 96, 97, 98, 99, 100, 101, 102, 103, 104, 105, 106, 107, 108, 109, 110, 111, 112, 113, 114, 115, 116, 117, 118, 119, 120, 121, 122, 23, 124, 125, 126, 127, 128, 129, 130, 131, 132, 133, 212, 213, 214, 215, 216, 217, 218, 219, 220, 221, 222, 223, 225, 226, 227, 229, 230, 231, Schedule 1

- **Onboard announcements:** An onboard announcement service for people who are D/deaf, deafened, or hard of hearing and/or people with hearing loss. Now, when a passenger submits a Specific Service Request (SSR) or informs VIA Rail staff of their barrier, the passenger will receive all public announcements in a visual format.
- **Specific Service Request hours:** Expanded hours for Specific Service Request (SSR). Previously, passengers wishing to make a reservation with an SSR were only able to do so during daytime hours. Now requests can be made 24 hours a day, every day of the year.

## Station and In-Station Services

As VIA Rail has grown over the years, the government has acknowledged the need to update its train stations and provided funding to modernize our busiest stations. Here are a few examples of what has been done to improve accessibility in some of our stations.

- **Ottawa Station improvements:** The Ottawa Station has been called VIA Rail's laboratory. It has earned a gold certification for Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) and has introduced numerous accessibility improvements. A few of the most notable improvements have been the creation of an accessible business lounge, a raised railway platform, and a new elevator.
- **Service Animal Relief Areas (SARAs):** SARAs have been installed at 83 stations throughout VIA Rail's network. SARAs are a new amenity for service animals to relieve themselves. Directional bilingual signage with Braille has been put up inside and outside of stations to guide users to the SARAs.
- **In-station announcements:** To make sure information is accessible to everyone, in-station announcements are now offered in both audible and visual format by way of audio announcements through speakers and visual announcements displayed on screens. In 2020, VIA Rail updated its public announcement system in stations to ensure passengers in boarding areas inside terminals have access to both visual and audible public announcements relating to safety, security, train departures, and track assignment.

- **Station entrance and train platform assistance:** To better serve our passengers' needs, we now offer curbside assistance at 9 of VIA Rail's busiest stations. Most curbside assistance areas have been designated with signage near main entrances. Customers who place a Special Service Request for this service will be met by a VIA Rail staff member near the station entrance and then be escorted to the platform to board their train. The same service is offered when customers get off the train. They can be accompanied to the station's exit.

## Communications

Communication is one of the areas where VIA Rail has recently focused much of its attention to improve accessibility. Over the past couple of years, VIA Rail has removed some of the biggest barriers to communication, including the following:

- **Website:** VIA Rail's website is where most passengers go to learn about our train routes, services, and to purchase their tickets. A significant effort has been made to improve the site, including an accessibility section, station profiles containing each station's accessibility features, and an accessibility booking widget.
- **Large print and Braille:** While onboard, passengers can now request a safety card in large print and Braille that explains the train layout and the important features of the train in case of an emergency. Similarly, passengers can request menus in Braille or large print.

## Our Work Continues

We believe that to take meaningful steps towards universal accessibility at VIA Rail, we must apply our efforts consistently throughout the organization. VIA Rail is committed to the ongoing coordination of universal accessibility, across all our departments, to ensure that we take active steps to identify and remove barriers and prevent the creation of new barriers. Our Multi-Year Plan outlines our commitments and timelines will be checked by our dedicated Accessibility Team.

VIA Rail is an organization that does more than just move passengers. We believe in making our commitments a reality. This is just the beginning. We will continue to rely on our passengers

and persons with disabilities to guide us and join our efforts in creating one of Canada's most accessible mobility options.