

ACCESSIBILITY PLAN

2023-2025

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GENERAL

Executive Summary

Northumberland Ferries Limited (NFL) is a ferry company operating in eastern Canada and is headquartered in Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island. Bay Ferries Limited (BFL) is also the subsidiary owner of NFL.

This Accessibility Plan is in place for these companies (NFL-BFL). NFL operates service between the Wood Islands terminal on eastern PEI and the Caribou terminal, near Caribou, Nova Scotia. Due to winter ice in Northumberland Strait, the NFL service is seasonal and operates between May 1st and December 20th. BFL operates two routes: one with the MV Fundy Rose serving the Saint John, New Brunswick to Digby, NS route year-round; and the other with the Alakai serving the Yarmouth, NS to Bar Harbor, Maine seasonal route, which operates from mid-May through October.

NFL-BFL are guided by the corporate vision of being leaders in the provision of world-class, safe, secure, efficient ferry service, as well as the values of Safety, People, Reliability, Integrity, Sustainability, and Innovation.

Preventing and removing barriers for both its customers and employees are important to NFL-BFL, with the companies striving to create an environment in which everyone is treated with dignity. As transportation service providers, our goal is to provide a positive, accessible transportation experience for persons with a disability, regardless of physical or sensory impairments. NFL-BFL's leadership continues to include objectives to support accessibility, diversity, and inclusion in the annual strategic plans, and highlight their ongoing value to the organization.

NFL-BFL take seriously the responsibility to remove barriers to travel for persons with disabilities and are proud of the achievements to date. The companies will continue working to remove additional barriers and make the organization and its services even more accessible in the future.

Feedback and Alternative Formats

NFL-BFL welcomes feedback on any accessibility-related items. The Chair of the Accessibility Committee is the designated contact to receive accessibility feedback on behalf of the companies and informs and involves other departments as required based on the content of the feedback.

Feedback can be submitted in the following three ways:

1. Directly to the Chair of the Accessibility Committee.
2. By utilizing the feedback form located in the Accessibility tab for each service.
3. By clicking on the link to the feedback process located on the main landing page of the website.

Anonymous comments can be submitted using the feedback form or by completing the contact information on the form. A Company representative will be able to respond to the feedback.

The Company will respond to feedback using the same medium that it was received.



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This plan is also available in alternative formats: print, large print, braille, audio format, and an electronic format. Requests for one of these alternative formats, or the submission of feedback, may be made through the contact information provided or through any of the companies' social media channels which include Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Instagram, and YouTube.

KEY AREAS

Information and Communication Technologies (ICT)

NFL-BFL utilize numerous information and communication technologies both internally and externally. In general, NFL-BFL telecommunication, computer, and network systems use industry-standard equipment and software.

Digital signage is used in the NFL service for communicating directly to customers. Screens are available in terminal seating areas and display various messages such as arrival and departure times, as well as other pertinent sailing information.

Entertainment systems on board vessels are television based, and the type of entertainment offered is primarily determined by voyage length. Shorter voyages, such as those offered by NFL, have televisions tuned to live programming, while longer voyages aboard the MV Fundy Rose and The CAT feature marquee movies that are closed captioned.

Customers wishing to avail themselves of described video options, or who wish to control the playback in other ways, can opt to view content via a loaned personal electronic device containing similar content to that being viewed on the main entertainment system.

Externally Focused

NFL-BFL are committed to the highest levels of customer satisfaction, and that includes our website. To make sure we are providing an online experience that is complete and equal for persons with disabilities, our website conforms with the generally recognized and accepted WCAG 2.1 AA guidelines for website accessibility.

As new content, features, and enhancements are developed and added to our website, NFL-BFL are committed to testing these components prior to release to ensure they meet said WCAG 2.1 AA guidelines and conform to our overarching web accessibility goals.

We're always interested in your feedback. Should you have a concern as it relates to accessibility, or wish to report an issue you've experienced, please submit feedback to <https://www.ferries.ca/accessibility/>

The comprehensive NFL-BFL point-of-sale system has several features that gives the user the ability to generate notifications when there is a schedule advisory or other important information regarding upcoming travel. Customers with impacted reservations receive direct communications via e-mail and SMS advisories that can be read on the users' device of choice.

Where supplementary or publicly available information about transportation-related services, safety or facilities are available in an electronic format, the organization has ensured that the format is compatible with adaptive technologies. Materials are available for viewing on personal devices using the customers' adaptive technology.

NFL-BFL provide telephone access to customers via a toll-free line, which can accept all types of relay services. A TTY phone number and various email addresses are also made available for public use.

Customers can receive information about onboard safety announcements from a staff member at the check-in counter in printed format, large-font printed format, and in braille. This procedure is described for customers on the company website at www.ferries.ca. Where applicable, onboard safety announcements are made via the television system in a closed-captioned format.



ACTIONS, TIMELINES, AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Under the guidance of the Accessibility Committee, an internal review of internet resources will be undertaken. This work, anticipated to be completed by the end of Fiscal Year 2023-24, will identify ways to improve the current offering of information and lead to the reviewing and continuous improvement of accessibility guidelines.

Additional Communications for Internal and External Audiences

Communication with internal and external audiences can take many forms depending on the purpose and circumstance, but the overall goal is to communicate information in a way that is most useful to the intended audience.

At NFL-BFL accessibility awareness training, employees are taught how to communicate clearly, concisely, and plainly—using gestures, large print, writing, or many other ways, including electronic options—to meet the needs of the person with whom they are communicating. The employees are trained in the importance of obtaining information from the person about what method of assistance they prefer, whether it is an alternative means of communication or another kind of assistance.

The staff are prepared to provide accessible alternatives to passenger services. The safety video played at the beginning of each crossing, for example, is closed captioned. Additionally, each vessel has an iPad that allows customers to watch, pause, and play videos while adjusting the volume. Printed or electronic versions of the dialogue in large text are also available upon request. Crew members can also provide an in-person, individual safety briefing upon request to ensure all important safety information is communicated and questions addressed.

Customers making reservations for travel requiring Assistance Services are engaged about their needs in relation to their disability once they self-identify to a reservations agent. Currently, customers utilizing the online booking engine are asked to contact a reservations agent to discuss or confirm requests for accessibility services.

Procurement of Goods, Services, and Facilities

NFL-BFL have an internal purchasing policy that lays out how items are to be purchased (i.e., optimal quality, lowest cost, buy local when price is competitive, etc.).

Accessibility considerations may be included by the purchase initiator as part of the stated requirements for the goods or services. The current procurement process, for all but large purchases, currently depends on the initiator to remember accessibility considerations when submitting requirements for goods and services. This process is under review to ensure that accessibility requirements are specifically considered where relevant. For example, in a new vessel acquisition, Accessibility Committee input will be included as part of the design specifications. This is also relevant for terminal redesign and major terminal projects.

ACTIONS, TIMELINES, AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Led by the Executive Director of Finance and with Accessibility Committee input, the Procurement Policy and processes are to be reviewed and amended as appropriate to include accessibility considerations. The policy review will be completed by the end of 2023.

Design and Delivery of Programs and Services

NFL operates ferry services on a seasonal schedule between Wood Islands, PEI and Caribou, NS. This service is available between May 1st and December 20th each year, and the number of sailings per day rises through the season to a peak 16-crossing schedule serviced by two vessels. NFL transports a diverse assortment of traffic daily, including customers, passenger vehicles, tractor trailers and their drivers, drop trailers, and many others.

BFL operates ferry services on two routes, one of which is international and seasonal, one of which is year-round and inter-provincial. The *HSV Alakai* operates daily from May into October, and operates daily from May into October between Yarmouth, NS and Bar Harbor, ME, USA.. The *MV Fundy Rose* operates throughout the year between Saint John, NB and Digby, NS on either a single- or double-daily trip schedule.

From shipping large volumes of freight to offering quality passenger amenities, NFL and BFL strive to exceed customers' expectations in providing a safe, reliable, and quality travel experience that is accessible for all.

NFL-BFL are governed by various acts and regulations including the Canada Labour Code, Transportation of Dangerous Goods Act and Regulations, International Maritime Dangerous Goods Code, Marine Liability Act and Regulations, Canada Shipping Act and Regulations, Financial Administration Act, Domestic Ferries Security Regulations, Sulphur Emission Control Areas Regulations, and Accessible Canada Act and Regulations.



NFL-BFL have an Accessibility Committee. The committee consists of representatives from all three routes in the NFL-BFL service, including both General Managers.

The committee is seeking to include employee representation in its membership. The mandate of this committee is to grow relationships with internal and external stakeholders, including people with disabilities in our community. It provides insight, feedback, and direction on NFL-BFL's current programs, services, and accessibility approaches, helping to identify potential areas for improvement to the benefit of employees and customers. The committee meets on a quarterly basis, with the plan to include customers in an annual virtual roundtable.

Transportation Services

NFL-BFL are pleased to provide a variety of assistance services. To ensure that your experience with us is smooth and enjoyable, it is recommended that you advise us of any required services when making your booking. A minimum of 48 hours' notice will help us to be prepared; however, we endeavour to provide services without any advance notice.

When accessibility-related services or assistance are requested and confirmed, this information will be added to the booking as additional resources. Terminal agents will also add these resources when requests are made at check-in.

Assistance Services Include:

- » Curbside luggage assistance.
- » Check-in process assistance.
- » Assistance to the boarding area after check-in.
- » Provision of free transportation to a support person for customers requiring a support person.
- » Assistance in boarding, disembarkation, and in moving between a vehicle deck and a passenger deck.
- » Provision of vessel safety briefing information in print, large-print, and braille formats.

- » Provision of pre-recorded onboard announcements, closed-captioned video safety briefings, and closed-captioned on-board entertainment.
- » Assistance to access onboard entertainment content. Personal electronic devices and instruction on the use of the device will be provided upon request.
- » Ship personnel will guide you to accessible tables and advise you of the location of the accessible washroom.
- » The crew will conduct periodic health checks during the voyage and will assist with any requested services.
- » Customers can remain in their personal mobility aids during the voyage or crew can provide seat transfer services.
- » Provide mobility aid storage upon request.
- » Assist a person who is blind or has a visual impairment to select food and beverages that are offered on board.
- » Assist persons with opening food packages, identifying food items, and in cases where the portions are large, assist the person by cutting the portion into smaller pieces.
- » Assist a person in processing through customs and security areas (where applicable) and assisting a person after disembarkation to proceed to the curbside zone.
- » Provide wheelchairs for use at the terminal and onboard, transportation onboard by accessible bus, or parking the vehicle close to an elevator on the vehicle deck.
- » Assistance with gaseous oxygen or a personal oxygen concentrator.
- » Permit certified support animals' access to passenger deck.
- » Provide pet relief areas at all terminals. Pet relief areas are clearly marked with wayfinding signs that are embossed and in braille.

Service Animals and Emotional Support Animals:

- » NFL-BFL allow service animals (including emotional support dogs, assistance dogs, and psychiatric service dogs) on the passenger deck of all vessels free of charge, when the animal is on duty.
- » It is important that international travellers review the entrance and import regulations for Canada and/or the United States to ensure permission to travel with your dog.
- » Dogs are accepted as service animals on all vessels at no charge (one service dog per passenger with a cognitive, physical, or emotional disability). Requests to travel with more than one service dog will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis. Only on-duty, fully trained, and certified service dogs are permitted on the passenger deck. All other dogs must remain in your vehicle or in the kennels provided on the vehicle deck.
- » Your service animal must wear some form of physical restraint device as it must always be under your control. Animals that pose any type of threat to the health and safety of crew members or other guests may be denied transport on the passenger deck of the vessel.
- » We strongly recommend that all service animals always wear proper identification (e.g., vest) while on the passenger deck of the vessel.
- » NFL-BFL reserve the right to limit movement on the passenger deck should another guest have severe allergies to animal dander.
- » Customers travelling with a service animal may be required to provide credible verbal assurance that the animal is a certified service animal. In situations where verbal assurance provided is questioned, a Registered Certificate Identification Card or other written documentation may be requested. Alternatively, the presence of physical indicators (e.g., harnesses or tags) will be accepted.
- » Customers should contact a crew member upon arrival on the passenger deck for assistance in locating seating to accommodate both you and your service animal.

- » Pet relief areas are available at all our terminals. Should your service animal require the use of one of these areas, simply self-identify at check-in and you will be escorted to the designated pet relief area by one of our staff members. Pet relief areas are clearly marked with wayfinding signage that is embossed and includes directional arrows and braille print. These are strategically placed to guide guests to the pet relief areas.
- » All necessary travel documentation, including required health certificates, must be up to date before travel. Proof of compliance with international regulations is required for travel between Canada and the United States.
- » Failure to provide the required documentation will result in the service animal being denied passage on our service between Nova Scotia and Maine. Service dogs must be at least 16 weeks old, be a certified service animal, and have up-to-date vaccines. A veterinary certificate will be required at check-in as well as upon arrival at the Canada Border Services Agency. For more information, click [here](#). The U.S. Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has certain requirements that must be met before a dog will be permitted to enter the United States. All dogs must appear healthy, and a valid rabies vaccination certificate may be required. To learn more, click [here](#).

Employee Services

NFL-BFL provide all employees with access to a free and confidential employee and family assistance plan. There is a wide range of assistance within the plan, be it healthy eating tips, financial planning, smoking cessation, or many other areas.

Work is underway to develop an Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion plan. Annual training will be the highlight of this plan, encouraging partnerships with local organizations to assist in the delivery of training.

NFL-BFL also partner with local non-profit organizations to promote inclusion, such as selling baked goods prepared by adults with disabilities and donating all used bottles and cans to non-profit organizations.

ACTIONS, TIMELINES, AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The Accessibility Committee will work on a plan to include select external resources such as vendors and consultants who also perform work for NFL-BFL. Prior to June 1st, 2024, NFL-BFL will include customers with disabilities and employees to best appreciate where improvements should be prioritized in the Accessibility Plan. The Committee will also provide key metrics to allow ongoing measurement of progress on accessibility issues from an employee perspective.

Transportation

Most NFL-BFL customers access the service using their own vehicles, which they drive onboard themselves. The Yarmouth-Bar Harbor and Digby-Saint John services provide a shuttle to take foot passengers between terminal buildings and vessels. Shuttle buses are accessible, featuring a wheelchair lift in the rear of the vehicle.

Employees are generally responsible for arranging their own transportation to and from the workplace and when travelling for business purposes. In less common instances when other types of transportation are contracted, such as external taxi or bus services, the accessibility needs of the user group are considered.

ACTIONS, TIMELINES, AND RESPONSIBILITIES

As NFL-BFL renew the fleet of shuttles, accessibility is a key consideration. Both the Digby-Saint John and Yarmouth-Bar Harbor services provide accessible shuttles, with the latter being electric 15-passenger trams.



The Built Environment

Accessible facilities are a key component of NFL-BFL's operational infrastructure and vital to supporting the achievement of its mandate. The companies operate four vessels and six terminals, as well as various administration office spaces.

NFL terminals are maintained in Wood Islands, PEI (seasonal), and Caribou, NS (seasonal). BFL terminals are maintained in Saint John, NB (year-round), Digby, NS (year-round), Yarmouth, NS (seasonal), and Bar Harbor, Maine (seasonal). Each terminal has accessible parking, entrances, and washrooms, and signage that includes tactile and/or braille where applicable, as well as elevators where occupied spaces are on more than one level. Service dog relief areas are established in both the secure and non-secure areas at each terminal, along with associated directional signage that is in large-print format, embossed, and braille. There is accessible parking at terminals for visitors, employees, and travelling passengers that links to accessible paths to terminal buildings.

In addition to its terminal facilities, NFL-BFL lease corporate office space in Charlottetown, PE, and in Halifax, NS. The Halifax office includes elevators, as well as accessible parking, entrances, and washrooms. Accessible parking is available at all locations.

Whenever NFL-BFL are engaged with design professionals, applicable accessibility code requirements are implemented in a manner that supports and enhances physical, social, and psychological barrier-free design to improve accessibility, inclusion, and equity for all.

NFL's current vessels include the MV *Confederation*. This vessel is maintained to strict regulatory and safety standards and must comply with Transport Canada Marine Safety Statutes and Regulations. It is inspected by Transport Canada Marine Safety and Lloyds Register, a world-leading classification society, to ensure compliance with these regulations and codes. The Safety Management System of the vessel is audited independently by Class Society DNV to verify compliance with the requirements of the International Safety Management Code for the Safe Operations of Ships and Pollution Prevention.

MV *Confederation* has various accessibility features including elevators, signage that includes tactile and/or braille where applicable, service dog relief areas, accessible public washrooms, and adapted cabins and seating. Both mobility and hearing adapted cabins are available and each type has specific features, such as a washroom and shower that can accommodate mobility aids and visual doorbells respectively.

NFL continues to work with Transport Canada in the replacement of the MV *Holiday Island*, one of NFL's former vessels that is no longer in service. The replacement vessel will be approximately 120 metres in length and carry up to 600 passengers, along with commercial and passenger vehicles. It will incorporate the latest accessibility standards, energy-efficient green ship technology, and enhanced maneuvering ability. The ship is expected to enter service in the 2029-2030 fiscal year.

At BFL, the current vessels are MV Fundy Rose for the Saint John-Digby service, and HSC Alakai for the Yarmouth-Bar Harbor service. MV Fundy Rose is maintained to strict regulatory and safety standards and must comply with Transport Canada Marine Safety Statutes and Regulations. It is inspected by Transport Canada Marine Safety and Lloyds Register, a world-leading classification society, to ensure compliance with these regulations and codes. The Safety Management System of the vessel is audited independently by Class Society DNV to verify compliance with the requirements of the International Safety Management Code for the Safe Operations of Ships and Pollution Prevention.

MV *Fundy Rose* has various accessibility features including elevators, signage that includes tactile and/or braille where applicable, and accessible public washrooms.

HSC *Alakai* is maintained to strict regulatory and safety standards and must comply with United States Coast Guard (USCG) Safety Statutes and Regulations. It is inspected by USCG and DNV, a world-leading classification society, to ensure compliance with these regulations and codes. The Safety Management System of the vessel is audited independently by Class Society DNV to verify compliance with the requirements of the International Safety Management Code for the Safe Operations of Ships and Pollution Prevention. HSC *Alakai* has various accessibility features including elevators, signage that includes tactile and/or braille where applicable, and accessible public washrooms.

Barriers in NFL-BFL's built environment are largely related to older infrastructure that was constructed or procured prior to the existence of current accessibility standards. As facilities are upgraded or replaced, accessibility requirements receive significant attention. There are also some potential barriers related to vessel safety or class requirements that cannot be changed. Efforts continue to be made to mitigate the impact of these requirements, often by providing assistive devices or individual assistance.

ACTIONS, TIMELINES, AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Some accessible features in public buildings, such as automatic door openers and call buttons, are not used on a regular basis. It is possible that potential issues with these devices may go undetected until they are required for use. To better ensure these features are maintained in proper working order and any issues are identified promptly so they may be rectified, a checklist of accessibility features will be developed for each site. The Accessibility Committee will oversee the development of these checklists by the end of Fiscal Year 2023-24 and work with appropriate managers as required to have them completed monthly.

By the end of 2024, the Accessibility Committee, working with the Infrastructure Manager and local Health & Safety Committees, will undertake a review of existing administration and operations buildings to inventory existing physical barriers and begin exploring options to improve accessibility to and within the buildings. This review will provide NFL-BFL a clear understanding of the current state of its infrastructure in terms of accessibility and allow additional planning for future improvements.

Provision of CTA Accessibility-Related Regulations

As federally regulated marine transportation service providers, NFL-BFL are subject to the Accessible Transportation for Persons with Disabilities Regulations from the Government of Canada, which has the goal of removing barriers to transportation for persons with disabilities.

As NFL-BFL are both carriers and terminal operators, sections of the regulations applicable to NFL-BFL include: 1-25, 28, 31-35, 37-39, 42, 46, 48-61, 134-138, 140, 142-144, 153, 164, 178, 212-223, and 225-231. Information on the activities and services covered by these sections has been presented in the preceding sections.

NFL-BFL maintain an open dialogue with representatives of the CTA and participate in its ongoing consultative processes.

Employment and Training

NFL-BFL employs approximately 400 employees, most of whom are unionized across seven different bargaining units. All job postings include a statement affirming our desire to consider applicants from underrepresented groups. As part of the recruitment process, the Company builds relationships with newcomer associations, Indigenous associations, and non-profit organizations supporting adults with disabilities. Each year, we report our employment equity statistics to the Federal Government, and this data allows us to review our accomplishments and strategize to improve.

NFL-BFL works closely with our unions to promote early and positive outcomes through return-to-work planning and temporary and permanent accommodations.

ACTIONS, TIMELINES, AND RESPONSIBILITIES

NFL-BFL Ferries provides accessibility training as part of its new employee orientation. Recently, this program has been revised thanks to the feedback from members of the public who volunteered their time. This provided valuable insight on the removal of barriers and enhancements we can make to ensure our service is accessible to all. Every three years, employees also participate in refresher sessions. Refresher sessions are planned and delivered during the annual Learning Fair for NFL-BFL.

CONSULTATIONS

The Accessibility Committee meets quarterly and has a mandate to include annual community and employee consultation. An annual feedback/review session will be held with representative Persons with Disabilities and employees.

In preparation for developing its 2023-2025 Accessibility Plan, NFL-BFL consulted with a number of specific disability groups as well as persons with disabilities. NFL-BFL consulted with:

- » Hear PEI, a non-profit, volunteer run organization dedicated to improving life for those with hearing loss
- » Person with visual impairment
- » Resource Abilities, a voluntary, non-profit, non-government organization that is governed by a sixteen-member Board of Directors, at least nine of whom must have a disability,

Representatives from the above stakeholders were all given tours of all publicly accessible areas of the Confederation, a passenger ferry, for their feedback on the vessel's accessibility from their individual perspective as persons living with aural, visual, or physical disabilities. All stakeholders were also provided the same accessibility training that NFL-BFL staff receive and were invited to provide their feedback.

The feedback received from consulting with the stakeholders above through tours, open-ended qualitative questions, and a review of NFL-BFL's accessibility training for staff, was used to develop the Company's 2023-2025 Accessibility Plan as well as revise and enhance the Company's accessibility training for staff.

Since publishing the 2023-2025 Accessibility Plan, NFL-BFL's accessibility committee meets quarterly and has a mandate to include annual community and employee consultation. An annual feedback/review session will be held with representative Persons with Disabilities and employees.



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