 

# Update on Accelerating Accessibility - 19 May 2021

## It is well established that change is needed to improve accessibility in New Zealand.

### 1 in 4 New Zealanders have a disability and can face challenges with:

* buildings that are inaccessible;
* public services and facilities that are hard to access;
* barriers to using public transport;
* barriers to employment;
* digital information and communication formats that are inaccessible.

## Currently, there is no coordinated, effective system to remove or reduce accessibility barriers that disabled people face across society

The existing accessibility system has a number of issues.

* No single point of leadership driving change.
* Knowledge and awareness of accessibility in New Zealand is unevenly understood, distributed and applied.
* There are limited channels for people experiencing accessibility barriers to bring these to the attention of decision makers.
* Policies, services and buildings are designed by people unaware of the accessibility barriers people face.
* Existing accessibility regulations and obligations on those responsible for preventing accessibility barriers is fragmented and not consistently applied.

## In June 2020, Cabinet agreed to officials developing further work on a legislative framework and other mechanisms for accelerating accessibility, broadly endorsing that a new accelerating accessibility system needs to:

* Provide enhanced system leadership and accountability. This will ensure a clear focus and drive to address systemic accessibility issues.
* Create clear processes for considering and removing barriers. This will enable a consistent and effective approach to removing accessibility barriers, including new accessibility regulations or standards to drive change.
* Incorporate the voice of expertise. This will allow those with expertise - disabled people, the community, the private sector and government - to all play a role in shaping the accessibility system.
* Build knowledge of accessibility barriers. This will help individuals and organisations to understand their rights and obligations around accessibility measures.
* Be flexible and progressive. This will allow governments to set priorities to resource accessibility measures and ensure that obligated parties have time to meet measures and can do so in innovative ways.
* Be transparent, consistent, and equitable. A system must bring all New Zealanders on the accessibility journey, be consistent with Te Tiriti o Waitangi and the UNCRPD, and ensure predictable and consistent accessibility outcomes for obligated parties.
* Be universal - An accessibility system must be able to influence and change behaviours towards accessibility across all of society.
* Be inclusive and easy to use - Disabled people must be involved in all aspects of decision making to ensure the system is robust, while also ensuring that the system is user friendly.

## My officials have been working in partnership with the Access Alliance and have identified a range of approaches for how this new system could work

I am aware that any approach to legislation needs to find a balance between creating powers and functions that:

* allows a flexible and innovative approach to realising accessibility outcomes, including different transition arrangements for accessibility measures to be realised over time and;
* provides a directive approach to ensure that groups in both the public sector and wider civil society prioritise and act on accessibility barriers.

## I will seek Cabinet agreement to a complete policy proposal in September

* I had intended to present a complete policy proposal in May, however I consider it necessary that more time is spent undertaking careful and thorough analysis of the legislative approach.
* New accelerating accessibility legislation is a once in a lifetime opportunity. Time taken now to work through the legislative implications will ensure that legislation delivers a more inclusive and accessible Aotearoa.
* Considering this approach in September will ensure that a new accessibility system is considered in conjunction with the work being undertaken around the broader transformation of Disability Support Services.
* My officials will consult with key stakeholders across the public sector, business and wider community over the next few months to ensure that the final policy approach is robust.

Ends