

**CITY OF HELSINKI  
ACCESSIBILITY GUIDELINES**

**2011**

15 November 2011

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## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Drafting of the accessibility guidelines

On 15 October 2001 the City Board approved the programme for 2001–2010 relating to the city's accessibility strategy. In this connection the City Board also decided to establish the Accessible Helsinki project (now known as Helsinki for All) for the period 1 January 2002 – 31 December 2011. The project covered programme coordination, communication, reporting and quality assurance, and was assigned to the Public Works Department.

The Helsinki for All project included drafting of the City of Helsinki's accessibility guidelines. Drafting of the guidelines was based on the City Board's decision of 17 May 2010 relating to the progress of the City of Helsinki's Accessibility Plan for the period 1 January 2003 – 28 May 2009 (minutes 19/2010 § 644). The City Board urged the Helsinki for All project team to draft a proposal for the City of Helsinki accessibility guidelines in cooperation with authorities and public enterprises and through interaction with interest groups.

The accessibility guidelines were presented to councils for the elderly and disabled in 2010, with subsequent work taking account of the comments received. Statements on the accessibility guidelines were requested from key administrative branches, organisations for the disabled and interest groups in spring 2011. Note was taken of these statements during the drafting of the final guidelines. The proposed changes and improvements presented in the statements were discussed by the steering group for the Helsinki for All project on 13 September 2011.

### 1.2 Aim and content of the accessibility guidelines

The purpose of the City of Helsinki accessibility guidelines is to function as coherent general guidelines for the entire city and all branches of administration when undertaking accessibility work. The guidelines form an overall framework for the implementation programmes of the different branches of administration that relate to accessibility, and for interaction among the various branches. Actual implementation measures and timetables are specified in the implementation programmes and plans of the individual administrative branches.

One of the aims of the accessibility guidelines is to boost cooperation at the interface of the various spheres of activity of the administrative branches, and thereby ensure that accessibility is implemented. The guidelines promote the linking of accessibility as part of the normal activities of each administrative branch.

The accessibility guidelines are divided into five focus areas: land use planning and traffic planning, buildings, public areas, residential environment, and services. The guidelines concern all administrative branches with activities related to the project in question.

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## **2. CURRENT STATUS OF ACCESSIBILITY IN HELSINKI**

We are moving in the right direction with regard to achieving accessibility in the city's public areas and buildings, although progress is considerably slower than first anticipated. The goal set at the time the Helsinki for All project was being established, namely that all public areas and buildings would be accessible by 2011, has not been attained, leading to the continuation of accessibility work beyond this date.

Though key accessibility-related instructions have been prepared, progress in their application and linking to normal operations within the different administrative branches has proved variable. Helsinki still lacks cohesive guidelines on accessibility that bind all branches of administration.

Cooperation among the branches must be intensified: regional co-scheduling of projects, for example those covering renovation of buildings and their surroundings, should be carried out as inter-branch cooperation.

Accessibility is beginning to be combined with normal operations, but in many administrative branches the process remains unfinished. Programmes are unnecessary in the case of separate accessibility projects.

## **3. ACCESSIBILITY GUIDELINES**

### **3.1 General operating principles**

Accessibility should be one of the entities monitored in the city's strategy programme.

Accessibility should be included as one of the metrics monitored in the Land Use and Housing (MA) programme and in the city's business strategy.

Accessibility should be incorporated in the service and operating strategies of the administrative branches.

Accessibility should be included in project procurement documents.

Close cooperation should be carried out among the different administrative branches on a regional basis.

Accessibility should also be promoted through integrated development projects: the projects should make use of accessibility instructions prepared by the Helsinki for All project (SuRaKu project, type drawings related to street areas, guidelines of the project 'Administrative branches and the need for accessibility', and the accessibility symbol project).

We should ensure that City of Helsinki purchasers and private providers have sufficient accessibility know-how: regular training in accessibility issues should be provided for the staff of the various administrative branches. The need for training and its specification should come from the administrative branches. Accessibility

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training should be organised in cooperation with disability associations. Certification of the accessibility competence of designers will also require the development of accessibility training. Such development will permit advantage to be taken of expertise at user level.

Accessibility requirements should also be taken into account in procurement tendering and various agreements (accessibility should be incorporated as one of the tender criteria). Accessibility competence should also be required of the consultants used by the city.

The accessibility perspective should form part of the city's development projects.

Municipalities in the metropolitan region should cooperate to promote accessibility (including planning, public transport, housing).

National networking: continuation of cooperation among municipal accessibility experts.

Cooperation with the Government: participation in accessibility-related development projects run by the various ministries.

Internationalisation: continuation of cooperation with accessibility experts from other countries.

Private bodies – including property owners, companies and entrepreneurs – considered as partners at the earliest possible stage when planning accessibility measures.

### **3.2 Accessibility focus areas**

All stages of the planning, construction and maintenance process will affect the accessibility outcome. Land use planning, together with the associated traffic planning, creates those starting points that for the most part will determine the later planning of streets, parks and urban blocks.

Decisions made during land use planning, for example the positioning of streets in a particular terrain, access to plots or street dimensioning, cannot be changed in any fundamental sense at a later planning stage. If the plan locates the street area in the terrain in such a way that gradients are too steep from the accessibility perspective or too compact for the safe disposition and differentiation of the intended functions, there will be few opportunities to effect a solution at the street planning stage.

The planning of streets and parks determines the detailed dimensioning of public areas, including levelling, surfacing materials, structures and equipment, as well as their placement. Street and park planning thus occupies a key position when considering the accessibility of the environment.

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The practical creation of the environment's physical structures occurs at the construction stage. Unless construction follows the plans faithfully, or should tolerances during implementation exceed those permitted by the plans, street surfaces and structures may develop characteristics of inaccessibility. An accessible environment requires greater precision than hitherto in the surfacing of pavements and passageways and in structural building.

In connection with construction and maintenance, working time arrangements concerning accessibility should be taken care of according to the instructions. As early as the project preparation stage, plans for working time arrangements should be drawn up for each contract, so that the party commissioning the work can require and ensure that implementation is in line with the plans at all stages of the work.

Management of accessibility throughout the chain requires close cooperation among the various administrative branches during the process. When responsibility for planning is transferred from one branch to another it is vital to ensure that the set objectives are retained.

### **3.2.1 Land use and traffic planning**

#### ***Accessibility of new planning areas and areas with changes in land use***

Accessibility criteria (existing instructions regarding accessibility and building practices) should be employed in city planning and local detailed planning, and any instructions relating to them: dimensioning of street spaces, relationships between buildings and streets, and the impact of accessibility requirements on the size of courtyard areas (including methods of implementing entrance accessibility if the building fronts directly on to the street). Instructions on incorporating the accessibility perspective should be drawn up for use in land use planning.

The Accessibility Plan to be made in connection with city planning and local detailed planning should be given emphasis, and a separate section on accessibility incorporated in the planning report.

For new planning areas, the areas, routes and sites requiring the special accessibility level should be set out in the land use plan. The location of sheltered accommodation for the elderly, for example, should make particular allowance for accessibility with regard to longitudinal inclination (maximum 5%). The areas requiring the special level should be determined in cooperation with the project managers responsible for land use planning, traffic planning, implementation planning, and the city's accessibility. The basic accessibility level should be set as the objective for other areas, with implementation complying with the relevant instructions. The criteria for special and basic accessibility levels are determined under the SuRaKu project and are used as a basis in the City of Helsinki Accessibility Plan.

A check should be made at the draft planning stage for the local detailed plan to ensure that the principles and solutions in the local master plan can be implemented. It is particularly important to confirm the implementation of

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areas and routes designated for the special accessibility level. This requires the cooperation of land-use-, traffic- and implementation planning. The plans should be drafted in cooperation with the project manager responsible for the city's accessibility.

In the case of large-scale planning changes to older areas or plans involving urban infill, care should be taken that the targeted accessibility levels for the relevant areas in the neighbourhood access plan or area plan are given full consideration and implemented as far as possible.

### ***Location of functions and service availability***

Adequate space should be reserved for public and private service functions (private medical centres, for example), and the location of functions should take account of the accessibility perspective.

Public and private service buildings should be situated close to extensive public transport connections.

The conditions for accessible and safe connections should be ensured from the street to the site and at the entrances to the building. Land use planning should comply with the guidelines issued by the Helsinki Building Control Commission. The main entrance should be altered to improve accessibility as far as possible; if it is necessary to circle a building in order to reach an accessible entrance this can present disabled persons with enormous difficulties (e.g. ground conditions, other obstacles, the lack of disabled parking spaces in private parking areas).

The adequate dimensioning, number and suitable location of disabled parking spaces and places for picking up and dropping off should be set out in the local detailed plan (distance from the main entrance). Adequate provision of space and unobstructed access are essential.

The accessibility requirements of rescue routes should be ensured (implementation of the requirements for special and basic accessibility levels).

### ***Functionality of the public transport network***

The public transport service network and transport stops should be situated so that the public transport connections between stops and service points and between individual service points are all accessible.

The functionality of the public transport network should also include provision of clear announcements and displays at the various types of transport stop in order to serve those users with impaired hearing or vision.

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The public transport information system should be flexible and able to take account of accessibility in communicating any changes to normal service.

The opportunity for accessible change from one means of transport to another should be ensured.

Stops and terminal areas should be dimensioned in such a way that they can accommodate pick-up and drop-off traffic, persons with mobility or functional impairment, those with prams or pushchairs, and the requirements of maintenance machinery.

### ***Accessibility of streets***

Streets in new planning areas should be situated in the terrain in such a way that street inclination remains within the limit for longitudinal inclination (special level 5%, basic level 8%).

Sufficient space should be reserved for stockpiling snow. Space allocated for accessibility purposes should also take account of winter conditions (pavements and passageways of sufficient breadth). For example, the illustrations should show the areas suitable for the temporary banking of snow, as well as the dimensioning of routes.

### ***Traffic Planning***

The drafting of traffic planning should be based on type drawings related to street areas.

Planning should involve the checking and recording of the accessibility level: special or basic.

Pedestrian and cycle routes should be kept separate wherever possible, reserving adequate space at the planning stage.

The guide for traffic lights should be planned to take account of the accessibility perspective.

### **3.2.2 Buildings**

When applying for a building permit, in addition to the report on access for the disabled mentioned in the National Building Code (A2:5.2.5) and issued by the principal design office in connection with the application plan, major building projects and their arrangements concerning the environment will require a favourable statement or opinion from the project manager responsible for the city's accessibility.

Major public and private building projects include the main transport terminals and stations serving the general public, city centre blocks



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incorporating large residential complexes, and all open public buildings, particularly health centres and hospitals, as well as service centres, sheltered accommodation and various group homes, including any buildings comparable to the above.

As early as the planning stage, before submitting the application for building permit to building control, the party initiating the project and the principal design office should review the draft of the application plan together with the project manager responsible for accessibility and, if necessary, modify the solutions in such a way that the project manager is able to approve them by issuing a favourable statement or opinion.

Accessibility implementation of building projects at the completion stage should be examined separately. Obligations of the party initiating the project include ensuring that practical functionality is examined appropriately in a manner approved by the project manager responsible for accessibility. A report on accessibility implementation should be made available before the final review by building control, when the project in whole or part will be approved for adoption.

Accessibility and functional inspections should be linked as part of the city's planning, building and maintenance in such a way that every notable new building and renovation project will incorporate a review on accessibility implementation.

Accessibility objectives in projects for constructing or renovating premises should be linked as part of needs assessment, project planning and other planning. Accessibility criteria should also be incorporated in contract documentation.

Accessibility requirements for entrances and courtyard areas should be specified for both public and residential buildings. This should also include private buildings accessible to the public that are located on city plots.

All administrative buildings should have accessible entrances.

All the city's administrative buildings that possess a customer service point should have an accessible area for customer service and an accessible WC located in space open to the public.

Accessibility criteria should be incorporated in the leasing and handover terms of buildings. Requirements for implementing accessibility should also be attended to in land use planning, and in area planning, transport planning and building design.

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### **3.2.3 Public areas**

#### ***Area plans***

Area plans should involve inspection of the specified routes at special and basic level, and include details of the special-level accessible playpark if such has been designated for the area in question.

#### ***Streets and routes***

Special and basic level routes defined as accessible should be implemented as such: investment projects, structural maintenance, renovation, upkeep.

The unbroken continuity of routes should be ensured: cooperation among the various administrative branches.

#### ***Winter maintenance***

Order documentation for winter street maintenance should specify the accessibility criteria for the winter maintenance of the various routes. Guidance should be given to manufacturers regarding the routes and areas designated as accessible.

#### ***Playparks***

Playparks designated for the special accessibility level should be refurbished to comply with special-level criteria: cooperation among the various administrative branches.

Accessibility of playpark buildings should be ensured.

The target level for accessibility and the accessibility objectives should be recorded in project programmes.

#### ***Parks***

The accessibility target level – special or basic – should be recorded in park plans.

Renovation projects should take account of accessibility.

#### ***Neighbourhood (local) sports facilities***

Sports facilities should also include areas designated at the special accessibility level.

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Planning and construction of neighbourhood (local) sports facilities should incorporate accessibility criteria.

### ***Planning conditions for public areas***

The planning conditions for public areas should be inspected with regard to accessibility (events, terraces and other temporary structures).

The criteria for the location, quantity and characteristics of advertising stands should be inspected (these criteria include guidelines concerning pavement sandwich boards).

### ***Lighting***

Specification of the lighting level and method for different areas should incorporate accessibility, including the drafting of criteria for special- and basic-level routes and areas.

## **3.2.4 Residential environment**

Quality criteria for accessible housing should be drawn up and linked to form part of quality criteria for housing construction. These quality criteria support the objective of local residents being able to live in their own homes for as long as possible in safety and with complete accessibility.

Cooperation with the business world should be increased with regard to accessibility of the residential environment (the route should run through a shopping centre, for example, or in proximity to other services).

## **3.2.5 Services**

Accessibility should also be taken into account in the following sub-areas: attitudinal accessibility, accessibility through the various senses, cognitive, communicative, cultural and economic accessibility, and accessibility to decision-making.

*"To bring about a change in society in terms of values and attitudes relative to disability policy requires of all administrative sectors – and of other societal actors as well – to realise measures which are consequential and which are to be realised through predetermined midterm targets. The objective of the work done in relation to attitudes and values is influencing the prevalent values and understanding in such a way that all people can build the society together. The disability-related needs will be taken into consideration as part of the mainstream design and implementation. Accessible environments, functioning services and usable products will strengthen both equality between people and nondiscrimination."*

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*Text: Finland's Disability Policy Programme VAMPO 2010–2015*

Accessibility should be considered in the development of electronic services (plain language).

Each administrative branch should ensure the usability and accessibility of its web content from the perspective both of the visually impaired and of other disability groups (instructions and standard of the Finnish Federation of the Visually Impaired on web content accessibility, plain language. W3C Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0).

The accessibility of public transport information should be developed: announcements, screens, route information.

Events arranged by the city should be accessible and organised in accessible spaces. Accessibility should also be added as a requirement at the rental and/or other agreement stage involving private organisers / renters of premises and the city. This means that the event organiser must ensure the event's accessibility within the bounds of the existing framework.

A GIS-based monitoring system should be developed for the purpose of following the progress of accessibility work (City Board decision of 17 May 2010). Cooperation with the IT Division of the Economic and Planning Centre: connection to the municipal office register.

#### **4. ASSESSMENT AND MONITORING OF ACCESSIBILITY GUIDELINES IMPLEMENTATION**

The accessibility work of the City of Helsinki will continue. On 12 April 2011 the Public Works Committee decided on a proposal to the City Board for the establishment of a fixed-term advisory committee for accessibility affairs for the City of Helsinki, effective from 1 January 2012. The key task of the advisory committee is to coordinate and promote accessibility work throughout the city, and to monitor accessibility implementation in the projects under way in the various administrative branches. The advisory committee consists of various administrative branches, as well as councils for the elderly and disabled, and Public Works Committee representatives. The Chair of the advisory committee is Deputy Mayor Pekka Sauri. The operational rules and duties of the advisory committee were determined at the start of 2012. The advisory committee reports on its activities annually to the City Board.

These City of Helsinki Accessibility Guidelines, together with the accessibility indicators approved earlier by the steering group for the Helsinki for All project, form the advisory committee's key tools for monitoring accessibility implementation.

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The project manager responsible for accessibility acts as the advisory committee's drafter of issues for discussion. The task of the project manager is to coordinate and promote accessibility work across the city in cooperation with the advisory committee, and to function as senior specialist on accessibility.

On 10 October 2011 the City Board formally noted the Public Works Committee's proposal on the organisation of the city's accessibility work after 2011.

At the same time it was decided to defer until a later, separate decision by the City Board the establishment of an advisory committee for accessibility affairs to monitor and promote accessibility work and to follow the progress of accessibility implementation.

The City of Helsinki Accessibility Guidelines and instructions should be updated sufficiently often to keep abreast of technical development and changing conditions.