

# International Day of Persons with Disabilities Transcript

## Building Parks for Everyone and Inclusive Recreation and Sport in Manitoba

**Darren Macdonald:** Good afternoon, everyone. Welcome to our webinar this afternoon. We'll give everybody a few minutes to log in, get comfortable, get settled. It usually takes a minute or two for everybody to join so we'll let people log in and make sure they take a look at the accessibility features. If they would like to change the captioning or turn on the captioning, as well, there are ASL interpreters here today for your convenience. If you need to access the live closed captioning, there's an icon at the bottom right. It has two letter CC's so you can click on that. For American Sign Language Interpretation, click on the globe icon, which is also at the bottom right. So welcome, everyone. Come in. We'll let you set up your zoom, get comfortable. We'll give it just a minute. I see people are still logging in so thank you.

**Darren Macdonald:** Thank you very much for taking the time to join us today. If you're here in Winnipeg, it's a little blizzardy and cold out there. Hopefully, you're nice and warm somewhere to take in our webinar. So again, thank you very much for joining us. Well, let you set up your screens.

**Darren Macdonald:** Just a note that our webinar is being recorded so we like to have our recording up on our website. [AccessibilityMB.ca](http://AccessibilityMB.ca). And we'll have that up as soon as possible. So, people who weren't able to attend in-person can take a look or for those who want to refer back, you can always take a look, too.

**Darren Macdonald:** So great to see all of you here for International Day of Persons with Disabilities. Likely, lots of you know this is a celebration held annually on December 3rd. It was first proclaimed back in 1992 by the United Nations General Assembly, and the International Day of Persons with Disabilities promotes an understanding of disability issues and calls for supporting the dignity, rights and well-being of persons with disabilities. And each year,

Manitoba joins people really across the world in promoting the rights and well-being of people with disabilities in all aspects of life, and that includes political, social, economic, and cultural parts of our life. So, the world's population is ever increasing and more than a billion people or approximately 15% of the world population live with some form of disability. And with 80% of those living in developing countries. So, evidence and experience shows that when barriers are eliminated and people with disabilities are empowered to take part, the whole community benefits. So, we prioritize accessibility and inclusion and then the result is that progress really benefits everybody.

**Darren Macdonald:** I'd like to take a moment just to promote Manitoba's work with regards to human rights for people with disabilities. Here in Manitoba, we have accessibility legislation, The Accessibility for Manitobans Act. And we've developed five accessibility standards or regulations that deal with accessible customer service, employment, information and communication, and transportation and those are all enacted and we are working currently on a regulation dealing with accessible outdoor spaces. And it is that work on the regulation for accessible outdoor spaces which led to today's theme for our webinar "building parks for everyone and inclusive recreation and sport in Manitoba." So, we're really excited to have two keynote speakers with us today. We will first hear from Rebecca Luhn-Jensen, she's with Manitoba Parks, and she will describe how provincial parks are becoming more accessible for all. And then we'll hear from Colin Mathieson, a Manitoba Paralympian, who will reflect on his journey to overcome systemic barriers and challenges in sport. So, we're glad you joined us. We're really excited for today's presentation. Not all of us can be elite-level athletes like Colin, and we're also happy to hear from Rebecca about some of the recreational and provincial parks and some of the recreational activities that are becoming more accessible for all of us.

**Darren Macdonald:** So, before we jump into that, we do want to have an opening blessing from Vern Dano, our Knowledge Keeper. And then we'll hear from Minister Nahanni Fontaine who can't be here in-person today. Unfortunately, she is at the Legislature doing her important work as an elected official, and so she'll send her greetings by pre-recorded greeting. So, we'll let Vern log in and then we'll just do a quick poll just to see who's out there today and just to get everybody interactive.

**Darren Macdonald:** We're curious to know a couple of things about you, so we'll launch our poll. We're just curious to know if you've previously attended an International Day of Persons with Disabilities event. Or how many of you are attending for the first time. So, if you're able, please click on the box, yes, you've attended an event before or, second box, it's your first time, and third, you're not sure, and that's okay, too. We'll give you a minute to click on those. As our guests are logging in, we'll quickly see the results. And there they are, so it looks like the majority of you, it's your first time, 65% say it's your first time attending an IDPD event, good to have you. 26% say they have attended before so welcome back, nice to see you again. And some of us aren't sure and that's okay too. So, thanks for answering. We always like to check in and see if it's first timers or return guests that are joining our calls. So now we will hear from Vern Dano, I always appreciate Vern's take on these types of events and his wisdom and then after that, we will hear from Colleen Watters. Vern, let me turn it over to you.

**Vern Dano:** Thank you. Hi, everybody. Aaniin. Vern Dano. [speaking indigenous language] My name is Vern Dano, my spirit name is Strong Running Horse of the Lynx Clan. I come from Mallard, Manitoba. I'm so happy I'm wearing my exercise outfit today because I'm in the gym working out and it's important that we stay as physical as possible. As an Anishinaabe Knowledge Keeper, my goal is for all of us to know, no matter what our challenges are, we can make decisions and the decisions we make are like that of a turtle. The turtle has a tail at the end, it's a rudder. And the head of it is where you're going and where you're coming from, that turtle, it's like that rudder of life. And so, as it goes both ways using that physical strength, it's the positive and negative decisions we make in our lives. It's important to know if you're always making negative -- you'll go in a circle. If you do too much positive, you go the other way, so you have to find that balance by learning from our negative experiences plus our positive experiences to find that balance in our life, our trajectory. I tell people, are you living in anxiety or in depression? If you're living in anxiety, you're too much into the future. And if you're living in depression, you're too much in the past. So, we have to visit the past and yet honour the future but live for today.

**Vern Dano:** I want you all to take that moment in your own life and see how are you moving in

your life? What obstacles and challenges that you've overcome, what have you done that you succeeded in, and you survived through that maybe other people don't know? And so, like today, that focus we're going to hear from people that are so gifted and the stories that have been shared by them, we call sacred stories, stories of our life, and we all carry beautiful stories. So, honour that mental, that physical, that emotional, spiritual self that you carry. And know that today is a special day, and I just learned that a billion-plus, so I don't feel alone. I feel part of a really cool group, and so I sign off. Be kind. Stay warm. I hope you enjoy your Christmas holidays and help someone that's struggling out there this Christmas and this new year's. So, with that, I sign off. Take care, everyone. And have a great Christmas season. Miigwech. Thank you.

**Darren Macdonald:** Thank you, Vern. Thank you very much for joining us, and I appreciate the teachings about the turtle. Sometimes when we're spinning, I think this will help us to sort of stop that spin. So, thank you very much for joining us today, Vern Dano, an Indigenous Knowledge Keeper. We love to have him come and do opening blessings for us in the spirit of reconciliation and learning. Thanks, Vern. Take care. Next, I would like to introduce Colleen Watters. Colleen is a policy analyst with us here at the Manitoba Accessibility Office, and she is going to talk about her connection to traditional lands and do a land acknowledgement because we're here today on Treaty One Territory.

**Colleen Watters:** Welcome everyone to the International Day of Persons with Disabilities webinar. I am Colleen Watters, Policy Analyst with the Manitoba Accessibility Office. I am proud to be here today to present the land acknowledgement on behalf of our office. As a person with a disability living in Canada, I am a Canadian settler with parental origins from England and Ireland and I am proud to call Treaty 1 territory home. On behalf of the Manitoba Accessibility Office, I would like to further acknowledge that we are presenting today from Treaty 1 Territory and that Manitoba is located on the treaty territories and ancestral lands of the Anishinaabeg [ah-nish-in-NAH-beg], Anishininewuk [ah-nishoin-inew-wak], Dakota Oyate [dah-koh-tah oh-ate-ay], Denesuline [den-ay-soo-lin-ay] and Nehethowuk [nee-hen-oh-wuk] nations. We acknowledge that Manitoba is located on the Homeland of the Red River Métis. We also acknowledge that northern Manitoba includes lands that were and are the ancestral

lands of the Inuit.

As we gather in celebration of International Day of Persons with Disabilities, we recognize the privilege living in Canada provides us. We have access to beautiful accessible Manitoba parks and a variety of opportunities to participate in accessible sports and recreational programs. However, this is not without its challenges and work to improve accessibility needs to continue. The Manitoba Accessibility Office remains committed to supporting this through the full implementation of the Accessibility for Manitobans Act (AMA), including the enactment of all five accessibility standards. On behalf of the Manitoba Accessibility Office, we remain committed to the ongoing journey to seek the truth and walk the shared path towards reconciliation.

**Darren Macdonald:** Great, thank you, Colleen. Thanks for the land acknowledgement. Next up is Minister Nahanni Fontaine, and our Minister Fontaine, she is the Minister of Families, also the Minister responsible for Accessibility, and she was first elected as an MLA for St. John's in 2016. She is a member of the Sagkeeng Anishnaabe First Nation, and Minister Fontaine is globally recognized for her expertise in missing and murdered indigenous women, girls and Two-Spirited individuals, Indigenous women's rights, Indigenous police relations and gender equity. And, as I said, she pre-recorded because she's busy in the Legislature today doing important work as an elected official. So, we'll play her message.

**Minister's Message on Pre-Recorded Video: Minister Fontaine:** Aaniin, everyone. I'm Nahanni Fontaine, Minister of Families and Minister responsible for Accessibility. I'm so sorry that I'm not able to be with you there today. But I was really happy and proud to proclaim December 3rd International Day of Persons with Disabilities. Our government has undertaken many steps in the last year to eliminate barriers and to ensure that we have a Manitoba that is inclusive of everyone. I have said time and time again, as in my role as Minister, that we have a sacred responsibility to ensure that all Manitobans are afforded equal opportunities in everything that Manitoba has to offer. So, I look forward to seeing you next year and good luck in your deliberations today. Miigwech.

**Darren Macdonald:** Great. Thank you, Minister Fontaine. So now it's my pleasure to introduce our first keynote speaker, Rebecca Lauhn-Jensen of Parks Manitoba. She's a landscape architect who moved back to her hometown of Winnipeg in 2009 to take on the role of Head of the Capital Planning and Development for Manitoba Parks. She has an undergraduate degree in Environmental Studies and a master's in landscape architecture. Rebecca has worked in the field for close to 30 years in both public service and private practice. And she has been involved in the development, and this is where I know her from, she's been involved in the development of the accessible outdoor public spaces standard under The Accessibility for Manitobans Act. So, we're happy to have you here today, and now without further ado, I turn it over to you, Rebecca.

**Rebecca Lauhn-Jensen:** Thanks, Darren. I'm happy to be here today. And thanks to the Manitoba Accessibility Office for inviting me to share what we're doing in Parks. I'm going to just take a second here to share my screen and open up my presentation. Is that good? Could someone -- yeah, we're all good to go?

**Darren Macdonald:** Yeah, all good, Rebecca. And I should say, if people have questions for Rebecca, you can type them in the Q&A box or in chat. We'll be monitoring those, and we'll be able to ask Rebecca those questions on your behalf throughout the presentation today or at the end. So please feel free to ask your questions. Thanks, Rebecca.

**Rebecca Lauhn-Jensen:** Yeah, absolutely. Welcome questions. Couple of qualifiers. I'm going to be focusing on physical accessibility in parks so addressing mobility issues for the most part. I'm not the person that has ramp ratios and millimetres in my head for answering highly-technical detailed questions on the spot, but I would welcome anyone to connect with me afterwards if there's some really detailed information that you want or any question really. But I just might not be able to answer it all today right away. So, this is what I'm going to talk about today. Feel free to get in touch with me later, I can connect you into other people in Parks who may be able to help with other areas, but I want to focus on the work that we've been doing, mostly the presentation talks about the last five years but some of it goes a little bit further back to ten years of what we've been doing recently in Parks to make our facilities more

accessible.

**Rebecca Lauhn-Jensen:** I'm going to talk first about facility types, so all the kind of infrastructure that we have in Parks, the design standards that we're using as either regulations or guidelines. I'm going to talk about recent work, so it's a lot of pictures. And then just the idea about, as Colleen mentioned how this is ongoing, this is work that is in progress. It's never fully complete because we're always evolving and there's new challenges coming forward, so I'll talk a little bit about that at the end of the presentation and hopefully we have time for some questions. So, Parks.

**Rebecca Lauhn-Jensen:** We have 93 provincial parks in Manitoba. 76 of them are operational, meaning 76 of them have some kind of development. It could range from just a fairly natural park that has trails and trailheads and parking and access so parks like the Whiteshell that essentially have little mini-cities in them, and they have infrastructure of every description in there. So, it's a wide variety. We have parks from the north to the south border, to the east and the west border so there's a variety of landscapes that we're dealing with in the parks. And we have over five million visitors annually so there's a lot of people visiting the parks regularly. That figure is rising. It kind of peaked in the pandemic and it is plateauing a little bit now but lots of visitation. We also have, I think, over 6,000 cottages in our parks. We have commercial operators. So, there is quite a bit of facilities and infrastructure in parks and we're working towards making that accessible.

**Rebecca Lauhn-Jensen:** Just to kind of give you a sense of what types of facilities we have in there, some of it is public-facing meaning everyone is accessing it and some of it is our behind the scenes staff-use only so public use buildings would include campground offices, washroom, shower buildings, park visitor centres, and then behind the scenes, we have maintenance facilities, bunkhouses, offices. Site development on the land that you'll see includes campgrounds with multiple camp sites, beaches, day-use areas, lots of trails. We have a yurt program that's very popular and some rental cabins, and then we've got a lot of background infrastructure too like water and sewer facilities, roads, so it's kind of a bit of everything. I'm going to show you pictures of most of the facilities we have. As far as the

design standards we're using to guide us in our mission to make parks more accessible and have all our new facilities accessible, if there's a building, it is regulated under the National Building Code with Manitoba amendments. It's not really rigorous as far as accessibility is concerned but there was a big improvement with the 2020 adoption of the 2020 National Building Code, because before that we were working under 2012 codes with 2015 amendments so we were a bit out of date so that's improved. We try to work towards taking a step beyond the National Building Code and work towards the guidelines that the City of Winnipeg has for accessible design standards. They are fairly urban-oriented so sometimes applying them in a park setting is a bit more of a challenge. And I think just mentioned earlier as part of the suite of standards for The Accessibility for Manitobans Act, there is, in development, the design of public spaces standard, so that will address all the spaces outside of buildings that the Building Code doesn't address and set a new standard for making those spaces accessible. So currently, we don't have that in place. I think it's still at the legislated drafting as far as the legislation drafting. I'm probably not using the right language there. But we hope to have that in play in the next while and that will be a standard that will have to be followed. And then I said we referred to the City of Winnipeg Accessible Design Standards. And we look to other jurisdictions for best practises. So now I'm -- most of the presentation is really showing you the facilities that we have on the ground now, recent works from now back to five, up to ten years ago, and just in each facility type where we're really heading with accessibility.

**Rebecca Lauhn-Jensen:** So camp sites, yurts and cabins, this is a big part of parks business, the camping program and yurt and cabin program are meat and potatoes of what parks does. So, we are working towards accessible campsites in campgrounds across the province. Winnipeg Beach Provincial Park, which is just an hour north of Winnipeg at Winnipeg Beach, is our first fully accessible campground, and I think it's probably over ten years old now. I'm going to show you a few pictures of that but it's one where every site meets our accessibility requirements. Otherwise, most campgrounds we're trying to have a percentage of sites be accessible. So just a glimpse into Winnipeg Beach, the vegetation has grown out more now, so it does look a little more park-like these days. But all the roads are paved so there's good movement surface. Campsites are compacted granular. They're more spacious than our



typical campsite of the earlier days. They have an accessible picnic table so a wheelchair can move under it. All have water, electrical and sewer so they're fully serviced so there's less need to move around the campground if you don't want to or have difficulties with that. And then all the washroom and shower buildings, I think there's three or four in that campground, are accessible. So met the requirements of the day for accessibility as well as the campground office there. Needless to say, it's very popular. The service level obviously is one reason and it's close to Winnipeg. But it is our only fully-accessible campground.

**Rebecca Lauhn-Jensen:** Yurts: So, this is a very popular program in Parks. If you've ever tried to book a yurt, you're probably aware that they can be challenging to get because they are so popular, so we do try to keep expanding this program. And right now, I think there is ten or eleven parks that have yurts and at each location, we have a percentage of those yurts accessible. Whether it's somewhere between 30 and 50% are typically accessible yurts. Because we can all see the list here, but it's Assessippi, Bakers, Clearwater, Camp Morton, Spruce Woods, and others. They cover all the regions, so we're trying to make sure that our developments are dispersed across the province to make facilities accessible.

**Rebecca Lauhn-Jensen:** Nopiming Provincial Park, this is just some images of the accessible yurts that we have there: And unfortunately it doesn't show the view from the yurt because they're really spectacular views over into bird river, so you can see there's compacted granular as the movement surface, there is a lot of decking, direct on to thresholds so there's no -- there's no gradient that you have to address when you're moving into the yurt and then it's ease of movement around the firepit and the picnic table. And ease of access to the privies you designed to be accessible, so in these yurts, you can drive quite close to them. Some of the yurts, you have to park your car and walk in and use a wagon to move your supplies. But these have a parking space relatively close to the yurt themselves. One of our more recent developments. Duck Mountain, Charles Lake Duck Mountain Provincial Park, ten yurts there, I believe four accessible. And these, there is quite a bit of ramping involved just because of the gradient, they're all on the water's edge so there's kind of a drop down to the shoreline. But there is a pathway that meets all the grade requirements to access them. And also provide you with access to the accessible washroom and shower building which is shown in this photo

here. This is the parking area. And trying to give a variety of experiences so some of the accessible yurts might be close to the washroom/shower nationalities and some farther away but still meeting accessibility requirements. So, you can have a choice of where you feel most comfortable.

**Rebecca Lauhn-Jensen:** Paint Lake Provincial Park: up north by Thompson. Again, this was in the last five years or so and there are I think three of the six yurts are accessible there. Accessible facilities nearby. These are showing their age. These are vacation cabins in Camp Morton Provincial Park, and this need renewal. So, these met accessibility standards from decades ago. They don't meet what we would consider accessible today although people still manage to use them. But they are on the radar for updating and it might be that they just ultimately need replacement to meet the requirements today.

**Rebecca Lauhn-Jensen:** We are working now on a mini-cabin design that will be accessible and will supplement the yurt program so hopefully in the next few years, we'll be deploying some of those on to the landscape, too. There will be another option for roofed accommodation in parks that's accessible.

**Rebecca Lauhn-Jensen:** Beaches: Beaches are obviously challenging for accessibility, for mobility because of the nature of them being sand or pebble. But what we're using a fair bit these days is, mobi mats is the name of the supplier but they're essentially mobility mats. They create they're pinned on to the sand, the sand is levelled below them and then they create a walkable, rollable surface to the wet sand or the water's edge, and I'll show you some pictures. In other locations in the background here is Grand Beach, actually we do have like a ramp that takes you down to the beach because the boardwalk is quite a grade difference between the boardwalk and actual beach so there are a couple of different solutions we've used. This is Grand Beach. The boardwalk was destroyed in 2010. When it was rebuilt, we made accessibility improvements so it's all hard surface now for movement along the top of the boardwalk and then to get down to the beach, you can see on the upper right here is our ramp system. And ideally, it takes you to the wet sand zone. But that varies greatly especially in grand beach, the water levels, there can be great variation. So, we're looking to supplement

that with some mobi mats that will bring you kind of from that bottom of the ramp and further along the beach, so you don't necessarily just get stuck kind of at the bottom of the ramp. It is challenging and some of these locations just with the wind and water and wave movement action on the beach to be resetting the mats but just something that we need to deal with from an operations perspective. There you go with a bigger perspective, a better perspective on how that ramp works to bring you down from the upper boardwalk area. Something similar at Winnipeg Beach, which was done more recently, but much less of a grade difference between the promenade, the walkway and the actual beach. So, you can see there is a concrete ramp that take you down to the sand and, again, ideally, you're getting to the wet sand zone. It's a much narrower beach there but something that also needs to be supplemented with mobi mats and just got a clip of this, it's not a facility or a piece of equipment that we have on offer currently, but under discussion at Parks is can we be providing beach wheelchairs to help people move around the sand area and not necessarily require the mats everywhere so that's kind of in discussion at the moment. Hopefully a future state.

**Rebecca Luhn-Jensen:** This is at Bird's Hill which was the first place we installed mobi-mats. We tried different suppliers and determined we liked one product was better than the other from walking on bare feet perspective. And just general performance so we've had very good -- the sign is out of date and the Accessibility Office told me about it, we have updated it. We have had really good reviews from users here, so this was our trial location and then we've been spreading it now across the province. I think we have ten or more locations across the province. This is at St. Malo. Another important feature, if you have an accessible beach is to make sure you have accessible washroom facilities nearby and that's an accessible washroom by the beach at St. Malo. Lakewood grindstone, this is getting you down to the beach at Hecla.

**Rebecca Luhn-Jensen:** Trails: Trails are, they're definitely an accessibility challenge for us. Many of our trails in provincial parks are wilderness trails that take you into challenging -- sometimes-challenging landscapes as far as gradients, bad rock, different ground surfaces that you have to traverse so we try to focus on the locations where we can really achieve a good level trade with a good compacted or paved surface. And then part of

also accessibility on trails is understanding, people to understand at the trailhead what they're going to encounter on the trail because it might not necessarily be doable from a wheelchair user's perspective but if you have a different mobility issues, you might be able to do sections or all of a trail if you understood at the beginning what was ahead of you on the trail so part of our program is now to get better signage out on our trailheads to describe what people can expect to encounter so they can make informed decisions about whether the trail is suitable for them or not. We don't have those signs in place yet. That's kind of a work in progress. We do have information at trailheads, but it just needs improvement from an accessibility perspective. But this is Bur Oak Trail at Birds Hill. Pisew Falls, up by Thompson, we've recently over the past couple years made accessibility improvements up there so this is the view that you'll get to. And previously, you can see the before picture on the left was wooden stairs, not accessible. And now it's a compacted series of switchbacks, pathways that take you down to these viewpoints, so it's really improved the accessibility to a spectacular destination up north. This is another recent -- I guess maybe not so recent as Tulabi, work that was done in ecological reserve, not officially a provincial park, but a partnership with parks, parks developed it and helps to operate it. So, this is an accessible boardwalk that takes you into the edge of this ecological reserve, Brokenhead Wetland which is a spectacular place known for a great variety of orchids and other natural wonders. But it's really received positive feedback from the accessibility perspective. It's a floating boardwalk and combined with a compacted trail through the forest to get you to the boardwalk. You can see some other pictures of it here. And again, we've had really good response to this development. Just privies you there but they are accessible.

**Rebecca Lauhn-Jensen:** Washroom/shower buildings are a big part of what we do as far as built infrastructure. Take a quick look at the time. Anyone from MAO, please interrupt me if I'm running too long here. So, this is at Big Whiteshell Lake in Whiteshell Provincial Park. This gives you a sense of what our kind of standard going forward is for our park's washroom/shower buildings. This one is probably five or six years old now. So just ensuring that the spaces are accessible, meeting the Building Code requirements and going beyond, we try to meet the City of Winnipeg Accessible Design Standards. This is one at Paint Lake up north by Thompson again. So, there are a lot of doors, automatic door openers, Braille signage

on them, and then they are -- now our approach is to make all the washroom and shower and toilet facilities accessible from the exterior so they're also gender-neutral, they tend to cycle better through the use not a line-up at one gender or the other and really just kind of open to all. They also work well for families because they're bigger spaces, so it's a solution -- a design that's been working well now and been well-received.

**Rebecca Lauhn-Jensen:** Bakers Narrows, up north, this is done now, this was kind of getting close to the end of construction. These are in Winnipeg Beach Provincial Park, so they were kind of in the early days. These are about 12 years old now, and with a different esthetic we were working with specific to that park at the time.

**Rebecca Lauhn-Jensen:** Campground offices: This is in Assessippi Provincial Park, ensuring physical access to what would be the welcome centre for the park, the check-in for the campground office. Again Spruce Woods, lower counters, level surfaces outside, compacted or hardscaping. Play areas. Play areas, a bit of a challenge for accessibility, although there are a lot of products you can order off the shelf that do address accessibility as long as you get the surfacing right. So, we do have play structures in our parks across the province and we're trying to, as we put new ones in and upgrade old ones, include more and more accessibility features. And sometimes it's a ramp accessing you from the hard surface to a play component that's accessible. This one doesn't look spectacular but it's really popular, the tippy canoe, you can go on it and wiggle it like you're going to tip over. This one's up in Grand Beach. There's some learning Braille and Sign Language, accessible swings. This is a knitted wood mulch surface that is accessible for people using wheelchairs and other mobility devices. This was the birds hill plaza by the shower building that was done, probably this one is 15 years old now, one of our older developments, but again integrating ramps and hard surfacing into the space.

**Rebecca Lauhn-Jensen:** Duff Roblin Provincial Park: Essentially where the diversion starts for the Red River when it's at high water levels and this park is designed for people to observe the floodway in action and learn about it. Although this picture was before we had the interpretive signage up so it's missing the interpretive signage. Essentially this is a fully

accessible space so parking area is all accessible, the privy and then this is a ramp to the upper viewing plaza where you can see on the top left there, that's the viewscape back to the inlet control structure and viewing spokes to assist with that. Just more of our illustrations missing for the interpretation there, but just more images of Duff Roblin, everything in this park is accessible. It is a small park just on the urban edge, but it's an interesting space when the floodway is in action. An evolving challenge. So, guidelines are constantly changing. We need to update our regulations. Kind of the idea of universal design goes beyond meeting basic physical access, and really physical access and mobility is what we've been focusing on in our facilities in parks over the last ten years. Disabilities are invisible so kind of understanding your clientele and working towards accommodating them is an on-going challenge and an on-going goal for parks. Just an example of access to electrical, people in campgrounds may need electrical for devices, we've got a picture of a cpap machine here where you need electrical to run that, so if that's something we can accommodate from an accessibility perspective, just challenges you wouldn't think about when thinking of accessing park spaces.

**Rebecca Lauhn-Jensen:** Support animals, access, how does that come into play in our built facilities? We're making most washroom/shower buildings to gender neutral to make them open for everybody. Sensory issues, playgrounds, I guess we're just -- what I'm trying to say is we're constantly learning and evolving to try and address the world of accessibility which is always expanding and ever-changing. This is in my presentation, but we don't need to dig into the details of it.

**Rebecca Lauhn-Jensen:** We talked about how we have an upcoming standard with the design of public spaces that will be a part of the suite of ama standards. When that comes about, it will definitely have an impact on parks because many of our spaces are exterior spaces so while we're trying to address that in advance, because we understand what's coming in a sense, that will be -- when that's in play, that will require all new developments and retrofits of a certain percentage to meet these requirements. So, we kind of just see that on the horizon in the future as something to look towards and to be working towards now. It will apply basically to all of our spaces. It's beaches, campgrounds, trails, trailheads, signage, parking, all these facilities will need to adhere to that new standard. There will be, when it comes into play,

and I guess we don't know exactly how it's going to be -- the details of how it will be written yet, but there will be some spaces that will be exempt or facilities that would be exempt from the requirements and they would be based on potentially if you had negative impact to protect flora or fauna or ecological features or if it's not practicable due to natural terrain, in some cases where you have just an outcropping of bedrock that you can't make an accessible path of travel through, so it's still in development. That may change. We'll see when we get the standard drafted and enacted, what it ultimately leads us to. And I think that's generally it.

**Rebecca Lauhn-Jensen:** So, we talked about doing questions if there was time right after my presentation or maybe Colin will see if there's time at the very end.

**Darren Macdonald:** Sure, Rebecca, let's see if we can squeeze in a couple questions. I'll introduce Maria, our colleague here at the Manitoba Accessibility Office, and she's been watching the chat and the Q&A, so I think we have time for a couple.

**Maria Ferraro:** All right. There's a couple. There's one question that says, Rebecca, need to provide the light flash alarm in each washroom in the building for deaf and hard-of-hearing. Do you have those in the facilities or in the buildings?

**Rebecca Lauhn-Jensen:** A light flash alarm for, like a fire alarm?

Maria Ferraro: Yes.

**Rebecca Lauhn-Jensen:** I can picture our emergency lighting that we have in there, but senators a flash alarm, so a lot of our buildings are small enough that they don't trigger specific code requirements. I would have to get -- actually, if that person wants to, or maria, if you want to send me that question specifically and let me get the right information and get back to the person who asked the question because I can't think off the top of my head what the square footage is that triggers specific requirements for alarming so I don't know the answer off the top of my head.

**Maria Ferraro:** Okay.

**Rebecca Lauhn-Jensen:** Sorry about that. We'll get back to that person, no problem.

**Maria Ferraro:** The next question is: Does Parks Manitoba have any accessibility plans that aren't just about serving people with mobility barriers? The physical and built environment. For example, hiring disabled people to guide your mission or initiatives supporting blind visitors.

**Rebecca Lauhn-Jensen:** Yeah, and so you're right, my presentation obviously did focus on physical access. And that is the role that I work in Parks so it's what I can speak to with some knowledge. As far as hiring practises and other program areas, I can't really speak to that. I don't know and it's not where I fit into the world here. But again, if you want to reach out to me directly or send me that question and that person's contact information, I can connect you to the other people in parks that would be more involved in those program areas.

**Maria Ferraro:** For sure. Rebecca, you did speak to our upcoming regulation for accessible outdoor spaces and when that regulation is in force, it does have a number, it looks at accessibility barriers for all types of barriers, not just physical accessibility. It's looking at communication and other types of barriers. So, signage and some of those pieces.

**Rebecca Lauhn-Jensen:** Yeah, some of that would be addressed in the standard and then the other standards in the AMA would address hiring, I think, but those are areas that I'm not well-versed in so I would have to defer to someone else. But I can find you the right person.

**Maria Ferraro:** All right. Thank you. There's just a couple more. What is the accessible ground cover at the playground called, knitted wood mulch?

**Rebecca Lauhn-Jensen:** That's not the right term.

**Maria Ferraro:** What's the cost comparison to soft core surfaces, if you know?



**Rebecca Lauhn-Jensen:** The name is escaping me and the cost; I don't know off the top of my head. Sorry, I feel like I'm saying this a lot.

**Maria Ferraro:** We knew we would get those technical questions, Rebecca. No worries. You warned us, you're not the technical person.

**Rebecca Lauhn-Jensen:** I probably have someone on my -- fibar is the name, I guess it's like the name that's used for the actual material. I don't know the cost, though.

**Maria Ferraro:** Okay. And lastly, when it comes to converting older or aging infrastructure to accessible infrastructure, what are the biggest challenges and how do you overcome those, is the biggest challenge the cost of these upgrades?

**Rebecca Lauhn-Jensen:** I guess, in general, the cost of upgrades is our biggest challenge for everything, accessibility or otherwise. We have infrastructure, a lot of it that was built in the '60s and '70s that we've been putting paint on for 40 years and trying to keep it going because we're so spread out and there's so many facilities across the province, the challenge is -- can be budget but having said that, when we're putting together -- if we're replacing an aged facility, we will be, accessibility will be a part of it. So, the cost there, it's really a matter of getting the project funded not like the accessibility component of the project funded. And then the other -- I guess the other biggest challenge aside from budgets is the spaces that we're dealing with combined with the type of experience we're trying to give people so we're often in a natural environment where just the terrain, if you're thinking about physical accessibility, the terrain can be very challenging and then you're working a balance between making it as accessible as you can and then maintaining the wilderness experience so that's something that we're kind of always thinking about. So, I would say budget and terrain.

**Maria Ferraro:** Okay. Thanks, Rebecca.

**Darren Macdonald:** Thanks, Rebecca. I think one of the themes that kept coming up and that was encouraging was when you showed, I think it was Camp Morton, some of the older

accessible cabins and it's a good reminder that accessibility is really a journey, it's not a destination. We're never done. There will always be barriers to remove, there will be new technology, new laws that come in place that help make places more accessible. So, it's exciting to see even within some of the cabins and yurts and those types of things what we thought was accessible 20 years ago, we really upped the game, as it were, to make those more accessible. So exciting for what the future holds and what more barriers parks can remove, the better for all of us so it's exciting work.

Rebecca Luhn-Jensen: Absolutely.

**Darren Macdonald:** Thanks for joining us today.

**Rebecca Luhn-Jensen:** Thank you for having me.

**Darren Macdonald:** Yeah, take care, and we'll hand it over to Colin momentarily. So, our next keynote speaker is Colin Mathieson. Colin got hooked on wheelchair racing at a young age. Inspired by athletes competing in the Manitoba Marathon in the '80s when he was just six years old. So, Colin was born with Spina Bifida and a wheelchair is his primary mode of transportation and as it turns out, he can move really fast. Colin's never been satisfied with staying still, testing limits has always been his mode of operation, whether it's going farther or faster. He earned a bronze medal in the 1996 paralympic games in the 4 x 400 metre relay. And he's participated in other paralympic games and world championships, earning four world championship medals and a Canadian record in his 20-plus -- I think, for me, Colin, the medals and accolades, those are impressive, I think it's the longevity of your sporting career that's very impressive for me. And one thing we have in common, Colin graduated in 2015 with a Bachelor of Social Work from University of Manitoba, where I also graduated from U of M with a Bachelor of Social Work. Colin graduated with distinction. I won't say whether we have that in common or not. And professionally now, Colin has found his calling as a social worker with a multidisciplinary community-based team working at the Deer Lodge Centre. So welcome, Colin. It's so great to have you today. And, as I said in the introduction, not all of us aspire to be elite-level athletes like yourself, so I thought it was great to have you today and also hear a

little bit about parks so we know that there are just some paths that we can walk on or wheel on and take advantage of in Manitoba parks but your story is also very inspiring. So, we wanted to give our audience a bit of both, a taste of both. Thank you for joining us. I'll turn the floor over to you. And we'll watch the questions, and we'll throw a couple of questions your way at the end.

**Colin Mathieson:** All right. Thank you, guys, very much for the invitation. I might surprise you guys a little bit but I'm not going to speak as much about high-performance sport. I'm going to speak about the journey, and the best part about journeys are that they can reflect uphill and downhills and things that every single person is going to experience in their lives. And sometimes the destination is the journey. And I look forward to sharing a little bit about my story, and will jump right in. All right.

**Colin Mathieson:** My presentation is titled "The Bumps Along the Road", and today, we're going to talk about barriers to accessible sport, but we're also going to talk a little bit about how sport is a binding -- is a binder or a mechanism to keep everybody together. And so, a little bit about me, I have a Social Work Degree from Winnipeg, University of Manitoba, graduated in 2016. And it was one of those really important components of my life because I knew that I couldn't be an athlete forever, even though I did have a relatively long career in sport starting in 1985, starting my racing career in 1988 and then my last Paralympics being 2012. I always knew that there was something that was going to be followed by this sport career, and my little picture here is just showing that we can all wear different hats and be different people at different times and sometimes simultaneously. One of the hardest things that I can say that happened in my life was not sport-related or work-related or school-related, it was trying to marry the combination of working and racing and going to school at the same time. All right.

**Colin Mathieson:** Overcoming barriers: I want to be absolutely clear out of respect for everybody else that's gone up a hill, I am not the first person that has overcome any of these barriers and I certainly won't be the last. But the theme of this is mainly that it is an ongoing, never-ending uphill battle. And I think that we can celebrate some major accomplishments like the Manitobans with disabilities act, as well as other legislation that has paved the way and

made society better and certain people's journeys easier or at least more equitable. But we're never done. And I always laugh about my 400-metre, it's one lap of the track, and every single race starts with a really good start and finishes with a really, really good finish. And that is sort of what everybody's journey sort of represents, whether you're on the track or in school or at work or doing anything else in your life, you gotta start strong and finish strong and there's a lot of exciting parts in the middle. So here is a snapshot of my beginning of my journey.

**Colin Mathieson:** In 1985, I was very fortunate to meet Rick Hansen when he came through Winnipeg and, believe it or not, that is a picture of me, as cute as it is. I don't know what happened after that. And then on the right-hand side, I've got a picture of my very first house that we lived in, and they had a paved path around the house and that's me and my little walker with my neighbour, and they allowed us to run laps around the house. It's probably about 30 metres worth of distance. But between the support of my family and friends and neighbours and combined with my determination, the first step was to get one lap. Then it was to get two laps and then it was to try and make each lap quicker and that's sort of been my motto for my life has been very competitive and testing the limits. And as an example, this is where the majority of my athletic career finished in London in 2012, at the Paralympic Games. And as the end -- at the end of my career, I had a bronze medal from the Paralympic Games in '96, some world championship medals, 15 Canadian championship titles as well as four passports absolutely jam packed with stamps of amazing places that I've been and experiences that I was either catapulted in or found myself in or chose to be in, which is part of the excitement. All right.

**Colin Mathieson:** So, in 30 years, if we think about the last 30 years of accessibility of disability rights, advancements in technology, I have been very fortunate to be a part of this, these changes, as well as in sport combined with the regular sort of societal changes that we've all experienced. And I have to say that, you know, change is not always better, but the changes and improvements, aside, some of the barriers were annihilated or removed, and some of them, unfortunately, still exist. And that's what we're going to talk a little bit about. So, I've got the major challenges to accessible sport. Number one would be the built environment. Number two, local programming. Number three, equipment and finances. And so those are

going to be the three that I work on or talk to you guys about and expand on.

**Colin Mathieson:** So, the built environment, I can't remember where I heard this from, but somebody posed the question does the environment shape society or does society shape the environment? And I think that that's a really good sort of philosophical question. And my answer to that is the built environment is as constructed as society is, so the built environment will determine who's included or not in every aspect of life. And as an example, you know, we've got this amazing framework as the Human Rights Act, the Canadian Human Rights Act, and the Act ensures equality and opportunity and freedom from discrimination in all areas of federal jurisdiction. In my growing up in sport, there was a couple of examples where it fell short, but it was at the very least a framework to improve it, which I'm very thankful for.

**Colin Mathieson:** So, as we, as I tell this story, I want to just emphasize that there was a positive resolution at the end, even though it doesn't look like it right now. So just as an example, in the early '90s, I was already a paralympic athlete, had been to my first Paralympics, I had a ton of support in the community, I had a ton of support on the track, all of my teammates, and I was training at a facility that was world class. It hosted the 1967 pan am games and then hosted the, subsequently hosted the 1999 Pan Am Games, and I can tell you, this track was by far the fastest track that I had raced on, barring one track in Switzerland, you don't get to race on that, so I was so fortunate to have this amazing facility in my backyard. Granted there was one ginormous problem, at the time there was no accessible bathroom and, unfortunately, because in 1967, they built this facility for the Pan American Games, it was not part of Building Code to automatically put an accessible bathroom in the facility. So, for 20 years, we had one very unfortunate option. So, if anybody can decipher the picture there, it is not a lurker in the bush, but you can use your imagination of what I'm hinting to. So, as I said, unfortunately, this facility was built in the 1960s, it didn't have any accessible attributes and another unfortunate sort of scenario, like a lot of places, is that it was built really, really well and hadn't gone -- hadn't undergone any renovations since it was built 50 years ago. And again, the facility was built before properly robust Building Code and sadly it didn't reflect design for everybody so here's a picture of the two washrooms that were available, male and female. And I couldn't get the door open when I took the picture but there is a very, very steep

set of stairs down to the basement where the washrooms were located. And speaking to able-bodied people, it was quite the staircase to navigate, especially after you were done a workout. To the right of that, you can also see a ginormous set of cement steps that go up and, unfortunately, that was the only access at the time to the spectating area. So again, prior to any accessible Building Code, the bathrooms as well as the spectating area were not accessible.

**Colin Mathieson:** So, before we talk about the solution, let's dive into the consequences of inaccessible design, what are the consequences and to whom. The recruitment of paralympic athletes is very difficult and either slows down or stops due to a lack of accessible facility. I know that I was hesitant to put together a program in a facility at the time that was not accessible because everybody is going to have to go to the washroom at some point, especially when your coaches harp on you for drinking lots of fluids. Second problem or consequence is family members of these people would not be able to come and watch and support their loved ones and their families, which is very unfortunate. And then the final two are more mechanical, without an accessible facility, the local clubs and the province were not able to host large events and potentially generate income as well as notoriety for as much as we had a really, really fast track, it was very difficult to host major events in a facility that required some substantial renovations to bring it up to sort of today's standards. And then, unfortunately, you know, the human rights complaints and lawsuits and all sorts of other things can follow when there's inaccessible spaces.

**Colin Mathieson:** So, what are the solutions? Well, first of all, we're going to install some motivation. We're going to collaborate with the decision makers. And we're going to have a deadline and then, of course, after that deadline, we're going to have to wait for construction season to start. Now, taking a step back and talking about the motivation and the collaboration, when we had been announced that we had -- we won the bid for the Canada games here in I think it was 2013 or '15, it was a really, really big opportunity to sort of advocate that we need to make this place accessible, we need to have an inviting space for spectators, for athletes, for officials and so talking about the collaboration, we had many, many meetings with sport Manitoba, as well as athletics Manitoba and the university as well and I think that that was the

starting point for that facility to get a much-needed renovation and update for accessibility purposes and just regular usability for anyone who wants to benefit from that amazing space. All right. So, as we talked about the motivation and the advocating, one of the things that I have to always remember is that time machines are really, really expensive. And one of the things that we talk about or that I use as a reference when I talk about accessibility is that, you know, we can point out things that aren't right, but we can't go back and change them. So, we have an obligation and a responsibility to learn from these past failures or shortcomings and the costly half-fixes, you know, the good-enough is good enough for the time being but it is never a permanent solution as far as a true legacy. I always try my best to be respectful, but pointing things out, you try your best to be respectful and not hurt feelings or point fingers but at some point, things that aren't right really do need to be pointed out in such a way that they don't get repeated. And then my positive attitude sort of swings back in and says, you know, let's do better this time, and not wait for the next time. And I also tried really, really hard at this particular moment to talk about legacies because it's a lot of money and a lot of time and a perfect opportunity to build something amazing. It's not necessarily a good thing but a legacy can also be sort of a negative thing if it's a missed opportunity that lasts for another 50 years.

**Colin Mathieson:** So, after all of that, the Sport Manitoba and the university got together, and they built the most amazing accessible, stand-alone building that represents three accessible bathrooms/change rooms that are accessible for everyone. They're gender-neutral so it's not male-female. It is 100% whoever needs it whenever they need it. And I was very, very impressed. I got to see a picture early on and you sort of wrap your head around the idea of what it could look like, and it has exceeded all expectations. It's just a truly phenomenal experience to be able to say that it's done. Okay.

**Colin Mathieson:** So, barrier number two, and I'm going to -- I call them barriers, and it seems negative because a barrier is something that gets in the way, which isn't untrue, but I think it would be more -- I'd like to call them challenges. And so, the second challenge is access to local programming. So, when I started in 1988, 1989 doing wheelchair racing, I was inspired by the Manitoba Marathon as well as Rick Hansen. I was very fortunate to live on the Manitoba Marathon course and I got to see these amazing gladiators at like mile 20 rip through St. Vital

and that is just -- it's an image that I will never, ever forget. And it just reinforces what's possible and I was absolutely blown away to find out that these guys were local Winnipegger's, some of them were, and they had a full program of wheelchair racing, and it was championed by a couple of visionaries, some amazing leadership, and a couple really, really amazing, dedicated volunteers to make this team happen. And I got to be part of a what I would call a proper mix of athletes in the development stage which would be by myself, which would be myself as well as some amazing Paralympians all the way from have already been to the Paralympics to at any given point getting ready for the Paralympics. And so, I'm just so fortunate to have been part of that program.

**Colin Mathieson:** We're going to fast forward a little bit, 1996 came and went. And starting in the early 2000s, Athletics Canada, which was the governing body for athletics, wheelchair racing, and there is a couple of sports within Sport Canada that amalgamated paralympic and able-bodied at the national level. And this is one of the greatest milestones that I am so fortunate to be present for because it was based on respect, sharing of resources and even sharing the spotlight, you know, side-by-side with some of Canada's most amazing athletes, you know, from the 1996 Olympics. We all probably remember Donovan Bailey and the 4 x 100 metre relay team as well as some of the other amazing athletes from that era, you know, all of a sudden, we were side-by-side, shoulder-to-shoulder and given the same respect and exposure that we all deserved based on our efforts and our results. The secondary spin-off of this is provincially, although the sporting organizations were also amalgamated, and that was the beginning of us joining Athletics Manitoba which has been an absolutely-amazing framework for inclusiveness and all of the levels of support for paralympic athletes that followed.

**Colin Mathieson:** So, we are going to talk a little bit about one challenge that's unique to the Paralympics side and some of these are related to paralympic only, some are shared by lots of different sports regardless of ability. So, one of the challenges that we have with paralympic sport is, you know, athletes retire or move away, coaches move away, as well as the cost of participating becomes prohibitive. Now, in able-bodied sport, there are a billion people or more than a billion people that are accessing sport and can choose athletics. But when you're a



paralympic program with a small percentage of persons with disabilities, if these things sort of happen too quickly or in succession, unfortunately, my phrase is that a small pool drains quicker than an ocean. And unfortunately, we had a little bit of a drought for a while where there wasn't a robust paralympic program in Manitoba. All right. So, let's say we lose our coach, we don't have as many athletes, what do we do? And one of the biggest myths in paralympic sport is that it's specialized. An athlete is an athlete. A coach is a coach. And there are 99% similarities between an able-bodied athlete and a paralympic athlete with that 1% being negligible and the differences you can teach. And one of the stories that I talk about is that when I had a paralympic-specific coach for many, many years, and when I moved back to Winnipeg, I was changing my program around and I had the luxury of training with one of the best athletics coaches who was an able-bodied coach in Winnipeg and, you know, the 99% of the similarities, the drive, the determination, the planning, all of that stuff was exactly the same and the 1% difference was that this particular coach, he was very upfront and said that he doesn't know anything about racing wheelchairs. And so, he ran my program for four years and I took care of the wheelchair racing parts that were not part of the regular coaching, but we had some of the best experiences and I had some of the best results. So, it just reinforces that I was an athlete within his program. He was a coach that coached a lot of able-bodied athletes, and we did some, we had some very amazing results. Okay.

**Colin Mathieson:** Barrier number three is the cost of equipment. And this is sort of a controversial topic right now because of, you know, we've talked about all sorts of ways that society can get on-board and help inclusion and help a sense of camaraderie and unfortunately while a pair of running shoes are between 1 and \$200, the cost of a racing chair in 2024 is closer to \$10,000, and that is also not in counting the upkeep which means if you blow a tire, you blow \$150 tire or you break a piece of your chair that has to either be custom made, it's extremely expensive. Now, this cost, while \$10,000 in 2024 seems to be or sounds very expensive, wheelchairs have never been cheap. Mobility devices for anybody with a disability are, they have never been economical or, you know, affordable. They have always been very expensive. And in the 1980s, even my racing chair back then cost I think it was about \$2,000, and just as a visual, that was the exact same price as my parents' 1979 Ford Fairmont station wagon. So just the difference of, you know, of price between a wheelchair to

participate in sport and then a vehicle that's going to last 15 years and drive people all around the country, it's pretty amazing how it can cost the same. So, a little bit of wheelchair racing history is that the original premise for wheelchair racing started with the person or the athlete to bring their wheelchair and race it. It was really that simple. There was lots of black and white videos or 8-millimetre videos that show these guys racing in their hospital wheelchairs before anything else was ever even developed. And it was all about trying to make sure that you were the best you could possibly be as well as little tweaks that could make your wheelchair faster. And just so you guys are aware, in comparison to the next picture, this is the exact model of racing chair that I started out in, and it is -- it was funny because it weighed more than I did as well as being painted solely for the purposes of it not rusting. So, in comparison, this is what a new racing wheelchair looks like in 2024. It's what I would consider a premium wheelchair. And it looks a little bit different, and the costs are a little bit more prohibitive than even before. I don't have an exact price on this, but it's upwards to -- this one was over, I think it was over \$20,000. And sort of in a comparison, it shares a little more in common with some other pieces of machinery that we might be familiar with and that is a formula 1 race car. The company that developed the previous picture is actually a formula 1 company, so they are using the most cutting-edge, amazing technology, but unfortunately, it comes at a cost. And for a lot of people, that starting point is prohibitive. So, as we've just mentioned, or as I've just mentioned, persons with a disability are very familiar with being captive -- can suit what I would call a captive consumer. Limited choices, exuberant costs combined with, in some cases, some poor-quality equipment that's just not up for the challenge. One of the biggest challenges that we had that sort of opened pandora's box, if you want to use as an example, the international paralympic committee mandated that every single racing wheelchair had to be purchased from a manufacturer and you actually had to get it registered and unfortunately that took away all sorts of homemade designs and mom and pop companies as well as, you know, community support where you could have somebody build your racing chair locally and it be a partnership between the athlete and your welding shop down the street rather than a massive manufacturer that's charging thousands and thousands of dollars. And so, in 2015, all of the Formula One Racing Companies decided that they were going to showcase their skills which from an eye candy perspective it is amazing to see these chairs in picture and even in-person, and of course, like any high-performance sport, the best chairs went to the

highest-performance athletes and the elite athletes. So, this is a picture of a racing wheelchair, and I titled this particular slide "the best chair that never was" because right around the same time that they were putting restrictions on having homemade chairs and people building them in their garages, I had an amazing partnership with red river college to build a better racing wheelchair. We were 90% of the way done when this new rule came into account so that kind of reinforces it's the best chair that never was. I was never able to race in it. But it represented a super light chair. It was really fast and based on how we built it or how we designed it, it was potentially going to be affordable and it's really unfortunate those three things came together with a lot of effort and determination and passion for myself as well as the red river team and unfortunately, it's just one of those projects that never saw the light of day. And it breaks my heart because if we could have affordable racing wheelchairs, even built in Winnipeg, it could drop the price so much and make a good wheelchair affordable which would -- could be an absolute game changer.

**Colin Mathieson:** So, the question is, where do we go from here? I am eternally optimistic that both healthy living and physical activity and personal improvement is a metric and a goal that everybody can achieve at any point within their either lifespan or their ability continuum. And there are people that are able-bodied that become disabled, there are people that have a disability that either worsens or changes, and I think that the whole idea of personal improvement and just living healthfully and having physical activity in your life, those are all things regardless of the costs and all of the barriers that I just described are -- it's independent of those challenges. Equipment costs aside, the community-based physical activity using a standard wheelchair is possible, and I won't call anybody out, but I know of an individual in Winnipeg that is part of a running club and they have got so many amazing pictures and results on Instagram and I follow them with so much enthusiasm because they are, you know -- they've joined an able-bodied group, and they are doing their best to be their best and I'm always excited to see what's next. So, facilities in the community are reasonably priced as well, and you can -- you don't need to commit to a high-performance environment to be active. There's also Sport Manitoba which is a Provincial Government-funded organization. They have done an amazing job of creating a pathway for paralympic athletes as well as just accessible sport in Manitoba and, you know, it includes high performance as well as grass roots. I don't

ever want to suggest that anybody needs to take sport as far as I did. I had a vision in my head of what I wanted it to look like or where I needed to be, but there are so many amazing opportunities along the way that as a peak or as a stopping point or as a continuum, it doesn't matter, as long as you're chasing your potential.

**Colin Mathieson:** So, when I was working for a not for profit, I went to an event for accessibility in Montreal. And one of the things, I cannot remember who said it, but the whole emphasis of their presentation was that they could not afford a parallel system for accessibility, so it was cheaper to make one for everyone. And just the idea that instead of having accessibility being a tacked-on expense where it's easy to say we don't have the budget for it, inclusion really does have the potential to be economical. If you build it for everybody, then you don't have to build anything separate, and that can be a program, that can be a building, it applies to all sorts of different applications, or examples.

**Colin Mathieson:** Now, one of the other things, too, is that grass roots and community recreation remain the best entry point to feed both high-performance sport and provide a start and finishing point for someone who only wants to have fun. It all starts with having a track available. It all starts with having a basketball court available. It all starts with having an accessible facility, proper equipment, those are all things that are applicable to anybody's starting point and one of the things that I am super excited to see is that Winnipeg specifically has gone on an absolute tear, and they are rebuilding pretty much every single community track in Winnipeg, they look amazing. It started with Dakota Collegiate has a track now behind their school. Grant Park had just had their surface redone, and I just want to encourage everybody that if you want to go out for a wheel, go out for a walk, whatever your mode of transportation is, you know, go out and use these facilities because they're absolutely amazing, and you get to use it as a really general space. It can be whatever you want. So, I feel partially like I've taken forever and partially like I'm talking really quick, so my take-away message is that inclusion and equity -- equality are a concept that should and can be applied everywhere. Doing the right thing doesn't cost more than doing it poorly twice. And high-performance sport is for a few while recreation and physical activity should be accessible to all. And so, with those thoughts, I will thank you guys very much for your time and if there are any

questions, we can sort of answer them now.

**Darren Macdonald:** Thank you, Colin. And great take-away messages. And really a great reminder that I think when we talk about barriers in sport, we think of the athletes, and I think your point was well-made and good for all of us who are responsible for removing barriers that we need to think about the spectators and the coaches and look at the sidelines and look at the stands and those types of things as well because parents want to come, you know, maybe the athlete isn't the individual with a barrier but it's the coach and we need to remove the barrier so that people can coach and participate in whatever form. We have really one minute so let me check with Maria if there are burning questions for Colin, maybe we can get to one or two.

**Maria Ferraro:** Sure. There's two. In general, has there been a significant amount of pushback from Paralympians on the mandate that the chairs have to come from a manufacturer? If yes, how did the International Paralympic Committee respond?

**Colin Mathieson:** Oh, that's a good question. There was a lot of initial pushback because most of us have been very, very creative in getting our racing wheelchairs exactly how we need them to be as a very, very personalized device. And just the idea that it all of a sudden had to come from almost like a menu was really off-putting because the risk was that one size doesn't fit all and we kind of felt like they were sort of steering us towards a need for everything to sort of be the same, kind of like Nascar or stock car racing. It's something that we've all just sort of agreed to disagree on. I'm still racing in the same racing wheelchair that I had in 2014, so I haven't subscribed to the idea that I need a \$30,000 racing wheelchair. And if my results reflect a percentage slower than those chairs, then that will have to be good enough.

**Maria Ferraro:** Great, good answer. Thank you. And lastly, what advice would you give young Para athletes or people thinking about trying a new sport?

**Colin Mathieson:** Well, I think that there's enough people in the community that have already done it once. I think that with the disabled community being fairly tight-knit, I'd find the person

that is also doing it or doing what you would like to try and connecting. I've never met somebody that didn't openly invite somebody out to come give it a try because the more of us that are active and together, we can -- you might end up with a training partner.

**Maria Ferraro:** Great, thank you.

**Darren Macdonald:** Thanks, Colin. And perfect timing. We're right at the end of our webinar today. So, thanks, everyone, for joining us, particularly Colin. That was a great presentation. And Rebecca for your words and thank you to Vern Dano and Minister Fontaine for the opening remarks. And thank you to all the staff here for putting this on. And lastly, thank you to the interpreters and captioner for their work and having the accessibility features on today's webinar. A reminder that it is being recorded and the webinar will be available on [AccessibilityMB.ca](http://AccessibilityMB.ca). Give us a couple of days, and we will get that up. So, thank you, and if you're at our website, please subscribe to our newsletter, *Accessibility News*, for monthly updates on accessibility, especially as the outdoor spaces regulation gets worked on and we'll have updates in the new year about that. So, thank you. And happy International Day of Persons with Disabilities. Thanks for joining us.