

## **MEDIA RELEASE**

### **BCA TO EXPAND ACCESSIBILITY MANDATORY REQUIREMENTS FOR EXISTING BUILDINGS**

- *Existing commercial and institutional buildings must include barrier-free upgrades as part of their major additions and alterations works*
- *Extension of S\$40 million Accessibility Fund to 2022 to offset retrofitting costs*

**Singapore, 27 July 2016** – The Building and Construction Authority (BCA) will introduce new mandatory requirements on barrier-free accessibility in existing buildings from 2017. These requirements will mean that owners of commercial and institutional buildings – visited frequently by the public – must include barrier-free accessibility upgrades when they undergo additions and alterations (A&A) works. Mr Lawrence Wong, Minister for National Development, announced the new requirements to existing buildings this morning at the opening of the Singapore Universal Design Week 2016, where he officiated as the Guest-of-Honour.

2. Commenting on the expanded requirements, BCA’s Chief Executive Officer Dr. John Keung said, “For a future-ready built environment we need to prepare for tomorrow even as we build today. Singapore’s demographics will change in the next few generations, so these requirements will compel us – including the industry – to plan ahead on how our living environment can meet the needs of all Singaporeans. This is not just about improving the accessibility of our buildings but also concerns the employability, social mobility and convenience of everyone.”

3. Under the new requirements, owners of existing buildings undergoing A&A works must provide basic accessibility to their premises, i.e., by making the building entrance barrier-free and one toilet accessible to a wheelchair user (Table 1). The new requirements will apply to commercial and institutional buildings that are frequently visited by members of the public, such as offices, schools, universities, community clubs, shopping centres, markets and food centres.

4. For example, when an existing ten-storey commercial building, without an accessible building entrance and an accessible toilet, undergoes A&A works on its ninth and tenth storeys, there is currently no requirement to provide barrier-free accessibility beyond the works at these two floors. Under the new requirements, the owner must provide an accessible building entrance and one accessible toilet in addition to the current requirements that the ninth and tenth storeys must be accessible.

Areas	Minimum requirements for existing buildings
<b>Addition &amp; Alteration works</b> (Current)	Require to be made accessible
<b>Accessible entrance</b> (New)	Provide either a ramp or a stair-lift / platform lift to overcome steps
<b>Accessible toilet</b> (New)	Provide at least one accessible toilet

Table 1: Minimum requirements for existing buildings undergoing A&A works

5. To encourage more owners of existing buildings incorporate barrier-free upgrades as part of the A&A works, BCA will extend the S\$40-million Accessibility Fund for a further five years, i.e., from FY2017 to FY2021, expand its scope and enhance its eligibility criteria to benefit more building owners. The Fund will cover accessibility features for the visually and hearing impaired and allow up to two applications per building or development.

6. BCA's Chief Executive Officer Dr. John Keung said, "With these improvements to the Accessibility Fund, our objective is to encourage owners to plan gradual improvements to their buildings' accessibility that are in line with their maintenance and A&A cycles. We hope that the expanded eligibility criteria will also bring earlier applicants of the Fund back to upgrade their buildings with additional features and enjoy the same incentive that is available to new applicants. We hope that the Fund and the additional requirements will put us one step closer to fulfilling our goal of having 70% of commercial and institutional buildings in Singapore barrier-free by 2030."

7. Events during the Week such as the Universal Design Conference, the Exhibition and the Universal Design Forum will facilitate sharing among the experts, industry and voluntary welfare organisations on inclusive design in the built environment. It is part of BCA's efforts since 2008 to promote Universal Design in Singapore.

### **Enclosed**

**Annex A** – Factsheet: Accessibility requirements for existing buildings

**Annex B** – Factsheet: Accessibility Fund – Status as on June 2016

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**Issued by the Building and Construction Authority on 27 July 2016**

### **About Building and Construction Authority**

The Building and Construction Authority (BCA) of Singapore champions the development of an excellent built environment for Singapore. BCA's mission is to shape a safe, high quality, sustainable and friendly built environment, as these are four key elements where BCA has a significant influence. In doing so, it aims to differentiate Singapore's built environment from those of other cities and contribute to a better quality of life for everyone in Singapore. Hence, its vision is to have "a future-ready built environment for Singapore". Together with its education arm, the BCA Academy, BCA works closely with its industry partners to develop skills and expertise that help shape a future-ready built environment for Singapore. For more information, visit [www.bca.gov.sg](http://www.bca.gov.sg).

## ACCESSIBILITY REQUIREMENTS FOR EXISTING BUILDINGS

### Background

The need to address barrier-free access for persons with disabilities was raised in the 1980s. This led to the mandatory provision of barrier-free accessibility in buildings in 1990 under the Building Control Regulations, 1989. The Code on Accessibility in the Built Environment (previously called the Code on Barrier Free Accessibility in Buildings) has also been revised through the years with increased provisions and requirements to meet the mobility needs of a more diverse and ageing population.

Since 2006, through the implementation of the Accessibility Master Plan, incentive measures and public education programmes have been progressively introduced to improve accessibility of the built environment. While these efforts have brought significant improvements, there is still a large stock of pre-1990 buildings which do not provide barrier-free accessibility including existing commercial and institutional buildings that are frequented by the general public. To close the gap, it is important, especially for existing commercial and institutional buildings to undertake necessary upgrading to provide reasonably achievable access.

### Existing Measures

#### *New buildings and A&A works to existing buildings*

The requirement to provide barrier-free accessibility in buildings is applicable to all new building projects and existing buildings undergoing extensive addition and/or alteration (A&A) works since 1990. As the law does not apply retrospectively, accessibility upgrading for pre-1990 buildings not undergoing any A&A works is currently carried out on a voluntary basis.

### Existing Buildings - Public Sector

Since 2006, the Government has been stepping up efforts to accelerate accessibility upgrading in existing public sector buildings and infrastructure. Through multi-agencies' efforts championed by BCA, close to 100% of public sector buildings/ infrastructure that are frequented by the general public have achieved at least basic accessibility\*. These buildings include MRT/LRT stations, bus interchanges, shopping centres, libraries, sports complexes, health institutions, community clubs, markets and food centres.

\* "Basic accessibility" means having minimum wheelchair accessibility that comprises (a) a barrier-free building entrance; (b) accessibility at the ground or entry level; and (c) at least one wheelchair-accessible toilet.

## **ACCESSIBILITY REQUIREMENTS FOR EXISTING BUILDINGS**

### **Existing Buildings - Private Sector**

For existing Private sector buildings, BCA actively promotes voluntary upgrading with capital incentives through the S\$40-million Accessibility Fund (AF). Introduced in 2006, AF incentivises accessibility upgrading of privately-owned pre-1990 buildings by defraying part of the retrofitting cost. Due to the initial low take-up rate, the fund was significantly enhanced in 2008 by increasing the co-pay value up to 80% of retrofitting cost. The availability of the fund was also extended to FY2016.

### **Challenges to voluntary upgrading for private sector buildings**

In spite of the availability of monetary subsidy, the take-up rate of AF for private sector buildings is relatively poor when weighed against the large stock of pre-1990 buildings. The typical reasons cited by building owners/managers for the reluctance towards accessibility retrofits are:

- a. Physical constraints of existing buildings (e.g. site, structural);
- b. No obvious need or business benefits from accessibility upgrading;
- c. Loss of commercial/ rental space;
- d. Disruption to existing operations during renovation;
- e. Difficulties in obtaining consensus from owners in strata-titled developments;
- f. Conservation / heritage considerations.

Instead of encouraging building owners to upgrade voluntarily with barrier-free accessibility and/or awaiting them to redevelop according to their programme, one way of speeding up the pace of upgrading works is to strengthen the minimum accessibility requirements for existing buildings undergoing A&A works by providing with at least basic accessibility.

We have also conducted Focus Group Discussions (FGD) attended by government agencies, industry players and voluntary welfare organisations on the proposed mandatory accessibility upgrading. All the stakeholders were supportive of this proposed measure.

## ACCESSIBILITY FUND: STATUS (June 2016)

Accessibility Fund		
No. of applications received	:	197
No. of applications approved	:	135
Amount expended	:	S\$14m