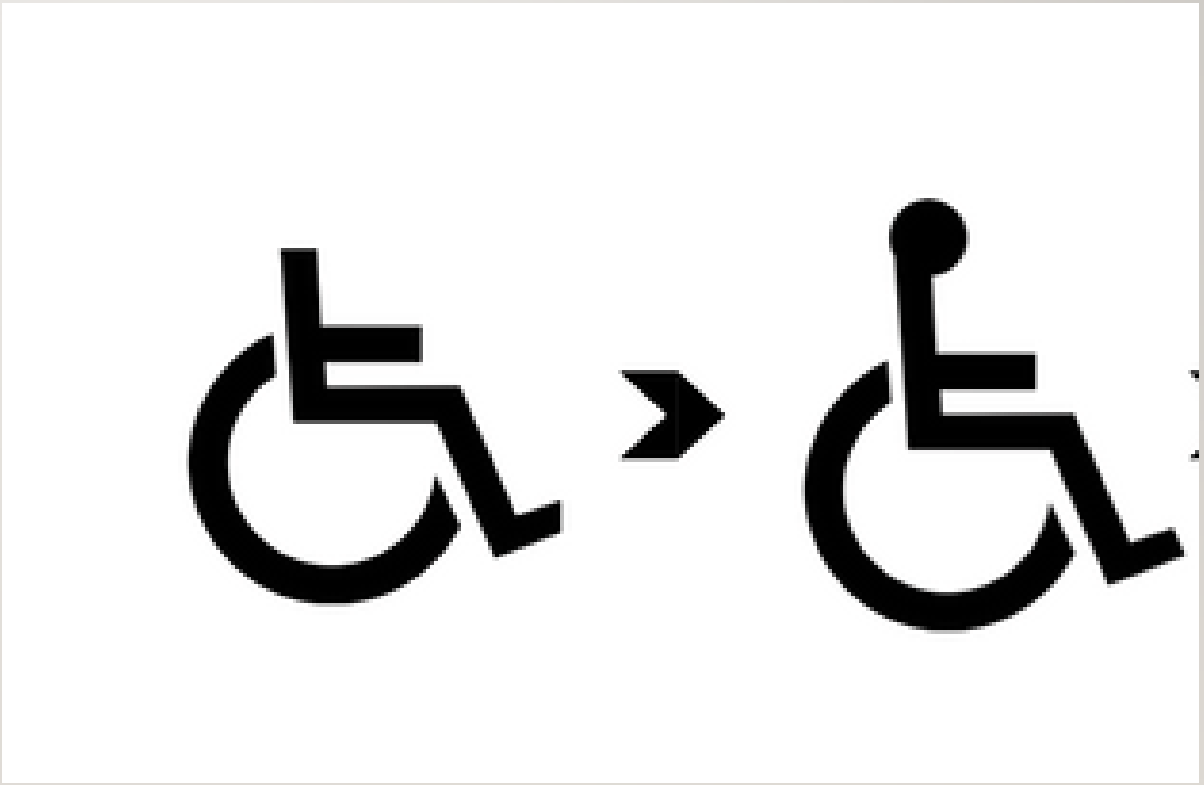
THE ACCESSIBLE ICON

WHY WE SHOULD UPDATE OUR ACCESSIBLE SIGNS AND SYMBOLS

By: Michael Baker

THE ORIGINAL ACCESSIBLE ICON

- The current symbol was designed by Danish design student Susanne Koefoed in 1968. Karl Montan adding the head in 1969 with its formal international adoption.



A QUICK HISTORY OF

THE INTERNATIONAL SYMBOL OF ACCESS



1968: SUSANNE KOEFED

Susanne, a Danish graphic design student, submitted this entry to Rehabilitation International's International Commission on Technology and Accessibility (RI ICTA) after they requested a symbol for accessibility.



1969: KARL MONTAN

As Chair of the RI ICTA, Karl humanized the symbol by adding the circle on top that represents the head. World Congress formally adopted this symbol, and it was decided it would legally be kept in the public domain as a "gift to mankind."



1994: BRENDAN MURPHY

As an Irish graduate student in Cincinnati, Brendan was inspired by a childhood neighbor to update the symbol with a more progessive view of people who used wheelchairs. He wanted to show them as active and independent people, as opposed to rigid and helpless



2000: GRAPHIC ARTISTS GUILD

Adding more rounded, human-like features, the Graphic Artists Guild Foundation hoped that this symbol would promote and publicize accessibility for



2011: SARA HENDREN

As a graduate design student in Boston, Sara became more aware of accessibility issues after giving birth to a son with Down Syndrome. She created a design with a more active feel, made them into transparent stickers, and illegally stuck them on current accessibility signs throughout the city of Boston.



2012: ACCESSIBLE ICON PROJECT

Founded by Sara Hendren and Brian Glenney, the update to the icon has the following features:

1. **Body Reprensentation:** Body symbol is consistent with other symbols: thick and rounded.
2. **Arm Position:** Arm is pointing backward to suggest dynamic mobility.
3. **Head Placement:** Head is forward to indicate forward motion and progress.

1960s 1970s 1980s 1990s 2000s 2010s

ELEMENT BREAKDOWN

1 - Head forward to indicate the forward motion. Here the person is the "driver" or decision maker about her mobility.

2 - Arm is pointing backward to suggest the dynamic mobility of a chair user which represents the active status of navigating the world.

3 - Angled knockouts present the wheel as being in motion.

4 - The human depiction in this icon is consistent with other body representations found in the ISO 7001 - DOT Pictograms (public information symbols).

5 - The leg has been moved forward for more space between it and the wheel which allows for better readability and cleaner application



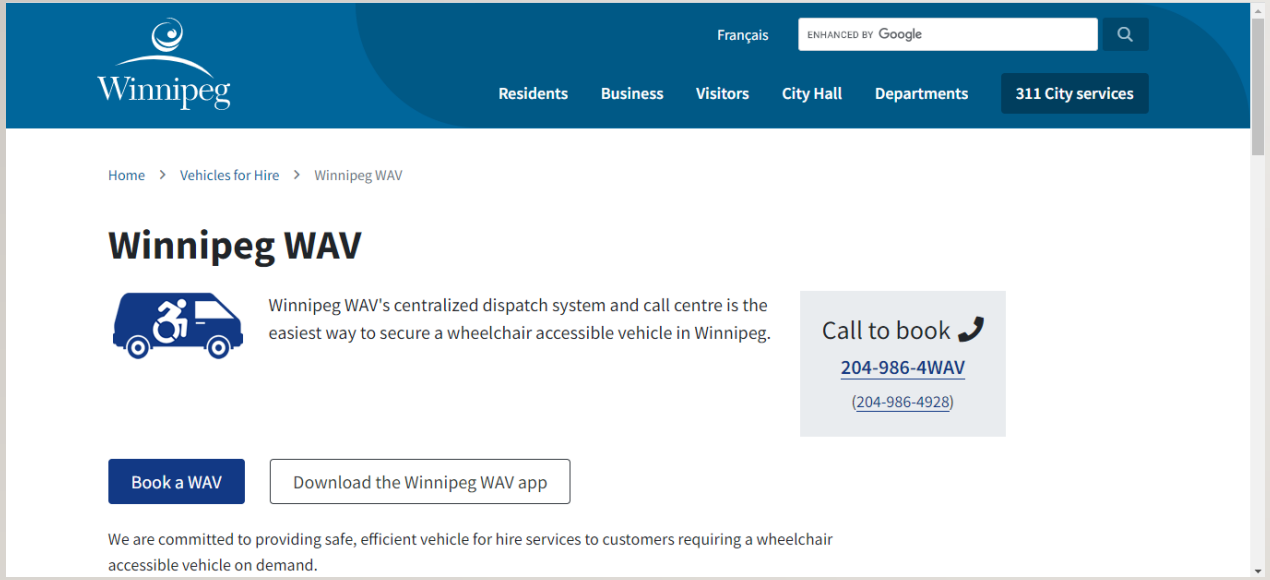
CONSISTENT WITH ISO & DOT REGULATIONS

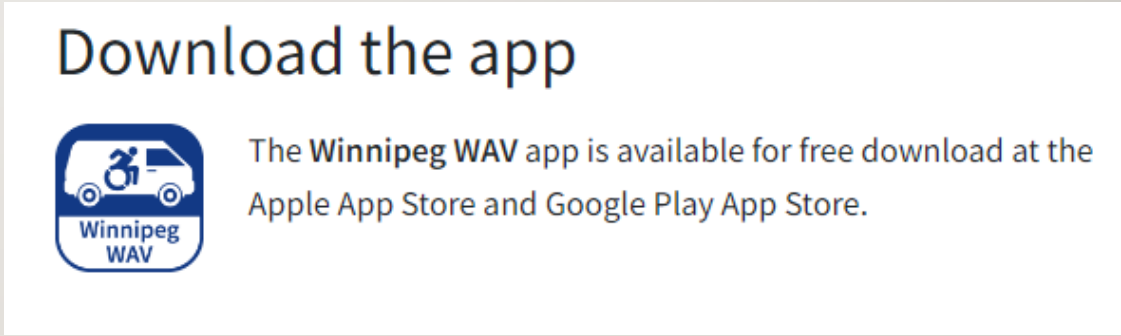


- The **DOT pictograms** are a set of fifty pictograms used to convey information useful to travelers without using words. Such images are often used in airports, train stations, hotels, and other public places for foreign tourists, as well as being easier to identify than strings of text.

- ISO- International Organization of Standardization
- DOT – Department of Transportation (USA)

ALREADY IN USE?





It should be noted the City recently launched Winnipeg WAV and, following consultations, used the forwarding leaning icon.

IN USE: BROAD APPLICATION

- NFL's Jacksonville Jaguars,
- New York City
- Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) NYC
- Nanaimo, BC
- Featured in major Canadian Publications (Toronto Star, Winnipeg Free Press, CBC etc..)

And more ……





TWO SIDES TO EVERY COIN



- No need to change, the current symbol works (Frivolous)
- "It doesn't look like me!" "I cant do that" (Feedback & Publication)
- Waste of resources: Instead of updating the sign, fund programming that supports people with disabilities (all or nothing)

- Stagnate, representative of the medical model, eroded meaning
- Transformative & Engaging
- Multi-Pronged approach to renewing inclusion as equity
- Symbol is not a personal reflection – it is representative (value, power, autonomy, - empowering, vibrant and vital)
- Disability as an identity, community, and culture.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR UPDATE

- Prior to full implementation – Community Consultation & Pilot Project
- Gradual Implementation for consistent recognition
- Pair implementation with community education (Disability Rights, Accessibility, Equity, and Inclusion)
- Intensify employee and community education RE: Attitudinal Barriers and Ableism (besides physical barriers)
- As a City, we need to constantly "Reaffirm the universality, indivisibility, interdependence and interrelatedness of all human rights and fundamental freedoms and the need for persons with disabilities to be guaranteed their full enjoyment without discrimination" (UNCRPD)