

City of Houston

Digital Accessibility Update & Strategic Roadmap

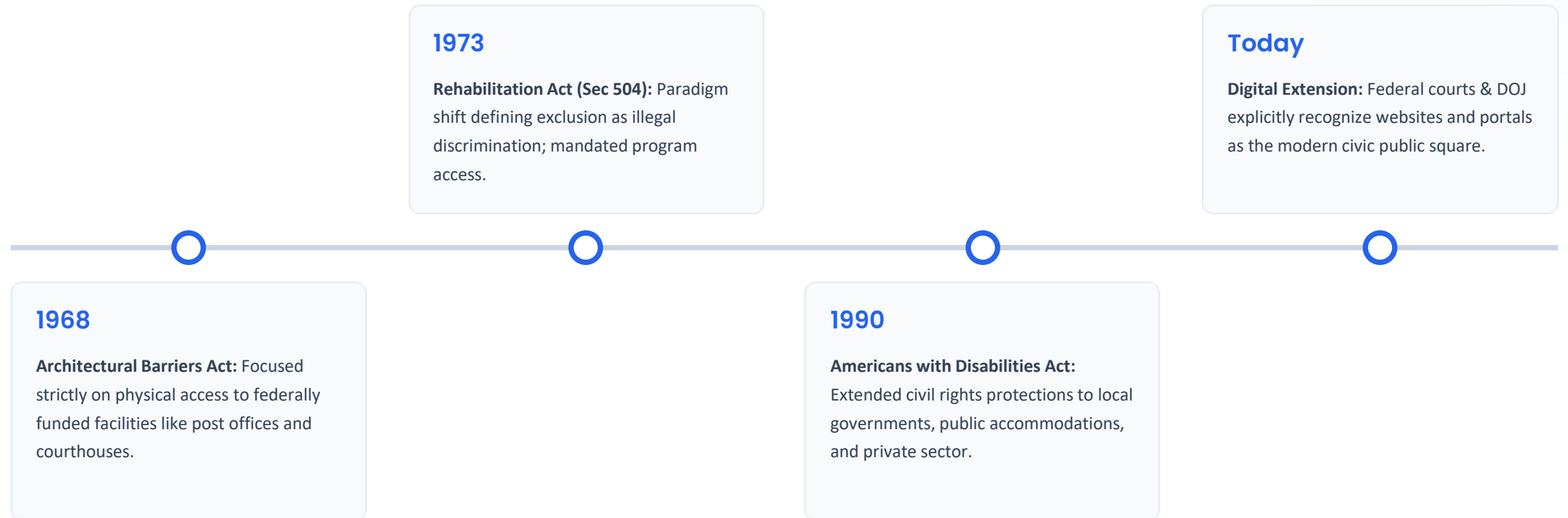
Pathways Toward ADA Title II Federal Compliance & Municipal Inclusion



Presented by: Angel Ponce | David Opheim | Kalpana Pillai



Evolution of Accessibility Law



The Modern Public Square

Digital environments—including municipal websites, payment portals, and mobile apps—are the modern extensions of physical city halls.

Equal access to online city services is just as vital today as a physical ramp leading to the front doors of government facilities.



DOJ Title II Mandate & Deadlines

April 26, 2027

Formal Compliance Deadline for Houston

Technical Standards & Mandate

Published on April 24, 2024, the DOJ Title II Final Rule requires all public digital assets (websites, mobile apps, digital PDFs) to meet **WCAG 2.1 Level AA standards**.

DOJ extended enforcement deadlines for municipalities to address legacy infrastructure: large entities have until 2027, while smaller entities have until 2028.



The P.O.U.R. Accessibility Standards



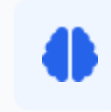
Perceivable

Residents can access information through screen readers, high contrast displays, and structured alt-text for images.



Operable

Users can smoothly navigate the site using keyboard-only control or assistive devices, without getting trapped or unable to proceed.



Understandable

Digital content features simple, logical page structures, consistent navigation, and clear plain-language text.



Robust

Municipal assets perform reliably across modern browsers, mobile devices, and screen-reading technologies.

Pilot Study & Operational Takeaways

Assessment Insights

- **Decentralized Management:** Digital content creation is distributed across multiple departmental webmasters and developers.
- **Automated Scanning Limits:** Software tools like Siteimprove catch only **30% to 40%** of total accessibility barriers.
- **Human Evaluation Essential:** Achieving true compliance requires manual screen-reader testing and human-centered design reviews.



Digital Pilot Study Results

Accessibility evaluation of Houston's Main Website & Library Website reveals key functional compliance gaps.



Main City Website

80.4% Overall Pass Rate

Level A Conformance 78.1%

Level AA Conformance 83.3%

Key Finding: Uncovered significant **Critical & Blocking** barriers affecting users of screen readers and assistive technologies. Current internal review processes are insufficient.



Library Website

73.2% Overall Pass Rate

Level A Conformance 71.9%

Level AA Conformance 75.0%

Key Finding: Severe compliance gaps identified. Heavy reliance on automated scanning tools (**SiteImprove**) fails to identify critical functional usability barriers.



Automated Tools Fall Short

Tools like *SiteImprove* catch syntax errors but miss functional navigation & screen-reader barriers. Usability testing is essential.



Decentralized Webmaster Risk

Multiple departmental teams operate without unified standards, leading to inconsistent compliance and higher defect rates on external sites.



Broader Audits Required

Small sample testing proved existing processes fail users. A comprehensive, city-wide digital remediation plan is recommended.

Citywide Coordination Strategy

The Digital Platform & User Experience HUB

- Publish and maintain accessible design standards and training so departments can create WCAG-aligned content consistently.
- Support departments through structured reviews and remediation, including WCAG testing and barrier identification across webpages, documents, forms, and media.
- Provide ongoing monitoring and feedback, including quarterly testing and updated accessibility statements, to keep new digital content aligned with requirements.



Strategic Opportunity: Website Migration

Align digital accessibility remediation with the upcoming Citywide IT Website Migration roadmap.



City of Houston Website Refresh (houstontx.gov)

Project Overview

Purpose

- Modernize the City's public website by replacing the current legacy, on-premises infrastructure with Acquia, a secure and scalable content management system (CMS).

Why This Upgrade Is Needed

- Updating content is slow and often difficult for department staff.
- Technology is outdated and not aligned with modern website standards.

What the New Solution Provides

- Cloud-hosted Platform as a Service (PaaS) for improved reliability and performance.
- Easy-to-use tools that allow City staff—without technical coding skills—to update and publish content.
- Streamlined collaboration with department website coordinators.
- Faster content updates, improved consistency, and better user experience for residents.



Benefits



Secure and Compliant Modern Digital Infrastructure

- Platform includes built in safeguards robust security monitoring, continuous patching, role-based access, and compliance support.



Better Resident Access and Service Experience

- Website will be faster, services will be easier to find with fewer clicks, works better for residents with disabilities, including those using screen readers or assistive devices.



Improved Reliability

- The new platform can handle high visitor traffic during hurricanes, major incidents, or citywide announcements, ensuring people receive critical information without the site slowing down or failing.



Modern Tools That Empower Staff

- Enables tools for City staff to be able to post updates and add announcements, make changes without needing technical support.



Lower Long-Term Costs

- System is easier to update and maintain, reducing the upkeep costs.



Digital Accessibility Roadmap

Date	Initiative	Action Items
January 2024	ADA Transition Plan Phase I: Receives Council Award	Adopted a phased approach to evaluate accessibility barriers and ensure ADA compliance, prioritizing digital accessibility alongside programs, facilities, parks, and rights-of-way.
August 2025	ADA Plan Results: Presentation to Leadership	ADA Self-evaluation findings, next steps, and timelines delivered to city leadership.
Early 2026	Webpages & UX HUB	Webmaster reviewed the top 100 City webpages to identify and resolve accessibility barriers. UX HUB to provide departments with clear WCAG standards, training, hands-on support for fixing issues across all media, and quarterly testing to maintain long-term compliance.
September 2026	ADA Transition Plan Phase II (Pending)	Conduct needs assessment and gap analysis to strengthen the digital accessibility roadmap and support implementation.

Digital Accessibility Compliance Roadmap & Ongoing Implementation

End-to-End Digital Accessibility Consulting and Implementation Support

- Evaluate City IT systems to identify DOJ Web Accessibility Rule compliance challenges.
- Establish a strategic framework resolving findings from gap analysis.
- Provide strategic guidance and resource development for municipal-wide adoption.



Questions & Discussion

Positioning Houston as a national leader in accessible, transparent, and efficient municipal governance.

