



## **Commission on People with Disabilities**

June 12<sup>th</sup>, 2019

### **Welcome and Approval of May 2019 Meeting Summary Minutes:**

Seth Morgan, Chair, convened the meeting. A motion was made to approve the May 2019 Meeting Summary Minutes. The motion was seconded. A vote was taken, and the May 2019 Meeting Summary Minutes were unanimously approved as written. Approved minutes are available online at [www.montgomerycountymd.gov/cpwd](http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/cpwd).

### **Panel Discussion on the Construction of Bicycle Lanes, Floating Bus Stops, Pedestrian Issues and Impact on Safety and Mobility – Patricia Gallalee, Vice-Chair; Charlie Crawford, President, Capital Area Guide Dog Users, Inc.; and Day Al-Mohamed, J.D.**

The meeting began by showing the following video about floating bus stops from the Canadian Federation of the Blind: <https://vimeo.com/340333872>

Charlie Crawford is a former Chair of the Commission spoke about his perspective on pedestrian safety for people who are blind. Regarding pedestrian safety, he stated that everyone should have a seat at the table for a negotiation based on mutual needs. Yet, when the needs of people with disabilities are not anticipated or acknowledged the system starts to break down. While he does not want bicyclists to not be able to ride their bikes, Charlie also does not want to be stuck in his house because of bicyclists. Charlie reported that James Kutsch, President, The Seeing Eye, who is blind, was recently struck by a cyclist while walking across the street in Morristown, New Jersey. The cyclist claimed he did not see James. Fortunately, James was not severely injured, and his service dog is okay. Charlie asked what can be done to keep this from happening.

Vision Zero is a national initiative that Montgomery County has adopted and has put resources in place to reduce severe and fatal collisions on County roads by 35 percent for vehicle occupants (drivers and passengers), pedestrians, and bicyclists by November 2019. The County has an opportunity to design an environment that works for everyone and considers the needs of drivers, cyclists, and pedestrians. People have the right to travel in an infrastructure that is designed for everyone's use. Up until now it seems that pedestrians with disabilities have not been included in the discussion. Charlie reported that he has been invited to join the Maryland Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee. The Committee advises State government agencies on issues directly related to bicycling and pedestrian activity including funding, public awareness, safety and education.

Charlie was asked what he would like to have included in the planning for pedestrian safety. He has been reading documentation developed by the National Association of City Transportation Officials, whose mission is to build cities as places for people, with safe, sustainable, accessible and equitable transportation choices that support a strong economy and vibrant quality of life. He will be reviewing their Urban Street and Urban Bikeway Design Guides over the next month in order to present his findings before the American Council of the Blind. Charlie suggested reducing the speed limit for vehicles and bicyclists allowing them to pay more attention to their surroundings and give them the opportunity to stop before hitting a pedestrian. He also suggested using a material that cuts between the

bicycle lane and the sidewalk so the bicyclists do not have to worry about hitting the pedestrian, although this would not solve the issue of the pedestrian trying to reach the bus stop or the issue of finding the bus stop if it is located in the middle of street.

It has been proposed that detectable warnings, or bumpy domes, be installed on sidewalks to indicate a pedestrian walkway, but this does not indicate to a pedestrian who is blind where the walkway leads. Charlie would like an audible detection system installed that would audibly indicate if there was a bus stop. The path to the bus stop would also need some form of indicator so that the individual does not step into the road. If the bus stop is in the road there should be railings or a barrier installed between the pedestrians, the bus stop, and the bicycle lanes with a break in the barrier to indicate to pedestrians where the bus loads passengers. During the design phase, persons who are blind or have low vision should be included to provide input on what works best for them.

Charlie ended by saying advocacy only works when everyone who is affected is involved in the process. In the end, even if the suggestions cannot be fully incorporated they will be much more accepting of the outcome because they were heard and the County was working with them.

Trish Gallalee, Vice-Chair, spoke from a mobility perspective. From reviewing the Federal government's design of bike lanes that set the standard she does not see that the Architectural Barriers Act Accessibility Standards were incorporated. While the standard includes demonstrations of accessible parking along a bike lane, it does not take into consideration the safety of the driver exiting into the lane of traffic. This is especially dangerous for individuals who need enough exit space for their wheelchair and/or service animal. Trish noted she needs at least three feet of space when exiting her vehicle. There are also potential risks when putting her service animal in the lane of traffic. The Federal government design only allows for the person to exit on the passenger side, yet that person would be exiting into the bike lane and again poses potential risks for the driver and/or service animal. Trish visited downtown D.C. over the weekend and she witnessed many bicyclists riding on sidewalks who had no regard for pedestrians and those who were in the bike lanes had no regard for pedestrians in the crosswalks. Her service animal was also almost hit several times by bicyclists.

Trish has seen some of the bike lane barriers being tested by the County along the route to her work on Nebel Street in Rockville. One barrier connects the parts of it together with a metal bar at the bottom that is six inches high. Trish cannot step over it. While it is understandable that barriers are being installed to prevent people from parking in the bike lane, it will make it difficult for those exiting their vehicle. <https://www.curbed.com/word-on-the-street/2019/5/10/18527503/bike-lanes-red-cup-project> Trish noted that she often parkings in non-accessible parking spaces as those tend to always be in use.

Another concern is MetroAccess requires that they drop their lift onto a curb. The MetroAccess vehicle will not be able to reach the curb due to the bike lane and the barriers installed, preventing the passenger to access the location they are trying to reach. Trish reported that the MetroAccess drop-off near the Federal agency she works at is currently a bus slip that will eventually become a floating bus stop. There are a considerable number of MetroAccess users who are dropped off and picked up at the Twinbrook Metro and the nearby Federal agencies. The bus slip is also used by the FDA and NIH shuttles.

Trish has been researching bicyclists and bike lanes. She has noted that not all bicyclists will use the bike lanes because of the lack of visibility, and some will ride in the street so they can be seen. Some bicyclists also will not stop at a stop sign, only if there is a traffic light. With the current design of traffic lane, parking lane, bicycle lane, and sidewalk, if a vehicle is turning right their visibility of the bicycle lane

and the sidewalk are reduced due to the parking lane. The bicyclists and pedestrians will also not be able to see the traffic lane. People should be able to ride their bikes, but it should be safe for everyone. Trish added that New York City is implementing a \$250 fine for people who are texting while walking across the street because of the increased number of pedestrians being hit by vehicles.

Seth said he has observed that bicyclists often do not want to follow the rules of the road. If they have an upward climb coming they will not stop in order to maintain their speed. Bicyclists should be held accountable and taught they should follow the rules of the law. It is important to have the police on board to educate and issue citations to bicyclists. Trish asked how enforcement would occur. Another issue is that bike lanes are not exclusive to people on bikes. They can be used by any number of mobility devices including scooters, segways, and wheelchairs. It was asked how those mobility devices would be enforced.

The floor was opened to questions and comments.

A member of the public commented that if bicyclists start being fined for breaking the law perhaps their behaviors will change. She suggested having the police focus on this issue.

Kathy Mann Koepke, Commissioner, suggested cameras be installed or existing cameras be used to identify bicyclists who are not following the law. This could prove to be difficult as bicycles are not required to have license plates.

Seth suggested that flashing lights that indicate a pedestrian wants to cross the street be added to intersections with bike lanes. Ric Kienzle, Commissioner, noted that these types of indicators have been successful near Dawsons Market on North Washington Street in Rockville in controlling traffic and increasing pedestrian safety.

Asha Clark, Commissioner, suggested that the County design a universal sign that indicates that all traffic, including bicyclists, must stop to let pedestrians cross. These signs may not be seen by traffic traveling at higher speeds.

Neal Carter, Commissioner, reported that while in Louisville, Kentucky he observed indicators located within the street that automatically changes the walk or do not walk signal and emits an audible signal if a vehicle or pedestrian crosses over those indicators. This could be an option for dangerous intersections.

Cindy Buddington, Commissioner, asked how the design of the floating bus stop and bicycle lanes were determined and if any accessibility input and recommendations besides ADA requirements were considered. She also noted that when she drove a wheelchair accessible van she required eight feet to park the vehicle and eight feet to let the wheelchair lift down.

Christopher Conklin, Deputy Director, Department of Transportation (DOT), thanked everyone for their comments about working together so the infrastructure works for everyone. He noted that DOT is working to make sure our streets work for a wide variety of people. He acknowledged that there are issues. DOT is attending tonight to listen to public comments and understand concerns regarding infrastructure. While DOT has sought public input on the projects that have been built, it does mean not the designs are perfect. Chris added that there are certain elements that can be designed differently and better. Chris was invited to present before the Commission in September to address some of the

concerns that have been discussed tonight. Chris accepted the invite and suggested inviting the Planning Department as well, who is in charge of the pedestrian plan for the County.

Debbie Brown, National Federation of the Blind, is concerned about the length of time for pedestrians to cross the street as she finds the time to be too short. If an additional lane is added this will increase the amount of time needed to cross the street. Debbie added she has come across several Audible Pedestrian Signals (APS) on Rockville Pike that are not installed in the correct place and she has difficulty determining which APS is for which crosswalk. Charlie noted that in the past signals were timed to allow for a pedestrian to cross the street at four feet per second. The new signals are timed to allow for 3.5 feet per second.

Day Al-Mohamed, Commissioner, spoke from a perspective of visually impairment and pedestrian safety. She relies on public transportation and is particularly interested in the design and changes regarding public transportation as the County continues to grow and develop. There has also been a big push for more cyclists. Day spoke with some individuals based in Seattle that noted bicyclists are familiar with driving in the path of traffic and are not as familiar as riding around pedestrians. She questioned if the design of floating bus stops or islands allowed enough room for two individuals who use power wheelchairs to pass each other. Day added that the Canadian Federation of the Blind is seeking to file a lawsuit. She recognizes that change is coming and Montgomery County is growing so fast with a push to design more walkable and bicycle-friendly communities, but the design needs to work for all pedestrians.

Seth asked how Commissioners can have an impact on changing or increasing the length of time that is allowed for pedestrians to cross the street. Chris reported that last year the County completed the retiming of all County traffic signals to the 3.5 feet per second walking speed. He noted that the majority of traffic signals are designed and owned by the Maryland State Highway Administration (SHA), but they are maintained by the County. In terms of the crossing time, the County has discussed continuing the program of retiming certain signals at priority locations where additional crossing time is needed. He explained that the 3.5 feet per second begins when the flashing 'Don't Walk' sign begins, not when the 'Walk' sign is present. In some cases, there is the ability to extend the actual walk time. The critical time frame is when the 'Don't Walk' sign begins as that is the minimum amount of time needed to cross the street safely. All crosswalk signals are connected to a centralized system and continually monitored. A crosswalk can have the cross time increased if there is a need. He will discuss this issue further when he returns in the fall to present before the Commission.

Charlie noted that traffic control signals were previously monitored by wires underneath the pavement. If there were many vehicles, the light would come on sooner for individuals to cross. If there were not a lot of vehicles the pedestrians would have to wait longer.

Trish recapped the issues that were discussed this evening:

- Danger crossing the crosswalk with the floating bus stop.
- Challenge with the ability to drop a lift on the curb for MetroAccess.
- Designated parking needs to be addressed for people with disabilities depending on which side they exit the vehicle.
- Sufficient parking space for wheelchair accessible vans that may need up to 8 feet to exit.
- No rules for bicyclists and how can we police them.
- Barriers to protect bicycles may cause persons with mobility issues to have challenges in term of blocking the path of travel.

- Add audible detections to know where a bus stop is located.
- Work with police to enforce the rules and have them focus on pedestrians.
- Could cameras be used to identify bicycles that break the law or cause an accident.
- Bicyclists don't need insurance to ride so what is the liability for a bicyclist – i.e. who pays the doctor or veterinarian bill.
- Additional signage and flashing lights to indicate when to cross the street.

Francie Gilman, Montgomery County Public Libraries (MCPL), is concerned about the needs of the Deaf community and what their thoughts are on pedestrian safety. Betsy has contacted an individual who is DeafBlind and will be speaking with them soon to learn more about their concerns.

Charlie ended the discussion to say the County does listen. This Commission was created to be a voice for the disability community. It is important to be involved in the process and make a plan.

**Chair and Vice-Chair Report:**

Seth reported he recently attended a meeting with Councilmember Hans Riemer's staff to discuss floating bus stops and bicycle lanes. Also, in attendance were Trish, the Chair from the Commission on Aging, and several representatives from DOT. Seth will be meeting with Councilmember Tom Hucker next week to discuss the Transportation Services Improvement Fund. There will be a Steering Committee meeting next Wednesday, June 19<sup>th</sup> from 5:30 p.m. to 7 p.m. at 401 Hungerford Drive, 1<sup>st</sup> Floor 1A Conference Room, Rockville. The Commission will not meet in July or August.

Commissioners were reminded to turn in their end of year reimbursement requests for meeting transportation and dependent care. Reimbursement forms must be received no later than June 19<sup>th</sup>.

**Ex-Officio Member Updates:**

Charlie Butler, Department of Recreation, shared a flyer advertising Monday, August 12<sup>th</sup> as the 30<sup>th</sup> Annual "VIP Day – A Special Day at the Fair" at the Montgomery County Agricultural Fairgrounds for children ages 5 to 14 with a disability or life-threatening illness. To request an application, call 240-777-6870 (V).

**Announcements:**

None.

**Next Full Commission Meeting:** Wednesday, September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2019 from 6pm to 7:30pm at the Executive Office Building, 101 Monroe Street, Lobby Auditorium, Rockville, MD 20850

**Steering Committee Meeting:** Wednesday, September 18<sup>th</sup>, 2019 from 5:30pm to 7pm at 401 Hungerford Drive, 1<sup>st</sup> Floor 1A / 1B Conference Room, Rockville, MD 20850.

Submitted by: Carly Clem, Administrative Specialist I  
Betsy Tolbert Luecking, Community Outreach Manager

**Montgomery County  
Commission on People with Disabilities  
September 2019 Meeting and Events Calendar**

**Monday, September 9<sup>th</sup>, 2019**

**Maryland Alliance Meeting**

12:00 p.m. to 2:00 p.m.

Annapolis

(Morgan / Luecking)

**Monday, September 9<sup>th</sup>, 2019**

**Developmental Disabilities Advisory Committee**

4:00 p.m. to 5:30 p.m.

HOB – 401 Hungerford Drive, 1<sup>st</sup> Floor 1A Conference Room, Rockville

**Wednesday, September 11<sup>th</sup>**

**Full Commission Meeting**

6:00 p.m. to 7:30 p.m.

EOB – 101 Monroe Street, Lobby Level Auditorium, Rockville

**Wednesday, September 18<sup>th</sup>**

**Steering Committee Meeting**

5:30 p.m. to 7:00 p.m.

HOB – 401 Hungerford Drive, 1<sup>st</sup> Floor 1A Conference Room, Rockville