

Thanks for giving me the chance to speak today in support of this proposal. Although I volunteer with many organizations, today I am speaking as an individual and these opinions are my own.

Many of you know me as an outspoken advocate for neighborhoods in Silver Spring and Wheaton, and in particular for advocacy on Vision Zero, pedestrian and bike safety and walkable communities. I'm also a transit user, and once the pandemic passes, I'll be using Metro and buses to get to work again. I'm lucky enough to live close to a Metro station and dozens of bus stops.

I speak from first-hand experience: we need to stop treating our sidewalks as storage facilities for snow and start treating them as important links in our transportation network. They truly are arteries, just as the streets that they flank. If you are going to take a bus or train to work, you must be able to get to the stop safely every single day, all day and night. All too often, snow makes this impossible or dangerous.

This bill is great and I'm glad Councilmember Glass introduced it. It makes sense to start with equity areas because in those neighborhoods people often have no other option but transit for getting to school, work and the store. But I hope that in the future, we can expand this effort to include all sidewalks in urban locations. If we are going to reduce traffic and meet our climate change goals, we need people to see transit as a dependable method of travel. Snow should not be a reason one must buy a car in this county.

When it snows, plows make their way along the big arterial roads and push snow up on to the sidewalks. The snow and ice then form literal barriers to getting around.

During the winter, people are forced to walk in the lanes along side of cars on University Boulevard and Georgia Avenue in Wheaton with terrifying regularity. It is not unusual to see groups waiting for the bus while standing in icy lanes of oncoming traffic, simply because they can't get to the actual bus stop due to the piles of white stuff. I have seen people waiting for buses on top of snow piles that are three feet tall along Georgia. It is all incredibly dangerous. This is true when there's only a small amount of snow, but much much worse when the snow is deep and heavy.

This is a particular hardship for those with physical disabilities. I have even seen wheelchair users doing this in the middle of a storm when the snow was falling, and visibility was low. People who are blind depend on reliable sidewalk routes, but often encounter walls of snow in unexpected locations, making the route to work difficult, or even impossible. People who depend on mobility devices like wheelchairs depend on curb cuts and wide paths and can't make their way past if those are clogged with piles of snow. I have even seen wheelchair users doing this in the middle of a storm when the snow was falling and visibility was low.

This is shameful mismanagement of public infrastructure and the disabled community deserves better. They are taxpayers just like everyone else. They need to get to work, to visit their families, to be able to do their own shopping. Snow should not be a reason they can't live like any other adult in our community and do the things that all adults want and need to do every day.

We have made the transit investment, and we are starting to increase and improve our sidewalks. Now we must do the maintenance that makes them both reliable and viable. Sidewalks shouldn't be a "fairweather only" option.

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