

My concern is that installation of bike lanes and floating bus islands are continuing, in spite of the lack of accessibility and safety for people who have disabilities. Federally-funded research is underway to study safety issues for people with vision disabilities around floating bus islands and to develop guidelines. Many large jurisdictions are removing or having second thoughts about bike lanes (DC, Houston, New York City, London among them) because they are confusing and frustrating for drivers and for pedestrians. ADA issues are certainly involved. Yet in Montgomery County floating bus stops (or islands) are funded and being installed in spite of repeated warnings and advice from the County's Commission on People with Disabilities. While I agree that bicyclists face difficult and dangerous journeys, are Council members not aware of the safety consequences of bus islands for people who are blind or have low vision, or who walk slowly, perhaps using a cane or a walker?

Bicyclists have 4-8' lanes between the curb and a bus stop built on an island "floating" in a traffic lane. Bicyclists may or may not see a pedestrian trying to cross to or from the island. Bicyclists may be moving too fast, or distracted by traffic or their earpods, or just careless. They may assume that everyone can either see them or hear them coming — but bicycles are silent, and bus riders may start to cross, assuming that bicyclists will see them and stop. It takes just a few incidents, and word spreads throughout the disability community. Even people who are blind who use guide dogs cannot cross because the floating bus stops are mid-block, and guide dogs are trained to cross at crosswalks only. The consequences are that people with disabilities either go farther to get to a bus stop on the curb, or they don't use buses to get to work, visit their family, or go to doctor appointments like other people. Their options are to ask a family member or friends to give them a ride. Or they could use Uber, or MetroAccess if they have the funds. Their jobs and health and financial well-being are put at risk.

The County Commission on People with Disabilities has never supported floating bus islands, and for years have forcefully told the MCDOT not to build them. Members have testified against them in front of the Council. I don't understand how the County and DOT can support and continue plans for bike lanes and floating bus stops in the face of this opposition, as well as the opposition of other residents over the years. Where is the MCDOT's proof that floating bus stops are safe for people with disabilities? What measures have they studied, validated and tested?

Two suggestions: 1. Council could sponsor a meeting between WABA and members of the Commission and other local groups representing people with disabilities such as the National Capitol Area Chapter of the American Council for the Blind and the Sligo Creek Chapter of the National Federation of the Blind. The goal would be to begin to reach a consensus on what might be a safer alternative for both groups. It would at least bring awareness of how each group sees the problem, and possibly result in new options. 2. Most importantly, pause building all bus islands until results of the federally funded study noted above are in.

Finally, I hope you agree that to help anyone understand a problem, there's nothing like experiencing it yourself. I challenge Montgomery County Council and staff to get from

the curb to a floating bus stop and board a bus while blindfolded and using a white cane. Definitely have some people there to observe, keep you safe, and take notes. Call in the media, if you dare!

Thank you very much for the opportunity to submit testimony.

Link to Federally-funded research:

<https://apps.trb.org/cmsfeed/TRBNetProjectDisplay.asp?ProjectID=5438>