



**Commission on People with Disabilities
Meeting Summary Minutes
November 13, 2024**

**** MEETING WAS HELD VIA ZOOM ****

Welcome and Approval of October 2024 Meeting Minutes

Tonya Gilchrist, Chair, convened the meeting. A motion was made to approve the October 2024 Meeting Minutes. The motion was seconded. A vote was taken and the October 2024 Meeting Minutes were unanimously approved as written. Approved minutes are available online at www.montgomerycountymd.gov/cpwd.

Designated Bike Lanes, Sidewalks and Floating Bus Stops

The following individuals were invited to give remarks during a discussion regarding the County's designated bike lanes, sidewalks and floating bus stops.

- **Matthew Barkley, ADA Title II Compliance Manager, Department of General Services:** Title II of the ADA requires that state and local government entities do not discriminate against people with disabilities in their programs, services and activities. The goal of the ADA Compliance Team is to coordinate Montgomery County government's overall ADA compliance efforts. This Commission has had discussions with Montgomery County Department of Transportation (MCDOT) previously about accessibility and pedestrian safety concerns regarding bike lanes and floating bus stops. Matt said it is a civil rights issue and persons with disabilities need equal access to all amenities. The ADA does not address bike lanes. Cyclists in the county have been very vocal yet cyclists are not a protected class whereas persons with disabilities are a protected class. People with disabilities fought hard for their rights to access the community and traverse it safely. Disability rights are human rights and civil rights.
- **Pat Sheehan, American Council of the Blind:** Dedicated bike lanes do serve a purpose in taking bikes off of sidewalks, but Pat asked if they are needed. Bike lanes have increased travel time, particularly along Old Georgetown Road where a 15-minute commute now takes 45 minutes to an hour. ACB has asked MCDOT for a moratorium on floating bus stops being built as they are not consistent, safe or needed. As a person who is blind and who wants to be able to utilize the bus service need to be informed via certain treatments put in place that the bus station has been moved from the sidewalk to 8 to 10 feet from the curb. Pat has been working with various staff within MCDOT on how to make floating bus stops more accessible including placing audible pedestrian signals to identify where the bus island is located and how to cross over to that bus island successfully. These types of accessibility features need to be put in place uniformly not only in Montgomery County but in other neighboring jurisdictions that have floating bus stops. DC has a very different configuration for their floating bus stops. The concept of floating bus stops is happening all across the country, with Montgomery County taking the lead. Transportation Research Board (TRB) is currently studying bike lanes and bicyclist behavior. An assumption was made early on that bicyclists would be compliant and slow down for an individual crossing the street, but this has been proven not to be the case. TRB is reviewing data and types of behavior that would be effective to slow bicyclists down. TRB is also reviewing the elements that must be present when installing a floating bus stop including the most accessible technology for persons who are blind or who have low vision.
- **Trish Gallalee, former Chair:** Trish uses a wheelchair and has a service animal. She has experienced issues when crossing a street where a driver in an SUV or a large truck cannot see her due to the height of the vehicle. Bike lanes are being frequently used by electric devices such as scooters which can travel at fast speeds and would require more time to slow down to avoid a pedestrian who is crossing. Trish noted that in her experience, oftentimes bicyclists will not slow down and stop to let a pedestrian cross but rather just go around the individual. Streets where bike lanes have been installed have become narrower allowing

very little space for drivers to safely enter and exit their vehicles. She questioned the increased driving times on streets where bike lanes have been installed and if the increased congestion has had any impact on emergency vehicles. Trish also noted there is a bike lane near Seneca Valley high School that has caused much confusion. She would have liked for bike lanes to have been an issue on the ballot to be voted on by residents. She rarely sees anyone riding in these bike lanes.

- **Seth Morgan, former Chair:** He has had grave concerns regarding floating bus stops and bike lanes. Growth in Montgomery County has not been well controlled in terms of access of either side of the road. Motorists are frustrated that their commute is now doubled. The installation of bike lanes has also created the need to install a different bus stop. The goal of Project Vision Zero was to decrease the number of pedestrian injuries and make the roadways safer for motorists. The number of severe pedestrian injuries is significantly higher than bicyclists. There are still communities in Montgomery County that do not have sidewalks and residents must walk in the road alongside cars. Often times attempts to install sidewalks have been blocked by homeowners that have been opposed to them. There needs to be a standard of every neighborhood insisting at least one sidewalk be installed on every major road. More funding is being funneled into floating bus stops than sidewalks.
- **Haley Peckett, AICP Deputy Director, Transportation Policy and Planning, Director's Office, MCDOT:** Haley stated she appreciates the diversity of perspectives and how researched-based and data driven the comments have been. There is a need for consistency and for designs to be predictable and transparent for everyone. Montgomery County has been investing in car traffic for a long time as roads and cars were the primary way to get around and still is for people with disabilities. In the last few decades there has been recognition that only investing in roads is not safe or equitable and the County is trying to play catch up. Vision Zero is important and everyone who travels has a right to be safe. Over the last few years there have been five cyclist deaths and 33 serious injuries. Haley noted that consistency will be important moving forward and you may find differences between the City of Rockville, City of Takoma Park, Arlington City or Fairfax County. MCDOT recently published a lane repurposing framework specifically around bus lanes. Lane repurposing can slow down traffic speeds and result in safer conditions. A pedestrian has a greater chance of surviving a crash if the car is traveling at 20 miles per hour or lower. The County installed 37,000 linear feet of sidewalk last year and had an extensive engagement process with residents.
- **Matt Johnson, Bikeways Coordinator, Division of Transportation Engineering, Montgomery County Department of Transportation:** Matt reported that the feedback that this Commission has provided is helping MCDOT do a better job. Bike projects are also pedestrian safety projects. The County is always upgrading ADA compliance features such as upgraded ramps, installing audible pedestrian signals or detectable warning systems, reducing exposure by building concrete islands and bump outs for crossing streets and reducing corner rates so cars turn more slowly. He noted that two young bicyclists were killed while biking on the sidewalk and they fell into traffic. They would not have died if there were bike lanes.

The floor was opened to questions and comments.

Betsy Luecking, Staff, noted that the intersection for Walter John High School at Rock Spring Drive and Old Georgetown Road is very confusing to drivers, especially the student drivers who have indicated that the bike lane looks like the road. She suggested that the County work with the State Highway Administration to improve the design of this intersection

Shameen Anthanio-Williams, Commissioner, reported that all County schools have transition programs for young persons with disabilities to learn how to navigate and ride public transportation. The challenge is that there are no pedestrian curbsides at many bus stops. For example, a bus stop on Route 198 does not offer any sidewalk or path for a pedestrian to safely travel after exiting the bus. She has spoken with MCDOT several times over the past two years about installing a small sidewalk to bridge the area of where the bus stop is located to where housing is located but was told it is not a priority. Haley asked for Shameen to send her

more information and specific location.

Michael Goldberg, Public, asked about available education programs for cyclists. Haley noted that MCDOT does have a good amount of resources going into cycling classes monthly as well as a number of materials that tend to get distribute by the Commuter Services Team to employers. MCDOT would like to expand their outreach to communities.

Chair Updates

A letter from the Commission was sent to the Department of Permitting regarding Design for Life and recommendations to increase the usage of the Design for Life tax credit.

Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities Commission (IDDC)

Steve Riley, Executive Director of Potomac Community Resources, has been elected Chair effective September 1. IDDC has reorganized their workgroups and is reviewing where their legislation gives them the authority to advise. They are working on forming a partnership with DORS and WorkSource Montgomery to determine ways to increase employment of persons with disabilities. Crystel Britto, DHHS, has been hired as a permanent part-time staff person to the IDDC. Betsy has been meeting with Crystel weekly for a transfer of knowledge.

Updates – Ex-Officio Members, Commission Members

It was asked if the Commission is still working on parking violations and proper accessible parking. Betsy said that issue is a Commission priority for the year. The issue is lack of enforcement and many places do not have the right number of parking spaces. Complaints can be sent to Gail Lucas, Department of Permitting Services and with the Office of Human Rights.

Denise Isreal, MCDOT, reported MCDOT held several outreach activities for seniors and persons with disabilities. On October 16, an outreach event was held at Gaithersburg High School for over 50 students and 12 teachers and aides. Students took a bus ride on Ride On and Metro Bus and WMATA was present to take photos of the students for their reduced fare cards. On November 1, MCDOT worked with the Montgomery County transition program in Rockville and conducted a bike rack demo for 16 students and 1 staff person. They also had Lime scooter available to provide demos. On November 6, County Executive Elrich and County Councilmembers along with MCDOT unveiled an Operation Green Light Ride On Bus that has a wrap design featuring an American flag, a silhouette of veterans, and the Operation Green Light national program. This Ride On bus is circulating around the county. All Ride On buses feature cards that have information for veterans on how to access services.

Angelisa Hawes, Montgomery County Public Libraries (MCPL), reported MCPL will have a new director starting November 4. On November 20, the Brigadier Charles E. McGee Library will be hosting a presentation by Alexandra N. Harris, senior editor at the Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Indian, discussing her book "Why We Serve: Native Americans in the U.S. Armed Forces". A monument dedication ceremony for the Brigadier Charles E. McGee library will happen in December with more information to follow.

Matt reported he attended a meeting today hosted by the Department of Technology and Enterprise Business Solutions to discuss Connect Maryland's series of grants for computer labs for targeted populations including persons with disabilities, veterans, homeless, and incarcerated. Individual grants are for \$65,000 and the County is looking at applying. He also reported the County is working on a slide replacement at the Martin Luther King Pool with a scheduled reopening for Memorial Day weekend. ADA employee trainings are going well. Trainings may be broadened to include more personal stories.

Shameen asked about conducting a survey of how many students transitioning out of Montgomery County Public Schools would be interested in enrolling in a post-secondary education. Pat Cochrane, MCPS, said she will connect with Shameen.

Public Comments

No member of the public signed up to speak.

Meeting Adjourned – 7:21 p.m

Attendees

Commissioners Present: Azeb Adere; Shameen Anthanio-Williams; Jennifer Berzok; Felicia Brannon; Tonya Gilchrist; Karen Goss; Samuel Korper; Cindy LaBon; Ricardo Lopez; Jamila Michael-Sobratti; Rebecca Murphy; Deborah Rozell; Richard Shermanski; Teresa Villani

Commissioners Absent: Tria Gray; Leslie Green Lyles; Christian Navarro; Nina Russell; Mary Simons; Christopher Sinsheimer; Jeneva Stone; John Whittle

Non-Voting Ex-Officio Members Present: Matthew Barkley, ADA Compliance Team; Patricia Cochrane, Montgomery County Public Schools; Rebecca Grayson, Housing Opportunities Commission; Candace Groudine, Human Rights Commission; Angelisa Hawes, Montgomery County Public Libraries; Denise Isreal, Department of Transportation; Angela Luskey, Department of Recreation; Soumya Nukala, Office of Human Resources

Non-Voting Ex-Officio Members Absent: Jennene Blakely, Montgomery Parks

County Staff Present: Haley Packett, MCDOT; Matt Johnson, MCDOT; Ij Oji, DPS

Commission Staff Present: Betsy Luecking, Staff Liaison; Carly Clem, Program Specialist II

Public: Laura (Sign Language Interpreter); Daphine Postl (Sign Language Interpreter); Seth Morgan; Trish Gallalee; Karen Morgret; Francie Gilman; Pat Sheehan, American Council for the Blind; Michael Goldberg

Montgomery County Commission on People with Disabilities December 2024 Meeting and Events Calendar

Full Commission Meeting – Wednesday December 11

6 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. to be held via Zoom – link to be announced

Steering Committee Meeting – Wednesday December 18

5:30 p.m. to 6:30 p.m. to be held via Zoom – link to be announced

Submitted by: Carly Clem, Program Specialist II

Betsy Tolbert Luecking, Community Outreach Manager