

The Impact of Inaccessibility on Blind and Partially Sighted People in Cardiff: Bus Stop Boarders

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Blind and Partially Sighted Residents of Cardiff

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RNIB Sight Loss Data Tool

- **9,410** people living with sight loss representing about **2.5%** of Cardiff's population.
- **6,080** people living with **mild sight loss**
- **2,100** people living with **moderate sight loss**
- **1,230** people living with **severe sight loss**.
- Of these **1,543** are **registered blind or partially sighted**.

Higher proportion of people with sight loss travelling through the city

- RNIB Cymru
- SightLife (formerly Cardiff Institute for the Blind)
- Wales Council of the Blind
- Guide Dogs Cymru

Getting Around with Sight Loss

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Sight loss is a **spectrum**, and everyone gets around differently but as a general principle –

Memorise Routes therefore rely on

- what can be **felt underfoot** i.e. tactile paving
- what can be **heard**, i.e. audible signals
- what can be **touched**, i.e. rotating cones
- what can be **seen clearly**, i.e. contrasting colours

Use **Mobility Aids**, such as long canes, guide canes, **Guide Dogs**, etc. Canes **detect** obstacles and kerbs. Guide Dogs are **trained** to find features. Vision Rehabilitation Specialists teach skills and build confidence.

Consistency is key to having the **confidence** to travel **safely** and **independently** . **How do you access visual information in the environment without vision?**

Causes for Concern in Cardiff

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Cardiff has seen rapid, sudden changes to its streets and is being transformed by different projects, due to both the Covid-19 pandemic and the climate emergency.

Changes to streets disrupt memorised routes which cause anxiety and frustration if you cannot navigate around them.

Blind and partially sighted people come to us, and other organisations, to raise their concerns.

One of the biggest cause for concern over the last few years is the pop-up cycleways and how they intersect with bus stops.

Inaccessible Bus Boarder Designs

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At **Newport Road, Dumfries Place, Castle Street, and the Kingsway** there are examples of **Bus Stop Boarders**, also called **Shared Use Bus Boarders** – an arrangement whereby the cycleway runs between the passenger waiting area or shelter and the bus. Passengers attempting to board or alight from the bus must cross the cycleway by stepping directly into a live cycle track, which then becomes a shared use area.

Our Accessibility Audit concluded they lack –

- correct tactile paving / tactile in the right places
- enough space in the ‘designated area’ to alight
- a waiting area free from obstructions
- detectable kerbs
- controlled signal crossing points

Examples of Inaccessible Bus Stop Designs

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Examples of Bus Boarder Style Stops around Cardiff City Centre.

Why is lack of accessibility so problematic?

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The lack of **Accessibility Features** creates a **Shared Use Area** where pedestrians and cyclists/other users mix freely on one level and cause problems for blind and partially sighted people.

People with reduced distance vision and Guide Dogs need oncoming traffic to come to a full, reliable stop. With lower levels of vision, you cannot use 'Gap Selection' to judge when to cross.

Cycles are fast, agile and silent and cyclist / other users' behaviour can be unpredictable as they might not notice that a person has sight loss. Danger of collision is higher – the thought can be enough to contribute to anxiety, frustration, and eventual aversion to crossing the cycleways.

What Blind and Partially Sighted People tell us

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“The first time I was waiting at this type of stop, I didn't realise that the bus didn't pull up to the shelter, or that there a wide cycle lane, and because the bus is electric, I couldn't hear it. The driver just left without speaking to me. A lady at the stop came up and said, ‘they've just left you, love.’”

“I used to work in the city centre and couldn't use the bus on Newport Road due to this new bus stop – I found I was standing in the road! One time I accidentally missed my stop and had to get off the bus with my baby at Dumfries place – cannot describe the terror I felt. I thought I'm going to get hit. I felt so vulnerable and responsible for my baby.”

What Cardiff Council tell us

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How we've engaged so far -

- Wrote officially to the Leader of the Council and the Chief Executive on 3 separate occasions to raise concerns
- Met with Councillor De'Ath and Transport team
- Inputted into Equality Impact Assessments
- Raised this with Cardiff Council's Access and Equalities Group, chaired by Chris Hanson
- Highlighted this issue in the media with BBC Cymru

Each time we have been told that the designs are **temporary** and will be changed into permanent designs subject to funding from Welsh Government, with no clear or public timeline. So, how long do blind and partially sighted people have to wait?

Why have they been built?

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As we've demonstrated, the stops are not accessible, which breaches the Public Sector Equality Duty.

They contravene Active Travel guidance around implementing designs like this in busy areas.

Remediating them needs to be a priority for the Council.

Poor engagement and lack of understanding and co-production seems to have led to a situation where the needs of blind and partially sighted people are not comprehended fully in the decision-making process.

We don't want to see this happen again.

Our Recommendations

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- These designs must be made fully accessible and safe for people with sight loss to use. Publicly commit to prioritising funding to remove them
- Review how they came to be installed. Carry out Road Safety Audits and comprehensive EqIAs on all the bus stops
- Adheres to Active Travel (Wales) guidance and Promotes safer cycling and walking infrastructure
- Propose adopting RNIB's Key Principles of Inclusive Street Design
- Improve understanding of how blind and partially sighted people navigate public spaces, ensuring meaningful engagement and user testing with blind and partially sighted people. This will help planners and designers experience the space as someone with some, low or no vision does and help to inform decision making.

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Wood Street cycleway crossing.

The positive is that an accessible bus stop has been created in Cardiff at Wood Street – so it can be done!

How RNIB Cymru can help

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We are the largest sight loss charity in Wales, and work in partnership with public, private and third sector bodies across Wales to deliver projects, training, services and give information, advice, and guidance. We can -

- Help with accessible consultations, from comms through to Tactile Maps and Images.
- Host focus groups and workshops with blind and partially sighted residents.
- Refer to our specialist Inclusive Designs services.

Other organisations such as Guide Dogs Cymru, SightLife and Access Design Solutions are also on hand to engage.



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Thank you for your time and
listening to this issue!

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