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

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By Rachel Jones,
Policy & Campaigns Officer, RNIB Cymru

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Blind and Partially Sighted Residents of Cardiff

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

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Getting Around with Sight Loss

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?

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Causes for Concern in Cardiff

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.

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Inaccessible Bus Boarder Designs

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

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Examples of Inaccessible Bus Stop Designs

Image Description:

Two Bus Stop Boarder style designs in Cardiff. The left shows a cycleway with a small black and white zebra style crossing leading to a painted designated waiting area. There is a black opaque bus shelter to its right. There is no blister tactile paving by the zebra style crossing. The right shows a red cycleway with yellow corduroy tactile paving between the cycleway and paving. There is a small zebra style crossing leading to a white painted designated waiting area. There is no blister tactile paving and a large post on the pavement in front of the zebra style crossing.

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Why is lack of accessibility so problematic?

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.

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What Blind and Partially Sighted People tell us

“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 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.”

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What Cardiff Council tell us

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 permanent designs subject to funding from Welsh Government but no clear or public timeline. So, how long do blind and partially people have to wait?

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Why have they been built?

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.

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Our Recommendations

- These designs must be made fully accessible and safe for people with sight loss. 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!

Image Description:

At Wood Street, a dark cycleway contrasts with grey paving and shows a signal controlled crossing point. There is red blister tactile paving at the crossing and white painted lines on the cycleway to indicate a stopping point. The crossing leads to a bus shelter on the right.

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How RNIB Cymru can help

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!

Rachel Jones,
Policy and Campaigns Officer,
RNIB Cymru
rachel.jones@rnib.org.uk
@RNIBCyrmu