

Interview: ADA Advocate Mark Challender

In-Person Meeting: Tuesday, July 5, 2022 – 11:00am to 12:30pm

- Mark Challender, ADA Advocate
- Chris Comeau, Transportation Planner, City of Bellingham Public Works

Guiding Questions

- **Your experience of walking, biking, and rolling in Bellingham:**
 - Mark used to walk and bike more, but then he was afflicted with a muscle degeneration issues and he now uses a motorized wheelchair.
 - How does your work intersect with biking and walking?
 - In his former career, Mark was the Executive Director of the Whatcom Council of Governments (WCOG) from 1989 to 1995 when Bellingham and Whatcom County were wrestling with new GMA requirements for Comprehensive Plans and Regional Transportation Planning Organizations (RTPO) mandated by Washington State. More recently, Mark was instrumental in the creation of Bellingham's [2021 ADA Transition Plan "Mobilty for All"](#) Mark currently serves on the [Community Transportation Advisory Group \(CTAG\)](#) hosted by WCOG and is one of the individuals featured in the ["Protecting Mobilty for All" public safety campaign](#) videos.
- **Barriers to walking, biking, and rolling:**
- What barriers do you face as a wheelchair user?
 - Encroachment into the required 48" ADA accessible pathway. Examples include, but are not limited to:
 - Streateries: Often too expansive, encroach into ADA pathway, especially on Railroad Avenue and Holly Street
 - Street furniture: Benches and artsy chairs can be obstacles for vision-impaired people
 - Bicycles locked to bike racks or other items (meters, trees, light poles): Bicycles can stick out into the ADA accessible pathway by careless riders who don't think about wheelchair users.
 - Newspaper boxes: Often clutter the outer edge of a sidewalk and sometimes the contents litter the sidewalk.
 - Parking meters: A 5 foot sidewalk functionally becomes a 4 foot sidewalk if parking meters are present because the meter is installed behind the curb.
 - Street trees and tree wells: Trees are also installed behind the curb so encroach into accessible pathway; tree wells must be 4' x4' and can create uneven surface or a sudden drop for wheelchairs, as well as an obstacle for vision-impaired users. Street tree roots can also crack and buckle sections of concrete sidewalk, which create an uneven surface for rolling and a hard-to-detect obstacle for the vision-impaired.
 - A-frame Sandwich Board Signs: Non-permanent obstacles in front of businesses

- Bollards: Permanent obstacles and should not be the same color as the sidewalk. The round-top concrete bollards on downtown corners should be painted a different color to provide a more defined street edge for vision-impaired users.
- Bicycles, scooters, skateboards/one-wheels, other conveyance fads, and people walking with earbuds in and oblivious to others on the sidewalks are moving obstacles for wheelchairs and vision-impaired users.
- What would be the most important changes to make Bellingham better for ADA needs?
 - Generally:
 - Citywide ADA upgrades to curb ramps, driveways, alleys, and building entrances need to be constructed, as identified in the 2021 ADA Transition Plan.
 - Sidewalk maintenance and repair of cracks and damage needs to happen quickly for the benefit of wheelchair users and those who are vision-impaired.
 - Wider sidewalks would allow more room for walkers and wheelchair users to pass
 - Specifically:
 - 34th Street and Connelly intersection needs to be brought up to ADA standards with ramps and crosswalks
 - Intersection crossings of on-/off-ramps to I-5 freeway are very hazardous for wheelchair users and those who are vision-impaired.
 - Downtown Bellingham should have at least one ADA parking space per block on every street and they need to be adequately marked on both left (driver) and right (passenger) sides. Currently, ADA parking spaces typically only have adequate space marked on the left (driver's) side of the parking space (see below) so if a wheelchair needs to unload from the right (passenger) side of the vehicle, there is not space if another vehicle is parked in the next parking stall. Markings needed on both sides.

