

Episode 1: Kris

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Anna Zivarts: This is Anna Zivarts, the director of the Disability Mobility Initiative, a non-driver organizing program of Disability Rights Washington. *The Road is the Sidewalk* is a podcast series we're producing in collaboration with Zack Hurtz, a blind podcaster from Kitsap County, Washington. In our advocacy work with non-drivers from communities throughout Washington state, we hear a lot about how inaccessible sidewalks, crossings, and transit stops prevent disabled non-drivers from accessing our communities. After the Americans With Disabilities Act passed more than 30 years ago, the cities and counties we live in should have developed plans about how they were going to address these barriers in our public right-of-way. However, not only do many of these barriers remain, lots of communities haven't created inventories of barriers or timelines for when they plan to fix them. Kitsap County, where we're focusing our series, is one jurisdiction with no such plan. In this series you'll hear interviews with disabled community members about how this lack of access impacts their lives, as well as interviews with researchers who are working on sidewalk accessibility.

Zackery Hurtz: My name is Zackery Hurtz. I'm a resident of Kitsap County and wanted to really help make a difference in accessibility within our community. So I am here as a Podcast Producer. Kitsap County is named after a leader of the Suquamish tribe, who call these forested peninsulas and islands in the middle of the Puget Sound home. Kitsap County includes Bainbridge Island, which was made famous on the show *Grey's Anatomy*, and its largest cities are Bremerton and Port Orchard, which historically are working class communities centered around the large naval base in Bremerton. As the cost of living in Seattle has risen, people have moved to Kitsap County to find more affordable housing and they commute back to work in Seattle using the ferry system. I live in Kingston, one of the many small unincorporated communities in Kitsap County. What draws me to Kitsap County is the fact that rent is so cheap. I graduated college in 2019 and was looking for a place to live. One of my best friends offered me a low-cost rent share. This does come at a cost: lack of services, lack of transportation, and lack of job opportunities. The following interviews illustrate the lack of services within Kitsap County for those of us who identify as disabled and who have trouble accessing the community.

Anna: Episode One, Kris.

Kris Colcock: Hi, my name is Kris Colcock. I live on Bainbridge Island in Kitsap County. My job is career counselor, Braille tutor, job developer, that type of thing. So it's self-employment. I am

blind. I use a cane. I used to use a guide dog. When I had children, I decided having two toddlers around was enough instead of having three, so I went to the cane.

Zackery Hurtz: Are you able to independently complete activities in your county? And are you able to get around well?

Kris Colcock: I use public transportation. I use rideshare services such as Lyft and Uber, taxis. And when I'm out and about I am using my cane to walk to the store, run my errands, that type of thing.

Zackery Hurtz: You use a white cane, correct?

Kris Colcock: Correct.

Zackery Hurtz: And how do you find the sidewalks in your area? Are they accessible? Are they full of cracks and gaps?

Kris Colcock: It really kind of depends. In the older areas, it's hit and miss. If you're down in Winslow, where all of the tourists are, those areas are pretty well maintained. They still have a little bit of, you know age to them. They've gone through—they've done some beautification.

Zackery Hurtz: Have you ever had your cane taken out of your hand by the sidewalk, like with a crack or with a curb or get, you know, jabbed in the stomach with it?

Kris Colcock: Yes, yes, in fact, here on the apartment complex I live in, with the recent freeze and rain and all that has happened over the past six months, there's a section of our walkway that recently lifted up. And the other day I wasn't really paying attention; I knew I was kind of coming up to there, but wasn't really paying attention. And my cane hit it and jabbed me in the shoulder. Because of the way I was holding it, but yeah, it was, it was painful. And I think one of the worst ones was, when walking, was the cane getting trapped in the sewer grate because of where the corner was and the sewer grate was, and it broke my cane because it went down. And I was trying to get it out, but everything else—it cracked it. So that was kind of useless at that point (laughs). But I had to get home in very slow progress.

Zackery Hurtz: What if any barriers prevent you from being independent in the county?

Kris Colcock: Transportation itself within Kitsap County. First off, there's absolutely no bus service on Sunday within Kitsap County. So if you work on a Sunday, or you want to try and get to church or try to get to a friend's house, your only option is rideshare —Lyft. Uber, and those can be expensive, you know, you can't, can't get around. Also, they don't go late into the evening. So if you are—either you've worked late or you're out with friends, and you need to leave by say six o'clock, because your last buses are around 8:30 at night. There are also areas that are rather dangerous, such as down at Highway 305. Some areas have sidewalks, but most of that highway, and that is—305 goes from the Agate Pass Bridge across the island towards the

ferry—that is the main route for a number of bus lines. And if you are unaware of exactly where things are, you can easily step out onto the highway itself. There is not a warning strip, there is no—in many places there's no sidewalks, and you have to be very aware of where your bus stop is. Also, as it gets darker later on in the year, there are very few lights in that area. So much so that Kitsap County Transit have passed out little flashing lights. I was given one to put it on my cane. And so when I'm out there to catch a bus after say, five o'clock in the evening, you have this light that flashes. And that lets the bus driver know that you're there and they should be stopping.

Zackery Hurtz: That sounds incredibly chaotic.

Kris Colcock: (laughs) That's a very nice way to put it, yes.

Zackery Hurtz: And as someone who's totally blind, I'd be constantly questioning whether or not my light is working or not. So that's just another anxiety to add to that pile.

Kris Colcock: I'm right there with ya. I totally get that.

Zackery Hurtz: So based off your descriptions, it sounds like that the bus stops are on the shoulder of the highway with nothing around them to indicate safety areas. Like, it sounds like it's just right off the edge of the highway. Is that correct?

Kris Colcock: That is correct. And it's spotty. Okay, because the bus stop on my side of the street—well, I don't have to cross 305. The east bound lane, there's just a pole, there's no shelter, there's no bench, nothing. It's just a pole there. And there's no sidewalk. On the westbound lane, which you have to cross the highway to get to that one, there is a shelter. But again, the sidewalk kind of—it starts out like a sidewalk and then it kind of flattens out. So that there really isn't a difference between the roadway. But at least there is a shelter there at that one.

Zackery Hurtz: And how do you find access to the signs like the bus schedule? How do you access that information?

Kris Colcock: I use Google Maps much of the time because Google Maps has a transit option that will tell you the different routes that are going by. I do like to back it up though with a phone call to Kitsap Transit. If you've ever been to the Silverdale park-and-ride, it's a lineup of buses. There is no signage as to what bay—there is no bay, it's just a line of buses and you start at the top one, and you walk down the buses, Is this the such-and-such, is this the such-and-such, is this the such-and-such? Now, that park-and-ride I believe is still under construction, so maybe I'm not being fair. Let's go over to the Viking in Poulsbo—the Viking Transfer Center. There are no poles where the buses come in to tell what bay it is and as far as I can tell, from talking to some of the drivers, they don't really have an assigned bay, they just kind of pull in. And there's tactile strips in the different slots for the buses, but there's no pole telling you this is bay A, B, C, and what bus is supposed to show up there. So again, you're sitting

there at the transfer station and a bus pulls in—you need to make your way to the bus and say, Hey, are you the this-and-this? Instead of going, I'm at bay C, it's 3:30 and I know that the 332 is going to pull in any minute now. I'd like to see those kinds of things addressed with the ADA money. And it would help anybody who's blind. It will also help other people by knowing what bays are what and what buses are supposed to be there. Bainbridge Island has a really nice service called BI Ride which is very handy from 9:30 in the morning to 3:30 in the afternoon, Monday through Saturday. You can call BI Ride up, and they'll pick you up and they'll take you pretty much anywhere on the island. The thing is, after 3:30 they don't offer that service anymore, because that's when the routed buses take over. The reason they have this service is that, for the most part, the only time there is a routed bus, in my area especially, is first thing in the morning and when people are coming home in the evening. But the BI ride is open to anyone on the island. It's not just for disabled individuals.

Zackery Hurtz: How does it feel to navigate these areas that are inaccessible, or that are dangerous to navigate, let's say?

Kris Colcock: I don't like to. I do what I can to avoid it. Instead of just walking down to the bus stop, a lot of times what I'll do is I will plan my trip so that I can catch the last bus that is going towards the ferry in the morning, which is about—I think it's 7:30 in the morning, and I will transfer at the ferry terminal there and then catch that bus going, you know, out. So I try and plan my day around that. I have my son who lives with me who's fully sighted. He will walk with me to make sure that I get across the highway safely. Because we've had people who are fully sighted have pedestrian accidents on the highway down there. But I do my best to plan my trip so that I can avoid that if at all possible.

Zackery Hurtz: Is there a light, a traffic light, that allows you to cross the highway safely? Or is it just kind of guess and go?

Kris Colcock: No, there is a light. It's a really odd intersection for me. And it could be you know, user error on my part, I'm not vain enough to say it's not. But I've been traveling for a long time. And for some reason that particular intersection, it just—you've got cars turning, you know, turning from turn lanes on both direct—both coming down High School Road, as well as the highway itself. And then you've got cars that will turn right. So there's a lot of traffic down there. And just is very busy. There are things that I avoid. I have in the past been very social. When I moved over to Port Orchard, there were, I think, a total of four or five routes for the entirety of Port Orchard and they didn't go back and forth. You know, like you would—if you were going in one direction you would catch the bus going into town, say on the west side of the street and out of town you'd get off on the east side of the street. In Port Orchard it's all circular. You catch the bus on the same side of the street, no matter where you're going, and they start from the Port Orchard foot ferry and they do their circle, and they end at the foot ferry. They don't reverse their trip at all. So if your stop happens to be near the end of the route, but your destination is further on in that circle, you've got a wait period, you know, if your destination and your start point have the ferry in between it. So that was one thing I got used to. Then realizing that Kitsap County Transit did not last far into the evening.

Zackery Hurtz: You touched on the fact that they cut Sunday service. Is there anything that that prevents you from doing?

Kris Colcock: That prevents me from going to church services. It prevents me from having weekend trips in the sense that if I'm going to go visit a friend on a Saturday, I have to leave early enough that I can get home, or I'm spending Saturday night and Sunday night at the person's house, which interferes with a work schedule. When you don't have bus service on Sunday, then you are confined to the area that you can walk around. I mean, you're not confined indoors, obviously. But you then are very limited to this one area that you can get to on foot.

Zackery Hurtz: You talked about some places have sidewalks and some don't. Is a huge limitation for you?

Kris Colcock: On the island it's more frustration, because we have areas that are heavily trafficked. And those heavily trafficked areas generally have sidewalks, you know, you're talking downtown Winslow, whatever. But as you are getting further away from the ferry terminal, the challenges there are staying to the side of the road. When you come up to cars, you have to decide, Am I going to go to the left out towards the road or am I going to go to the right? If I go to the right, is there enough room between me—between the car? And is it grass? Is it a culvert? So there's, you know—is it the same amount of distance from one end of the car to the other? So a lot of the times I choose, if I'm not familiar with the area especially, I choose to go to the left. So I'm stepping out towards traffic around the car. If they're—since they're parked on the side of the road, and then how do you know—when do you know is the next car? So then you try to go in, and if they're parked really close, okay, you know there's another car there. But if there's like three feet between them, you go in and oh, wait a minute, there's another car—you've got to go around that one. So you do this kind of leapfrog thing. Luckily, in a lot of those areas the traffic is light. And as long as you listen for cars, it adds a little challenge to your adventures, I would say.

Zackery Hurtz: Have you ever tripped or fallen or been injured while navigating something like that?

Kris Colcock: The one time I really fell and hurt myself was when I was carrying my son. At the time he was a year and a half. And anyone who's had children knows that you can plan all you want about when exactly to leave. But with young children, sometimes it happens that they'll throw a monkey wrench into the works. It was one of those days. I had planned to leave early enough to catch the bus to get him to childcare. I had other things to do that day. I had to hurry, and because I was trying to walk very fast, it was easier for me to carry him on my hip. And I happened to hit a piece of concrete that was raised—raised lip. It shouldn't have been. It hadn't been properly maintained. And I went down and I remember— I remember how scared I was that my son was gonna get hurt because as I'm going down, I'm holding him and the back of his head so that he wouldn't hit the pavement. Turned out that we both went down, back of my

hand got scratched and my knees got pretty bloodied. Because I was trying to make sure that he didn't get hurt. And I lost track of my cane for a few minutes. Somebody stopped, made sure I was okay. But the reason I was hurrying is that if I didn't get across the street in time to catch the bus, I wasn't going to get him to childcare within the window that they allowed him to come in, because the bus only came once an hour. Even with the fall, I was able to catch the bus and we got him there and he wasn't hurt. But I think that's the worst tripping story due to maintenance or lack of maintenance on streets that I have.

Zackery Hurtz: As a parent, that's got to be pretty terrifying.

Kris Colcock: Yeah, yeah. Because all I could think of was, Oh my gosh, I don't want my son to fall and get hurt. I didn't care about me—that it was him (laughs). But he survived, and he's twenty now. So you know, he did okay.

Zackery Hurtz: Are there things in your community that can be more accessible? And if so, what were your dream community look like?

Kris Colcock: One of the things I would do away with are those corners that are sloped down. The ones that when you come up to the corner, they have made the entire corner flattened out to meet the side with no truncated domes in there or any kind of markings. With those corners, I've ended up going kitty corner when you're not supposed to. I've ended up walking out into the street without realizing it. Because there was no indicator that I was transitioning from sidewalk to street. So my ideal community, we would have actual corners. And we would have those access ramps with some form of tactile indicator, one that did not cause canes to stick, or wheelchairs to stick (laughs). Because it's not easy. Also, there would be public access to transportation options that, you know, were at least every half hour, seven days a week. And as you get further into the night, once an hour. I can understand you don't need 15-minute service at midnight, but having it at least once an hour is—would be ideal. I appreciate when I can clearly walk without overhanging branches. Streets and sidewalks that are maintained properly. Having those edges, clear edges, you know, planters. We definitely—planters are nice around and they can be good markers. But let's have them so that people don't step into them—my cane doesn't get caught up in the plants that are growing in them. There's something that's very viny around here. And every time I walk by, if I do the wrong sweep, I get into there and I have to stop. Unwrap whatever plant has decided to wrap around my cane.

Zackery Hurtz: I feel you on that one. I'm often de-planting my cane from different bushes and shrubbery and hedges and it's like this is great, but also it slows me down quite a bit. Do you remember when the ADA passed?

Kris Colcock: Yes, yes, actually I do (laughs).

Zackery Hurtz: Would you mind sharing with us a little bit about how that affected your life then?

Kris Colcock: In 1995 I moved up here to Washington and I interviewed for a position with Girl Scouts Totem Council—part time position. And one of the things that they were talking about is reasonable accommodation. I lived in West Seattle at the time, and the office that I was working out of is in Kirkland. Part of my job was to go and network with other agencies and to develop programs for unserved and underserved girl populations. And to give presentations during the capital campaign—United Way capital campaign. No problem, I can do all this. Until I started trying to get around. When I couldn't get somewhere by bus, and—well let me just hire a driver. Well, that's, you know, is that a reasonable accommodation or not? And so, that whole aspect of what is a reasonable accommodation for someone who's blind, and who is expected to get around and do these things at all hours of the day, and into the evening. And I started really thinking about it. And I was hoping, because it was still young in 1994-95, that as the years moved on, things would be better. It kind of gets left behind. There's things happening that it doesn't cover because they weren't thought of at that point in time. I think people with disabilities need to believe that they have a right to be out there with everybody else. They have a right to take up space. A few years ago, I was out and about with my cane and I was with another friend who is blind. And I said, you know, "I keep hitting things, got any suggestions for me?" And she says, "Why do you keep your cane between your feet?" And I went, what? And she says, "I watch you and you keep clipping things with your shoulders because your cane doesn't go past your feet. Your shoulders are wider than your feet, you're a large person—large frame." And I said, well I don't want to—she says, "You know what, the sighted people can see you and they can avoid you. You have the right to take up space." And I thought about that. And we have just as much right to be out there and asking for the accommodations that allow us to be part of the community as anybody else. And many times, the accommodations that make it easy for us, make it easier for everybody. Just a little bit of forethought. Just a little bit of pre-planning can allow everybody to enjoy the world.

Anna Zivarts: We should note that not only does Kitsap County not have an ADA transition plan. As far as we can tell Bainbridge Island still doesn't have a completed ADA Transition Plan either. Thank you for listening to *The Road is the Sidewalk*. The Disability Mobility Initiative continues to work with advocates, local elected leaders and agency staff to ensure that disabled non-drivers have access to our communities. If you're interested in learning more, please check out our website at dismobility.com or follow us on Twitter at Dismobility.