

News article written for the Fremont Bulletin, by Jessica Lehman

Ninety-six percent of intersections in Fremont are not fully safe and accessible, according to a report on street safety released Tuesday. The report is based on a survey of pedestrian crossings throughout the city of Fremont, conducted by members of the Disability Action Network (DAN). DAN is a group of community members with disabilities, working together for local and state improvements for people with disabilities. The group is organized and sponsored by Community Resources for Independent Living (CRIL), an independent living center which provides resources and advocacy for people with disabilities.

The Street Safety Report was released on Tuesday, April 8, at a street meeting with Rene Dalton and Frans van der Meer, transportation officials for the City of Fremont. The group of about 20 residents – some using wheelchairs, some with walkers, others with varying disabilities – gathered on the corner of Dusterberry and Hansen, in the Centerville district. This corner has heavy pedestrian traffic, with an apartment building on one side of the street, a church and condominiums on the other side of the street, and a school just down the street. But the intersection at Dusterberry and Hansen has no stoplight. There are 4 lanes to cross, with only a simple 2-line painted crosswalk for protection.

At the meeting on Tuesday, residents and the Fremont staff attempted crossing the street at Dusterberry & Hansen, demonstrating the danger of finding an opening between quickly-moving cars. In fact, the Street Safety survey found that “pedestrians had to wait for up to 55 seconds to have a chance to cross.” Even with a pedestrian in the crosswalk, many cars failed to wait.

Fred Perez, a member of DAN who is blind, lives at the corner of Dusterberry and Hansen. He talked about the danger of trying to cross the street in front of his apartment building: “They see me with my white cane and they don’t stop. I try to wait until I can’t hear cars coming, but sometimes I just have to take a chance.” The group is calling on the city of Fremont to install a stoplight, stop sign, or other form of protection so that adults and children can cross safely.

The group was joined by Pastor Maynor Morales, whose church is right at the corner of Dusterberry and Hansen. He says he has seen many accidents and near-accidents from his office, and he hoped that something would be done to make the intersection safer.

The Disability Action Network discovered a number of other pedestrian safety problems, as detailed in the Street Safety Report. Many Fremont crossing signals do not give enough time for people with disabilities to cross the street, especially people with canes or walkers. For example, at Five Corners (Fremont, Washington, and Union Streets), the study found that the crossing signals allowed about 21-24 seconds to cross, but it took a person using a walker between 25 and 29 seconds to cross. Similarly, a blind person with a white cane or a person in a wheelchair needed more time to cross various streets than was allowed by the signal. Only a “brisk walker” was shown to have enough time to make it across the street, and at some crossings, the “brisk walker” took all of the time allotted. DAN members suggested to Fremont transportation officials that the signals be adjusted to allow more time for people to get across the street.

At the gathering on Tuesday, residents showed pictures of physical inaccessibility, such as poles with crossing signal buttons that are placed on curbs, out of reach of a person using a wheelchair. Inaccessible buttons were pictured at Auto Mall and Grimmer, and Five Corners. Residents also showed pictures of uneven sidewalks, which they said could be a trip hazard or could block a person with a walker or wheelchair.

The Street Safety Report said that a vast majority of intersections surveyed (89%) did not have audible crossing signals, the familiar chirping that tells blind or visually impaired people when it is safe to cross the street.

After showing pictures and describing the problems with street safety, Disability Action Network member Vicki Plaughter led a discussion with the Fremont staff members about what action could be taken. Dalton and van der Meer talked about possible changes to the intersection at Dusterberry and Hansen, such as removing lanes, adding a median in the middle of the street so pedestrians can pause, or painting a more visible crosswalk. They agreed to look at the Street Safety Report and meet with the Disability Action Network in two to four weeks to discuss other changes that can be made in Fremont.