

Toronto City Council
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IE14.10.18

July 24, 2020

The CNIB Foundation commends the City of Toronto for its intention to carry out further investigations on the impact of e-scooters before moving forward with a pilot, especially looking into the collision and injury data and possible public health implications. Introducing e-scooters onto our city streets is not a decision that is to be made lightly, especially in a city such as Toronto where sidewalk space is at a premium in many busy areas.

We would like to submit further comment to City Council, in addition to our initial recommendations provided to the Infrastructure and Environment Committee for consideration as part of agenda item IE14.10 "E-Scooters - A Vision Zero Road Safety Approach".

During the Infrastructure and Environment Committee meeting on 9th July 2020, the disability community came forward with powerful testimonies to the Committee, outlining accessibility concerns for people living with existing disabilities, but also the very real concern that e-scooter collisions may cause catastrophic injury and permanent disability, which otherwise could have been avoided.

There are more than more than 15,000 people who are blind or partially sighted living in the GTA and many more vulnerable pedestrian users who are living with other disabilities.

Given the potential safety risks that e-scooters could pose to pedestrians with sight loss, **we recommend against introducing e-scooters to Toronto's already busy roads.**

However, should City Council decide to move forward with an e-scooter pilot, we feel it would be a missed opportunity if we did not provide the recommendations below on how to mitigate the risks for Ontarians who are blind or partially sighted. This should not be read as an endorsement of the introduction of e-scooters but performing our due diligence to ensure any pilot would not cause harm to our community.

Recommendations

Injury Data Collection

The CNIB Foundation is concerned about how the City of Toronto and future e-scooter providers will enforce safe use of these vehicles. Complaints to the City via 311 and current available injury data collection methods (i.e. hospital records) are insufficient mechanisms for capturing the impact of e-scooters in our community. This data does not capture a) incidents that cause minor injury but do not require medical attention or b) when an e-scooter is removed from being improperly parked in a pedestrian pathway without being reported to 311 or the e-scooter companies. It is likely that these minor incidents will occur more frequently than major ones, and so cannot be overlooked in the data collection methodology.

We support the City's proposal to request that the Ontario Ministry of Transportation amend the Motor Vehicle Collision Report to add electric kick-scooters as a vehicle type and to treat e-scooters as a motor vehicle for reporting purposes. Furthermore, data capture must be reflective of social characteristics such as people with disabilities. Currently, injury data is silent when it comes to documenting persons with disabilities in collisions, including the City of Toronto's Vision Zero data. By defining e-scooters as a vehicle type and enriching the data capture protocols the City of Toronto will be better equipped to evaluate its e-scooter pilot.

Enforcement

Furthermore, it has been a long-standing issue that some cyclists choose to disregard rules about riding on sidewalks, and with a rise in the use of private e-scooters, the lack of compliance and enforcement concerning riding on the sidewalk remains a serious concern to CNIB.

For the above noted reasons, we remain unconvinced that the City of Toronto enforcement mechanisms will be adequate to ensure that pedestrians with sight loss will not be negatively impacted by continued deployment of shared or privately owned e-scooters.

The City of Toronto should also look to cities such as Calgary for examples of penalties when city bylaw infractions take place. Calgary has introduced graduated fines ranging from \$75 for inappropriate parking an e-scooter to \$400 for more serious violations. Recognizing that infractions will happen and that these will likely represent a minor segment of e-scooter riders, it is still imperative that the City of Toronto has the necessary enforcement in place otherwise fines will be ineffective deterrents.

E-Scooter Parking

We were encouraged that the City is moving towards an e-scooter program which would complement the existing Bike Share Toronto program, if this can be taken as an indication that the City is planning towards a docked parking system. E-scooters should only be parked in designated areas which are clearly marked and are cane detectible. The most accessible option for pedestrians is for the City of Toronto to repurpose existing car parking spaces for e-scooters, as this would help keep the sidewalk navigable for everyone, especially pedestrians with sight loss.

If this is not possible then e-scooters should be docked close to other items within the furniture zone on the sidewalk, without encroaching on the pedestrian path of travel. Permitting people to leave the scooters anywhere they wish puts rider convenience above the safety of vulnerable pedestrians, including seniors and people with disabilities. Pedestrians with sight loss, including guide dog handlers, cannot be expected to step off a sidewalk onto a street or rough terrain to avoid a collision with an e-scooter or navigate safely around an abandoned device parked haphazardly on a public pathway. The Calgary pilot recently approved on-street parking zones for e-scooters. Additionally, Calgary has begun to investigate the viability of parking zones within the furniture area of a sidewalk, placing it clear of the path of travel. These considerations would make it simpler for all pedestrians to travel unobstructed along a well-defined path of travel.

In addition to the issues directly raised in the Transportation Services Report, we would like to urge the City of Toronto to follow the lead of other Canadian municipalities who have banned sidewalk riding for e-scooters. As mentioned above, cycling on sidewalks is already a pervasive issue across the City, which poses a risk to pedestrians with sight loss who may not be able to see a cyclist or an e-scooter coming towards them on the sidewalk or hear an e-scooter approaching them from behind. This could lead to collisions, resulting in serious injuries. E-scooters must be treated as bicycles and operators must follow the same rules of the road as cyclists.

Furthermore, we recommend e-scooters also not be permitted on Multi-Use Pathways (MUPs) as this is another space shared with vulnerable pedestrians.

As outlined in the Transportation Service's report, further consultations will help ensure that the City of Toronto has at its disposal robust data and comments from all citizens, including persons with disabilities. These consultations should further include accessibility experts in the built environment, such as Orientation and Mobility Specialists.

We urge the City of Toronto to not proceed with an e-scooter pilot, but should the City decide to introduce e-scooters onto our city streets then it is imperative that the safety and accessibility needs of pedestrians who are blind or partially sighted are fully taken into account and incorporated into any Vision Zero approach to e-scooters.

If you have any further questions, please do not hesitate to get in touch.

Sincerely,

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Appendix: Summary of Recommendations

1. Do not introduce e-scooters to Toronto's already busy roads.
2. If e-scooters are introduced, develop a nuanced reporting strategy that gathers data outside of serious events (i.e hospital records) and 311 calls.
3. Add electric kick-scooters as a vehicle type and treat e-scooters as a motor vehicle for reporting purposes in the Motor Vehicle Collision Report.
4. Capture injury data for people with disabilities as part of this pilot and include people with disabilities as a vulnerable pedestrian group in the broader Vision Zero initiative.
5. Repurpose existing car parking spaces for e-scooters to be parked on the road. If this is not possible then e-scooters should be docked in designated areas which are clearly marked and are cane detectible and close to other items within the furniture zone on the sidewalk.
6. Ban people from riding e-scooters on the sidewalk and on Multi-Use Pathways.
7. Proactively include people with disabilities and the wider disability community as part of further consultations.