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Riding Electric Scooters in Toronto is Dangerous and Must Remain Banned

AODA Alliance brief to the Toronto Accessibility Advisory Committee on Electric Scooters

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Via email: taac@toronto.ca

Mayor Tory and Toronto City Council must not unleash dangerous electric scooters in Toronto. Riding e-scooters in public places in Toronto is now banned and remains banned unless Council legalizes them.

The AODA Alliance strongly commends the Toronto Accessibility Advisory Committee for holding a special meeting on February 25, 2021, to obtain input from the disability community on the dangers that e-scooters present to people with disabilities, seniors, children and others. We congratulate the Toronto Accessibility Advisory Committee for unanimously recommending to Toronto City Council a year ago, on February 3, 2020, that e-scooters should not be allowed in Toronto.

It was wrong for the City of Toronto's Infrastructure and Environment Committee to pay only token lip service to that wise recommendation, [at its July 9, 2020 meeting](#). It was also wrong for fully 11 out of 23 members of City council to [vote on July 28, 2020](#), against the City staff further investigating the dangers that e-scooters pose to people with disabilities, including Councilors Ainslie, Bailao, Colle, Crawford, Filion, Ford, Grimes, Holyday, Lai, Layton and McKelvie. The fact that 11 members of Toronto City Council openly voted against the needs of Torontonians with disabilities is very troubling. None of those Council members reached out to the AODA Alliance to learn of our concerns before voting against the City further investigating them.

A [City Staff Report last July](#), supplemented by the new February 2021 City Staff report prepared for the Toronto Accessibility Advisory Committee (key excerpts are below), amply shows that e-scooters endanger public safety in communities that have permitted them. Riders and innocent pedestrians get seriously injured or killed. They especially endanger seniors and people with disabilities. Blind people like myself cannot detect silent e-scooters accelerate at us at over 20 KPH, driven by unlicensed, untrained, uninsured, unhelmeted fun-seeking riders. Left strewn on sidewalks, e-scooters are tripping hazards for people with vision loss and an accessibility nightmare for wheelchair users.

It is no solution to just ban e-scooters from sidewalks. [Last summer's City Staff Report](#) and the new City Staff report prepared for the Toronto Accessibility Advisory Committee (the latter excerpted below), document the silent menace of e-scooters continuing to be ridden on sidewalks in cities that just ban them from sidewalks. Toronto would need cops on every block. Toronto law enforcement told City Councilors on July 9, 2020, that they have no capacity to enforce new e-scooter rules. City Staff reported last summer that no city that allows e-scooters has gotten enforcement right.

E-scooters would cost taxpayers lots. This would include new law enforcement, OHIP for treating those injured by e-scooters, and lawsuits by the injured. Toronto has far more pressing budget priorities.

With COVID raging, why is City Council even considering the legalization of dangerous e-scooters? [The October 30, 2020 report, released by the AODA Alliance](#), revealed the stunning well-funded behind-the-scenes feeding frenzy of back-room pressure that corporate lobbyists for e-scooter rental companies have inundated City Hall with for months. The corporate lobbyists want to make money on e-scooter rentals, laughing all the way to the bank, while injured pedestrians sob all the way to hospital emergency rooms. 73 pages of entries in Toronto's Lobbyist Registry, quoted verbatim in that report, reveal that in just over two years, a stunning 1,384 contacts by corporate lobbyists have taken place with City Hall from top to bottom in person, by phone, virtual meeting or email. Of those, as of last fall, there had been 94 such contacts with Mayor Tory or his office. There may be a couple of janitors the e-scooter corporate lobbyists have not reached yet.

City Council should not conduct an e-scooter pilot. A pilot to study what? How many of us will be injured? We already know they will, from cities that allowed them. It is immoral to subject Torontonians to a City-wide human experiment, especially without our consent, where we can get injured. The call for a "pilot project with e-scooters is just the corporate lobbyists' strategy to try to get their foot firmly planted in the door, so it will be harder to later get rid of e-scooters.

Since we allow bikes, why not e-scooters? An e-scooter, unlike a bike, is a motor vehicle. They should not be exempt from public safety regulations that apply to motor vehicles. A person who has never ridden an e-scooter can hop on one and instantly throttle up to race over 20 KPH. A person cannot instantly pedal a bike that fast, especially if they have never ridden a bike. In any event, Toronto already has bikes and BikeShare. We do not need the dangers of e-scooters.

The [July 2020 City Staff Report](#) shows that e-scooters do not bring the great benefits for reduced car traffic and pollution that the corporate lobbyists for e-scooter rental companies claim.

Please make Toronto easier and not harder for those of us with disabilities to get around. Protect those who need safe, accessible streets and sidewalks, not the interests of corporate lobbyists.

Mayor Tory's decision on this issue will strongly influence or decide how City Council votes. He should attend the February 25, 2021 special meeting of the Toronto Accessibility Advisory Committee, to hear directly from Torontonians with disabilities.

We need the Toronto Accessibility Advisory Committee to speak out again now, in as strong a voice as possible. On this issue, it is quite an uphill battle to get City Council to listen to us, over the call of the well-funded e-scooter corporate lobbyists. We need Toronto Mayor John Tory and all City Council members to stand up to those well-resourced and well-connected e-scooter corporate lobbyists, and to stand up *for* Torontonians with disabilities.

The e-scooter corporate lobbyists have proposed utterly inadequate solutions to the dangers that e-scooters pose. Those solutions are incapable of solving the problem. Only a ban on riding e-scooters in Toronto will provide us with the protections Torontonians deserve. The fact that the e-scooter corporate lobbyists have no effective solutions to offer, after operating e-scooters in several other cities around the world, proves that e-scooters should simply remain banned.

For example, geofencing cannot work. GPS technology is not precise enough to know when an e-scooter is ridden on a sidewalk, as opposed to on a road. Moreover, geofencing does not prevent any of the dangers that the silent menace of e-scooters present when ridden on the road, e.g. on roads where there is no sidewalk.

As another example, placing e-scooters in docking stations does not ensure that e-scooters are kept there. It does not prevent the dangers that e-scooters present when being ridden on roads, sidewalks or other public places.

We therefore call on the Toronto Accessibility Advisory Committee to pass a resolution along the following lines:

“The Toronto Accessibility Advisory Committee recommends to Toronto City Council that:

1. The use of electric scooters in any public place should remain banned in Toronto, including riding an e-scooter that the rider rents, owns or borrows.
2. No pilot project with electric scooters should be conducted in Toronto. City Council should not conduct an experiment that endangers Torontonians.
3. City law enforcement officers should now enforce the ban on riding e-scooters in Toronto, in the case of anyone who now rides one.”

We want to make it clear that these references to banning e-scooters do not refer to the very different scooters that some people with disabilities use for mobility devices. Those mobility devices are now permitted and of course, should remain permitted.

Learn more about the dangers that e-scooters pose to people with disabilities, seniors, children and others, by visiting the AODA Alliance [e-scooter web page](#) and by watching the AODA Alliance’s new short, [captioned video](#) on this issue.

Learn more about the AODA Alliance by visiting www.aodaalliance.org, by following @aodaalliance on Twitter, by visiting our Facebook page at www.facebook.com or by emailing us at aodafeedback@gmail.com.

Excerpts from the City of Toronto Staff Report to February 25, 2021, Special Meeting of the Toronto Accessibility Advisory Committee

Excerpt 1

“According to the UDV (German Insurers Accident Research) in January 2021, e-scooter riders are 4 times more (or 400% more) likely than bicyclists to injure others, due to e-scooters being illegally ridden on sidewalks.

– In 21% of e-scooter incidents with personal injury, the victim is not the rider, but another road user. This is due in part to e-scooters being ridden on sidewalks 60% of the time when they should be on the road or bike lane.

According to Austria’s Kuratorium für Verkehrssicherheit (KFV) in October 2020, 34% of 573 e-scooter riders observed at several Vienna locations illegally rode on the sidewalk.

- Even if there was a bike path, 23 percent preferred the sidewalk. If there was only one cycle or multi-purpose lane, 46 percent rode on the sidewalk. If there was no cycling infrastructure, 49 percent rolled illegally on the sidewalk.”

Excerpt 2

“Accessibility Feedback on Proposed Solutions...

Technologies are still emerging and not adequate yet:

- Geofencing and other technologies to prevent sidewalk riding are not sophisticated enough and would only apply to rental e-scooters.
- Docking stations for e-scooters has potential but is still in development.
- Lock-to cables on e-scooters mean they could be locked anywhere (e.g., café fence/railing) including in spots blocking entrance access and paths of travel.
- There is already a lack of bike parking so this would worsen the number of sidewalk obstructions on narrow and cluttered sidewalks.
- If Bike Share Toronto were dockless, there would not be enough bike rings to lock the rental fleet... same for dockless rental e-scooter fleets.

Accessibility Feedback on Proposed Solutions

Not enough city resources for enforcement and infrastructure priorities

- Oversight is very labour- and resource-intensive and depends on enforcement, which is already stretched or non-existent in parts of the City.
 - o Licence plates on rental e-scooter fleets could help, but this is a reactive tool and would be a drain on city resources to monitor and enforce.
- Bigger priorities for limited city resources.
- Inadequate infrastructure is a bigger priority – not enough sidewalk space or accessible infrastructure; not enough bike lanes/bike lane space; and not enough public transit.
- Importance of other city priorities before allowing something which poses a hazard and a nuisance for pedestrians and persons with disabilities.

Accessibility Feedback on Proposed Solutions

Impacts on seniors and persons with disabilities on sidewalks

- COVID-19 has resulted in challenges for persons with disabilities, their caregivers and pedestrians who use sidewalks as a necessity and not for recreation.
- Allowing e-scooters will pose hazards that affect persons with disabilities, seniors, their caregivers and pedestrians.
- Risk of severe injury for seniors or persons with disabilities if tripping and falling or struck by an e-scooter.
- Inability to identify e-scooter rider because of their speed, and that the person's credit card on the app may not be the person riding the e-scooter."

Excerpt 3

"Canadian context – City of Calgary

- No bike share. Only rental e-scooters allowed in Alberta.
- Allows e-scooter riding on sidewalks.

- 43% of 311 requests about bad behaviour or conflicts with pedestrians; 42% parking concerns. (total of 769 requests over the pilot period)
- Now allowing e-scooter use on some roads to reduce sidewalk riding issues. Added slow speed zones and 30 parking zones (2.5% of riders ended trips in parking zones; 10% of the e-scooter fleet was deployed to the parking zones).
- E-scooters to return via the procurement process. Lowered fleet cap from 2,800 (2020) to 1,500 (2021). Will require licence plates for enforcement.
- “Likely that e-scooters have the highest rate of injury per transportation mode” but less severe. 43% of EMS e-scooter injuries required surgery (double that of EMS bicycles at 21%). 37% of severe e-scooter injuries had suspected intoxication.
- 1,300 e-Scooter-related ER visits during the pilot period but may be over-inclusive of other devices referred to as scooters. 75 required ambulance transport, 5% were pedestrians injured.

Canadian context – City of Ottawa

- No bike share. Personal use and rental e-scooters allowed on roads with max 50km/h limit, bike lanes, and trails/paths that are not National Capital Commission multi-use paths.
- Lowered max. speed to 20km/hr for e-scooters from the permitted 24km/hr under the provincial pilot. 8km/hr for slow zones, e.g., transit malls/stations.
- Piloted a fleet of 600 e-scooters with 3 vendors in 2020. Will increase the fleet cap to between 1,200 and 1,500 for 2021 and expand outside the Greenbelt (suburban area).
- 76% of e-scooter riders surveyed used e-scooters for recreation; 2% to connect to transit (COVID-19 context)
- Will pilot in 2021 via procurement process. Staff labour costs not included in cost-recovery. Considering designated parking

areas. 69% of all survey respondents reported encountering improperly parked e-scooters.

- No injury data collection with hospitals and not likely for 2021 given the pandemic.
- Accessibility stakeholders were consulted and raised concerns about sidewalk riding and improper parking, especially barriers for persons with low vision or no vision.

Large Urban Peer Cities

- Peer cities have banned rental/shared e-scooters from downtowns in Chicago and New York City.
- No rental/shared e-scooters yet in places such as:
 - Montréal (not for 2021) or Vancouver
 - Massachusetts (e.g., City of Boston)
 - Pennsylvania (e.g., City of Philadelphia)
 - New South Wales (e.g., City of Sydney, Australia)
 - Scotland (e.g., City of Edinburgh), The Netherlands (e.g., Amsterdam), and
 - Others have banned or since banned them, e.g., Copenhagen (city centre), Houston, San Diego (boardwalk ban), etc.
- NYC (outside of Manhattan only) and Transport for London (UK) pilots not yet underway.”