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E-Scooters Are a Safety and Accessibility Risk for Torontonians with Disabilities

March of Dimes Canada Deputation to the Toronto Accessibility Advisory Committee on the Proposal to Allow Electric Kick-Scooters in Toronto

February 25, 2021

1. Introduction

March of Dimes Canada calls on the Toronto Accessibility Committee to remain steadfast in your recommendation that City Council prohibit e-scooter use in public spaces.

E-scooters pose a significant safety risk for people with physical disabilities, those who use mobility devices, seniors, and those with vision or hearing loss. As one of Canada's largest non-profit organizations supporting people living with disability, March of Dimes Canada has heard this firsthand from the people with disabilities that we serve, and from members of our broader disability stakeholder community.

A pilot project is not necessary to demonstrate that e-scooters will be dangerous for people with disabilities, as we already have the evidence from other jurisdictions. We call upon the committee to continue to be a strong voice for accessibility and safety on this matter, and to reject the proposal before its February 25, 2021 meeting.

1. Dangerous Riding

E-scooters represent a safety risk for all pedestrians in the city. They are silent, unlicensed, uninsured, and move at speeds of up to 24 kilometres per hour. When a ride-sharing program is in place, they are often being operated by first-time riders. Unsurprisingly, these users often ride on sidewalks to avoid riding on busy city roads, despite prohibitions on sidewalk riding. Most jurisdictions that have authorized e-scooter use experience illegal sidewalk riding.¹

The safety and accessibility risks are compounded for pedestrians with disabilities. People with limited mobility often do not have the time or space to move out of the way of these fast-moving vehicles. Those with vision or hearing loss may not even realize that a scooter is approaching. This can result in collisions where both pedestrian and rider are injured. This is not a hypothetical scenario; in Calgary, there were 700 scooter-related emergency-room and urgent-care visits in the first season of their e-scooter pilot.² By the city staff's estimation, riding a shared e-scooter is "potentially

about 350 times more likely to result in a serious injury than riding a shared bike on a per km basis.”³

While City Council has not yet authorized the use of e-scooters on Toronto streets, they are already being used for private use, on both roads and sidewalks. At March of Dimes Canada, we have heard stories from people with disabilities who have narrowly avoided collisions on our city’s crowded sidewalks. While the greatest risk of injuries is to e-scooter riders, concerns about pedestrian injuries are well-founded: an American study found nearly one in ten scooter-related injuries is experienced by a pedestrian,⁴ while a Danish study found 16% of those injured were non-riders, with a median age of 75 years.⁵

2. Improper Parking

In addition to dangerous riding, improper parking is a serious issue, with e-scooters littering public spaces. Illegally parked scooters are not only a trip hazard, but also create an accessibility challenge for pedestrians navigating the city’s sidewalks. An otherwise accessible pathway may become impassible when improperly parked scooters block the sidewalk. Again, this is not merely theoretical; in Montreal, the city opted not to renew their e-scooter pilot, given that 80% of e-scooter users parked illegally, causing serious accessibility issues in the downtown core.⁶

3. Proposed Solutions Are Ineffective

E-scooter rental companies have proposed a patchwork of solutions to mitigate the issues of dangerous riding and illegal parking. They suggest they will employ rider education, that they will mobilize their own staff to enforce safe riding, or that they will pilot geo-sensing technology. Unfortunately, none of these solutions is sufficiently mature and proven to ensure the safety and accessibility of pedestrians with disabilities.

The reality is that the City does not have the resources for enforcement, that Toronto’s infrastructure is not yet designed for this new form of transportation, and that riders are still learning how to use the technology. None of the proposed workarounds will be a silver bullet – and we have seen this play out in other municipalities with pilot projects.

4. Financial and Liability Implications

We must also consider the significant financial and liability implications for riders, pedestrians, and the City of Toronto. The commercial general liability insurance carried by e-scooter companies does not cover riders who injure someone else or cause damage to property, nor does it cover individuals struck by an e-scooter. In many cases, the City may be found partially or fully liable where their infrastructure has resulted in accidents.⁷ In some others, riders themselves may be found liable. The cost to individuals and taxpayers in the event of inevitable injuries must be thoroughly considered.

5. Conclusion

As we hope you will agree, now is not the time for an e-scooter pilot project in Toronto. Prohibiting e-scooters in our city is aligned with the City’s stated commitments to creating an accessible city and a Vision Zero approach to road safety.

Thank you for the opportunity to represent the perspectives of the March of Dimes Canada community. We will be following this issue closely.

About March of Dimes Canada

Founded over 70 years ago, March of Dimes Canada is one of the country's largest non-profit organizations supporting people living with disability. Our mission is to maximize the independence, personal empowerment and community participation of people with physical disabilities. Our vision is to create a society inclusive of people with physical disabilities. Headquartered in the Thorncliffe Park neighbourhood of Toronto, March of Dimes Canada has a long history of providing services, supports, and programs to Torontonians with disabilities, currently operating seven sites across the city.

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¹ B. Gray, *E-Scooters – A Vision Zero Road Safety Approach*, City of Toronto Transportation Services Report to the Infrastructure and Environment Committee, June 24, 2020. Retrieved from <https://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2020/ie/bgrd/backgroundfile-148266.pdf>

² E. Carpenter, "Injuries rise with popularity of e-scooters on Calgary streets," CBC News, July 21, 2020. Retrieved from <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/calgary/injuries-rise-with-popularity-escooters-calgary-streets-1.5657159>

³ Gray, 2020.

⁴ Gray, 2020.

⁵ S.N.F. Blomberg, et al., "Injury from electric scooters in Copenhagen: a retrospective cohort study," British Medical Journal, 2019, <https://bmjopen.bmj.com/content/9/12/e033988>.

⁶ R. Lau, "No more shared e-scooters in Montreal because they weren't being parked legally: city officials," CTV News, February 19, 2020. Retrieved from <https://montreal.ctvnews.ca/no-more-shared-e-scooters-in-montreal-because-they-weren-t-being-parked-legally-city-officials-1.4818347>

⁷ Gray, 2020.