

To: Chair Wong-Tam and members of the Toronto Accessibility Advisory Committee

From: Michael Black

Re: DI14.1 – Electric Kick-Scooters (E-Scooters) – Accessibility Feedback

Date: Feb. 23, 2021

I am used to advocating for users of mobility devices and I must admit that I have not personally tried out any type of E-Scooter, which seems like an unholy, menacing addition to Toronto's streets. I shall discuss various aspects of E-Scooters' use in relation to other modes of transportation.

AS WHEELED MOBILITY DEVICES, E-Scooters have extremely limited functionality. Unlike wheelchairs, they do not support the full weight of a user's body – nor do they provide partial support like a knee walker. They also compare miserably to bicycles. If you have no use of your legs, you are probably out of luck with E-Scooters -- but hand-pedal bikes can offer great freedom. People with balance impairments use E-Scooters at their peril, whereas tricycles have far more stability. Cargo bikes and regular bicycles outfitted with panniers and baskets are ideal for transporting things like groceries for people with reduced muscle strength and dexterity. In contrast, E-Scooters have zero capacity for safely carrying goods. Recumbent bikes are often used by people with chronic back conditions, who are likely to suffer acute pain if they were to hit a road bump using a small-wheeled E-Scooter.

AS A SOURCE OF DANGER TO THEIR OWN RIDERS, E-Scooters also compare badly. Promoters of E-Scooters advertise them as easy to operate, leading to a false sense of security amongst novices, who may not be aware of various shortcomings and perils associated with the device they are learning to ride. For instance, the braking operation of E-Scooters is not efficient; riders are far more likely to be sent flying forward than users of power wheelchairs or bicycles who are stopping abruptly. The small wheels of E-Scooters are also poorly equipped to negotiate potholes and icy pavement – with the same result that users can suffer a serious spill. Recently, emergency room staff have been reporting a multitude of injuries associated with E-Scooter use.

AS A SOURCE OF DANGER TO OTHER ROAD USERS, various disability advocates have described the horrors in great detail. Let it suffice to say that E-Scooters possess the potential to travel on sidewalks at so great a speed that any collision with pedestrians would have serious consequences. What's worse is that E-Scooters move silently, making it difficult for blind people to detect their approach. Furthermore -- unlike almost any other mode of transportation -- E-Scooters can endanger pedestrians even when they are not in use, because rentals are commonly abandoned on sidewalks and become a tripping hazard, especially for people with visual impairments.

PROBLEMATIC SOLUTIONS have been suggested, such as compelling owners of E-Scooter rental services to provide docks similar to BikeShare bicycle rental docks. However, space for docking stations tends to be limited on Toronto's streets, and if several E-Scooter services were to establish extensive networks of docking stations, this would result in less space being available for other street functions, ranging from BikeShare to benches to patios to flowerbeds. Even worse, E-Scooter station networks would surely cannibalize usage of BikeShare, which provides an existing transportation rental service that is safer and more accessible than what is available through E-Scooters. BikeShare's success is reliant on the

existence of a dense network of docking stations that are located in close proximity to people's trip origins and destinations. The very worst scenario I can imagine is to have rival E-Scooter networks competing with BikeShare – with none of them being dense enough to provide adequate coverage throughout the city. This consideration is especially important in suburban, racialized Neighbourhood Improvement Areas. The prudent course of action is to support a single, strong rental service, which should be BikeShare.

FITNESS is another issue that E-Scooter champions are embarrassed to raise. The use of bicycles and human-propelled mobility devices such as manual wheelchairs and walkers provides exercise with significant cardiovascular benefits. The same cannot be said of E-Scooters, which I personally do not classify as 'active transportation'. Ableists who possess expensive memberships in ski clubs, golf courses or posh fitness clubs often overlook the fact that exercise options for people with disabilities can be limited. I don't see E-Scooters as doing anything to expand these options.

CONCLUSION – E-Scooters fail to provide the health benefits of true active transportation modes. Meanwhile, these machines – whether in motion or not in use -- pose significant dangers to other people on our roads and sidewalks. Just as concerning, E-Scooters jeopardize the safety of their own users. It seems to me that legalizing E-Scooters in Toronto would be a lose-lose proposition, whether this is in a rental or ownership context. If the City approves the legalization of E-Scooters, the consequences will be especially severe for people with disabilities.

Let's not allow ourselves to be railroaded by E-Scooter promoters who value their own profits ahead of the health and safety of our citizenry. Instead, may I suggest that the Toronto Accessibility Advisory Committee focus on more worthy projects such as providing mobility scooters or wheelchairs that can be borrowed at major City venues – or adding accessible tricycles to the BikeShare fleet. These are the sorts of initiatives that will genuinely help the disability community. On the other hand, E-Scooters are so dangerous they are actually causing injuries that are increasing the number of people who have disabilities. This is not the direction we should be heading in.

I urge TAAC to firmly oppose the legalization of E-Scooters in Toronto.

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