

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR E-SCOOTER SHARING

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INTRODUCTION

The emergence of electric scooters raises important questions about whether this new way of getting around advances or undermines the mission and core goals of the Active Transportation Alliance. Do shared e-scooters help to build healthy, sustainable, and equitable communities in the Chicago region? Or do they hinder progress toward those goals?

This report uses information from Chicago's four-month pilot program on the West Side and similar programs in cities across the U.S. to begin to answer these questions. To get a sense of how Chicagoans see this new mode of transportation, we gathered feedback about scooters from residents, both in person and through online surveys. In this report, we provide a brief analysis of the various effects that scooters can have on health and safety, sustainability, and racial equity. Finally, the report offers recommendations that provide a path forward for the region.



COMMUNITY FEEDBACK

Survey Results

To gather information, Active Trans conducted an online survey that was promoted among members and supporters in the Chicago region. This wasn't a scientific survey and the sample is not representative of the Chicago population. Of the 1,541 respondents, most were White (85 percent), male (60 percent), and wealthy (50 percent had household incomes of more than \$100,000). Sixty-two percent live or work in Chicago's West Side pilot area. Many (61 percent) never rode an e-scooter. The people responding to the survey use various modes of transportation: more than half walk (86 percent), bike (63 percent), ride transit (73 percent), and drive (58 percent) in a typical week.

Sixty-three percent of people who responded to the survey support Chicago developing a long-term, regulated e-scooter sharing program. Looking at people who rode an e-scooter at least once during the pilot, support increases to 91 percent. Of the more than 900 respondents who live or work in the pilot area, 66 percent support a long-term program.

Opposition to a long-term program is stronger among older adults. Race and income are not significant indicators of support in our sample, which was not representative of the city.



Respondents saw the greatest promise in scooters in their potential to increase support for walking, bicycling, and transit infrastructure. The most common concerns are safety (falls and crashes) and accessibility (riding/parking on the sidewalk).

Community Roundtable

We partnered with the non-profit Northwest Side Housing Center in Belmont Cragin to host a roundtable of more than a dozen West Side community leaders and residents. The group included residents and people locally involved in housing, public health, and community development work.

Benefits

Support was nearly unanimous among the group for Chicago to develop a long-term, regulated e-scooter sharing program, with only one dissenting vote. Participants viewed scooters as a generally affordable and fun way to get around. They see scooters as a good first-mile, last-mile connection to public transit. Some small businesses reported that scooters helped bring foot traffic to their locations.

Concerns

Safety topped the list of concerns. Community leaders say there are no safe places to ride in their neighborhoods, and more investment in walking and biking infrastructure is needed. Residents observed lots of children riding by themselves or with parents on a single scooter. Few riders wore helmets and many rode on sidewalks. Sidewalk riding caused problems in congested areas but was less of an issue in less populated parts of the pilot zone.



Many people rode scooters on The 606, in violation of the pilot rules. Riders parked scooters everywhere — including the middle of the sidewalks, crosswalks, and private backyards. They didn't seem to be a practical transportation option for people with disabilities.

Opportunities

Participants emphasized the need to maximize community benefits in any long-term scooter program. Employment practices like local hiring and fair wages should be required. Vendors should offer discounted rates for low-income residents. To manage parking issues, the city should explore options like docking stations and parking corrals. A long-term program should also come with renewed commitment to expanding Chicago's network of bike lanes that are comfortable for people of all ages and abilities. Residents felt strongly that a portion of revenue from a long-term program should help fund new walking and bicycling infrastructure, especially in the highest need areas. Most importantly, community leaders should be at the table with decision making power as choices are made about the future of e-scooters in the city.



Scooter Feedback Night

Active Trans hosted a feedback night for Active Trans members and supporters at Revolution Brewing Taproom in Logan Square in September.

More than 80 people turned out and shared feedback about what worked, what didn't, and what the future of e-scooters should look like in Chicago. More than 75 percent of attendees support Chicago establishing a long-term program. The benefits and concerns shared were consistent with what we heard in the survey and community roundtable. Participants felt the best approach for the city to support any long-term program is building out the existing networks of safe walking and bicycling routes. There was enthusiasm about e-scooters being a fun, low-carbon transportation option. Many wondered whether e-scooters are replacing car trips, and how the city would manage a scooter program during the winter.

POLICY ANALYSIS

Health & Safety

The safety record of electric scooters is still to be determined. The devices are changing constantly and likely will continue to evolve. Initial police and hospital data from Chicago and cities across the U.S. indicate first-time riders, who are not accustomed to the speed and stability of the vehicle, are most susceptible to injury. The prevalence of riding on the sidewalk can put people walking at risk, especially older adults and people with disabilities.

Like people riding bikes, scooter riders are safest when they're separated from car and truck traffic in protected bike lanes. When people riding scooters don't follow the rules of the road, they're typically putting themselves at greatest risk. People driving cars and trucks remain the much more significant threat to others given the size and speed of the vehicle.

Scooters provide a health benefit when users are walking to and from the devices. This walk is often



short, however, and many e-scooter trips replace walking trips. Riding a scooter requires little physical exertion.

Health & Safety Bottom Line: *E-scooters are not as safe as walking, biking, and riding public transit. They provide limited benefit to community health.*

Sustainability

With global threats from climate change growing every day, the most popular talking points from e-scooter companies are rooted in their sustainability. The motor requires a small amount of electricity to run and there are no emissions from the device. However, like bikeshare programs, scooter sharing requires redistributing the e-scooters each day in the areas where they are needed most, which is most often done by emission-heavy cars and trucks. E-scooters also require charging. Environmental benefits can be maximized when scooters are charged with renewable energy and balanced with zero emission or carbon-free vehicles.

Surveys from programs in U.S. cities show about one-third of scooter riders otherwise would have driven or taken Uber or Lyft for that trip. These scooter trips are resulting in less driving and pollution from transportation, which is the leading contributor to greenhouse gas emissions in the U.S. The other two-thirds of scooter trips, however, are often leading to more environmental harm because they're replacing walking, biking, and transit trips.

Sustainability Bottom Line: *The greatest sustainability benefit scooters provide comes when they replace car trips. Replacing walking, biking, bus, and train trips with scooters harms the environment.*



Equity

Chicago is one of the most segregated cities in the U.S. A person's zip code is a strong predictor of their health outcomes. In this environment built across decades of structural racism and discrimination, better transportation options can lead to greater economic opportunity and quality of life. The Chicago pilot shows scooters can help cities address transportation inequity, particularly when they're regulated and deployed with racial and social justice as priorities.

Venture capital and ownership of scooter companies can lead to the profit motive overriding equity and other public concerns. This could occur by increasing the cost of scooter trips or skirting the rules to keep scooters in higher income areas. The public is best served when cities retain control over their transit systems, rather than turning management over to private companies and allowing them to decide where, when and how to operate. If that's not feasible with scooters, a strong, community-informed regulatory approach is necessary.

Equity Bottom Line: *When managed well, scooter sharing can be a fun, relatively affordable transportation option in communities that lack convenient access to everyday destinations.*



ACTIVE TRANSPORTATION ALLIANCE POSITION ON E-SCOOTERS

In February 2019, Active Trans' staff and board of directors worked to adopt a policy around e-scooters and other low-speed personal mobility devices. Active Transportation Alliance supports the City of Chicago developing a long-term e-scooter sharing program. We also support suburban communities exploring pilot programs where feasible.

Electric scooters do not deliver the health, safety, sustainability, and equity benefits of walking, bicycling, and public transit. These modes should be given priority relative to e-scooters when it comes to street space, parking, and public investment. Revenue from e-scooter programs should help fund walking, bicycling, and public transit infrastructure on city streets.

E-scooters provide greater health, safety, sustainability, and equity benefits to communities than driving or riding alone in a car. They are a welcome first-mile, last-mile connection to train and bus stops. This fun transportation option should be most available in communities with limited access to public transit. Scooter sharing programs should be designed to advance racial and social justice.

CHICAGO PROGRAM RECOMMENDATIONS

These are recommendations for Chicago to consider when establishing a long-term e-scooter sharing program:

- **Require e-scooters to be parked in docks, painted corrals, or locked to public racks and posts.** Asking riders to walk a bit farther to or from a designated parking area is worth decreasing the likelihood they'll be left in the public way.
- **Keep scooters out of downtown.** Chicago's Central Business District should be a priority space for people walking, biking, and riding public transit. The city's focus should be on reallocating street space from cars and making these modes safer and more convenient downtown – not introducing scooters to the mix. The e-scooter zone should be expanded to include the South and North Sides.
- **Retain and expand priority zones in low-income, low-opportunity areas.** The city's priority zones of

less dense, lower-income neighborhoods on the West Side should remain in place. New priority zones should be established on the South Side. The requirement for at least 50 percent of scooters to be in one of the priority zones at the start of the day should remain.

- **Keep scooters off urban trails.** Popular paths like the Lakefront Trail and The 606 are not designed to accommodate fast moving devices like scooters and should remain spaces exclusively for people walking and biking.
- **Maintain a reasonable cap.** Despite complaints from scooter companies about the pilot's cap, residents and community leaders didn't tell us they struggled to find a scooter. Making more scooters available per resident could exacerbate the negative impacts.



- Require vendors to deliver community benefits.** The city should work directly with residents and community leaders – especially people who live in the priority zones – to develop a set of community benefits. Residents should be given some decision-making power. Possible requirements include local hiring, fair wages, and mandatory partnerships with local groups and small businesses on community benefits.
- Establish equitable cost structure.** Companies should be required to offer discounted trips to low-income riders. All trips should be pay-as-you-go, rather than requiring users to maintain a minimum balance in their account.
- Incentivize trips to and from transit stops.** The city should identify ways to maximize the first-mile, last-mile benefit of scooters. Possibilities include plentiful parking near the busiest train and bus stops and discounts for parking near transit.
- Dedicate revenue to safe streets infrastructure.** Companies should be required to contribute a share of revenue to a dedicated Safe Streets Fund. The fund should be used for walking and biking infrastructure on the city’s highest crash corridors, which are primarily on the South and West Sides. Improvements like enhanced crosswalks, bus lanes, and protected bike lanes have been proven to make streets safer for all users while encouraging the healthiest, most sustainable, and equitable modes.
- Community oversight.** The City of Chicago should establish a community oversight council made up of residents in the low-income priority zones. This council should play a direct role in decision making regarding a permanent scooter program on an ongoing basis, including evaluating program performance and adjusting regulations as needed.



ACTIVE TRANSPORTATION ALLIANCE MISSION

The mission of the Active Transportation Alliance is to advocate for walking, bicycling, and public transportation to create healthy, sustainable, and equitable communities in the Chicago region. Our work is guided by a 50/50/Zero goal. By the year 2025:

1. All traffic crashes in Chicagoland are reduced by 50 percent.
2. 50 percent of all trips made in the Chicago region are made using walking, bicycling, or transit.
3. All traffic fatalities and serious injuries are eliminated.

We believe that mobility equity is fundamental to human and civil rights. We are committed to reversing disparities in transportation access resulting from structural racism and discrimination.

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