

February 27, 2019
Clean Air Council Testimony
City Council Hearing on Electric Scooters

My name is Nick Zuwiala-Rogers and I am the Transportation Program Director at Clean Air Council. The Council is an environmental organization with a mission to protect everyone's right to a healthy environment. The Council works to promote biking, walking, and public transportation as a solution to the city's congestion and air quality problems. The Council is very interested in exploring whether or not electric scooters can be a potential sustainable, safe, equitable, and transparent transportation option in Philadelphia.

The transportation sector in the United States makes up roughly 30% of greenhouse gas pollution, and a large portion of that comes from personal vehicles. Public transportation, bikes, and walking are well known long-term alternatives to replace car trips. The Council is excited to see a new low emissions mode emerge as another potential alternative that may take more cars off the road. In Cincinnati and Portland, where cities have done their own research on scooter usage, their surveys show that roughly 1/3 of scooter trips replaced either a personal car or an Uber/Lyft. Getting people out of cars and onto scooters could be a great way to address congestion and air quality.

I'd like to add an anecdote. Our office had the opportunity to test ride a scooter in our hallway last week, and I can tell you the joy it brought to a group of adults was remarkable. This shouldn't be discounted. In my experience getting people to switch modes to more sustainable transportation options, no one makes mobility decisions based on what is best for the environment, as much as I want them to. People make their decisions based on what gets them there fastest or which option is cheapest. Fun is really the only other opportunity to influence that choice, and it seems to me that scooters can be a part of that.

The Council is supportive of the potential benefits of electric scooters and looks forward to these innovative companies working with the city's Transportation Office to come up with solutions to the issues that I am raising today. With that, I want to lay out some concerns that the Council has, and that I am confident can be handled before the city opens its doors to electric scooters.

The first issue is sustainability. It is not enough for the trip itself to be low-emission, the companies should have an overall commitment to sustainability that is reflected in their business practices. Two points are critical here: first, the energy sourced for the trips should be renewable either through credits, or through the grid itself. Second, the companies operating in Philadelphia should commit to disposing of their waste sustainably, and recycling all of it. *No scooters used in Philadelphia should end up in a landfill.* The batteries and other electric components should be dealt with through sustainable e-waste practices, and the other parts of the scooters should be recycled or re-used. Because of the high turnover of electric scooters – once or more per year currently, how the companies deal with this waste is critically important from an environmental perspective.

Next, the scooters should commit to being a part of the city's Vision Zero goals. Scooter companies should be an active partner in making our streets safer. The city should set up a fund that scooter companies pay into from a portion of each ride. These funds should be diverted from the General Fund and go to meet the city's Vision Zero goals either through projects like restriping our roads, installing pedestrian bump-outs, education campaigns, or other engineering projects. The best way to protect pedestrians from scooters riding on sidewalks is to create streets that are safe for all users. Safety includes having good policies in place to prevent scooters from inhibiting pedestrians. Pedestrians in Philadelphia have a hard enough time navigating construction zones, illegally parked cars in crosswalks and on sidewalks, and other obstacles. It should be automatically enforced through the scooter apps that rides cannot end until the scooter is in an appropriate location that does not inhibit pedestrians.

The scooters themselves must be safe. Portland found that 83% of e-scooter injuries were a scooter-only crash. The city should adopt regulations on minimum tire size that handle potholes properly, and set speed limits on the scooters. The maintenance of scooters can also be a safety issue. The city should only permit scooter companies that have a local maintenance operation that does not rely on low barrier to entry mechanics (typically through the gig economy) who fix problems on the scooters themselves. The batteries could be charged and scooters redistributed through gig economy practices, but any maintenance should be done through a more formal working relationship with the scooter company. Indego bike share employs their own mechanics so they can ensure the safety of their machines, and scooter companies should do the same. The city should do random audits of scooters to ensure their safety.

These scooters will use public resources to operate, so they should serve all Philadelphians in a way that prioritizes equity. Other cities require a certain percentage of scooters be placed in low-income and predominantly minority neighborhoods, and Philadelphia should not only do this, but lead the way with the most progressive regulations for equitable rebalancing. Rebalancing should match the demographics of our city and should serve those communities with less access to transit and those with the most to gain from increased mobility. Scooters should be available to those without smartphones, should offer cash fares, and should be discounted for anyone on a local, state, or federal assistance program.

Data is another important issue to consider with scooters. Privacy is an issue with sharing data, but the Council believes that trips can be anonymized sufficiently by randomizing the start and end locations slightly. Indego bike share makes all of its data public, and the city has a commitment to Open Data. Partner companies that operate here should share this commitment. Companies should also have a public API that can be integrated into trip planning software like the Council's GoPhillyGo project.

Finally, the city needs to be confident in its ability to enforce whatever regulations or agreements it comes up with for scooters, and what mechanism that enforcement will happen through. As we see through parked cars in crosswalks and on sidewalks, idling vehicles, and many other issues, the city is not great at traffic enforcement, so a plan must be in place.

While the Council has several concerns about implementing scooters in a way that prioritizes sustainability, safety, equity, and transparency, we believe the city and the companies that want to operate here can address all of these concerns. The Council is excited about any new mode that curbs greenhouse gas emissions – we have a little more than a decade left to make major reductions to avoid the worst effects of climate change, and we simply cannot afford to miss out on opportunities to electrify a large portion of our transportation fleet.