

Ottawa E-Scooter Pilot CNIB Report

Submitted to City of Ottawa November 2020

About CNIB

CNIB Foundation is a non-profit organization driven to change what it is to be blind today. We deliver innovative programs and powerful advocacy that empower people impacted by blindness to live their dreams and tear down barriers to inclusion, including approximately 54,000 Ottawa residents living with sight loss. Our work is powered by a network of volunteers, donors and partners from coast to coast to coast.

E-Scooters in Ottawa

Following the Ontario government's announcement which [outlined plans to permit Ontario municipalities to introduce e-scooter pilots](#) in the province, the City of Ottawa announced on July 16, 2020 that three companies – Bird Canada, Lime, and Roll were bringing in 600 e-scooters, or electric kick scooters, to test as an e-scooter pilot project until the end of October, for the potential of a five-year run if extended.

E-scooters are two-wheeled electric single passenger vehicles which provide pedestrians with an alternate mode of transportation. These devices can operate on shared use trails and in busy urban centers. They can travel speeds up to 20 kilometers per hour. When a rider is finished with the e-scooter, they park it for the next rider. While e-scooters are a convenient and environmentally friendly way to travel around the City of Ottawa for some, they also cause many accessibility issues for people with sight loss in Ottawa.

October 15, 2020 Focus Group

In October, the CNIB Foundation, the Alliance for the Equality of Blind Canadians (AEBC), and the Canadian Council of the Blind (CCB), hosted a focus group about e-scooters and accessibility for Ottawa residents who are blind or partially sighted. Four main concerns were raised during this discussion:

1. Unsafe Riding

Many examples were given of people riding too fast and too close on sidewalks next to pedestrians with sight loss using canes or guide dogs. The Ontario [e-scooter best practices document](#) states that “**E-scooters should not be allowed to operate on**

sidewalks – sidewalks are for pedestrians, including persons with disabilities" and the City of Ottawa [website](#) states **"E-scooters will not be allowed to operate on sidewalks or in transit stations."** Despite this, there continues to be widespread noncompliance for riding and parking on sidewalks making sidewalks dangerous and inaccessible for vulnerable populations.

Multiple focus group participants spoke of being grazed or hit in the arm or side by e-scooters passing them on the sidewalk. In addition to any physical injuries, this greatly impacted their confidence when travelling through the city.

2. Improper Parking

The City of Ottawa e-scooter [parking considerations](#), as approved by Council on June 10th, indicates the devices are to be **"parked upright in the furniture zone of the sidewalk, away from the pedestrian path of travel.** This is standard practice in cities around the world." Despite this requirement, participants in the focus group indicated improperly parked scooters are regularly barriers to safely navigating sidewalks.

E-scooters are being left in intersections, lying on their sides, leaning up against Audible Pedestrian Signal (APS) buttons, and in other inappropriate locations. This results in tripping hazards, injuries, and barriers to accessing built environment features like APS buttons.

One focus group attendee who uses a wheelchair and is blind, stated that "this is a daily problem for me and it really hurts when I think about our friends in wheelchairs who can't move their arms and aren't able to pull or push these out of the way. If they can't get help, they're forced to go on the bike lane or a live traffic lane to get around it and that's extremely dangerous." Another focus group attendee shared their experience of tripping on an e-scooter next to the area under construction at the Rideau Centre and falling into a steel construction cage. As a result, they now walk in the road as they feel it is safer.

3. Reporting

Most participants in the focus group did not know how to report issues with e-scooters. Furthermore, the few participants that did report issues to 311 were advised they first needed to report the infraction to the e-scooter company directly. Bird, Lime, and Roll devices are visually distinct, but this differentiation does not help a pedestrian who is blind know which company to contact. In a [letter to the City's Transportation Committee](#) earlier this year, the CNIB Foundation recommended tactile indicators or QR codes be added to e-scooters as a possible solution for this specific problem.

4. Data Collection

The data being collected during this e-scooter pilot project does not proportionately reflect the typical travel patterns of vulnerable populations in Ottawa in our current time. As we are currently living through a global pandemic many of our city's most vulnerable

populations; seniors and peoples with disabilities have been recommended to stay home by healthcare professionals. This is causing the data that the three scooter companies are collecting to be skewed simply because of the nature of how people have been living for the past several months. Our city centers are less populated, our sidewalks are filled with patios and outside lineups, and people are being encouraged to give everyone around them two meters of space. If this project goes through to next year, the data that has been collected in the last months will not accurately reflect travel patterns in a post-pandemic Ottawa.

Recommendations

1. E-scooters must be treated as bicycles and operators must follow the same rules of the road as cyclists.
2. Designated parking areas should be created around the city to encourage safe parking practices and easy access of e-scooters in highly traveled areas. Improperly parked e-scooters was the most frequently cited issue in our focus group.
3. E-scooters should include a scannable QR code prominently and consistently placed on the device and marked using tactile and high contrast lettering. If a vulnerable road user encounters an e-scooter, they will be able to know which companies the e-scooter belongs to and report accordingly.
4. Municipalities should establish appropriate mechanisms and/or administrative penalties which will serve to discourage unsafe practices such as excessive speed or careless abandonment of e-scooters.
5. Scooters should have a consistent noise that they omit to warn nearby pedestrians that they are approaching.

Conclusion

The CNIB Foundation has made continued efforts to collaborate with the City of Ottawa regarding e-scooter safety and accessibility. We believe some of the measures in place should remain, such as geofencing measures to reduce speed on mixed use pathways and high-pedestrian areas. Further infrastructure and accountability policies are also required to protect the safety of both pedestrians and e-scooter riders.

E-scooters create safety and accessibility barriers for pedestrians who are blind or partially sighted. Until the concerns and recommendations discussed in this report are addressed, the **CNIB Foundation does not recommend the City of Ottawa extend the e-scooter pilot.**



Two Roll e-scooters parked in middle of sidewalk on Holmwood Avenue, Ottawa



Lime e-scooter parked across sidewalk on Elgin Street, Ottawa



Two Bird e-scooters blocking sidewalk and crosswalk in Byward Market, Ottawa



Two Bird e-scooters parked across sidewalk in residential neighbourhood, Ottawa