

Summary Report on Ottawa E-scooter 2021 Pilot

December 2021

About CNIB

CNIB 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. This includes 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 electronic kick scooter (e-scooter) pilots in the province, the City of Ottawa passed a by-law to run an e-scooter pilot project. In its second year, the City partnered with three e-scooter companies, Lime, Bird Canada, and Neuron to provide 1,200 rental e-scooters from May 28 to November 30, 2021. [As of October 31, 2021, 123,327 riders have taken 452,808 e-scooter trips](#) in Ottawa this season.

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 for some, they also cause many accessibility issues for people with sight loss in Ottawa.

In 2020, at the completion of the first e-scooter pilot season, CNIB, in partnership with the Alliance for the Equality of Blind Canadians (AEBC) and Canadian Council for the Blind (CCB), hosted a focus group for Ottawa residents with sight loss to give their feedback on the e-scooter pilot. This feedback was incorporated into our [CNIB Ottawa E-scooters Report](#) submitted for consideration to Ottawa City Council, to supplement the City's own report on the pilot.

November 18, 2021, Townhall

Similar to the previous year, CNIB hosted a townhall in November 2021, in conjunction with the Alliance for the Equality of Blind Canadians (AEBC) and Canadian Council for the Blind (CCB), for Ottawa residents with sight loss to share their experiences and concerns with e-scooters and accessibility. Below is a summary of the feedback we heard at that meeting, and from residents throughout this year's pilot. Participant's feedback centred on three main concerns: dangerous parking, sidewalk riding, and enforcement and reporting of bylaw violations.

Dangerous Parking

[The website for Ottawa's e-scooter pilot](#) notes e-scooters must be parked **“upright in the sidewalk furniture zone, the area closest to the curb in line with trees, benches and bike racks and out of the way of pedestrian travel.”** However, one of the major concerns raised at our townhall was the prevalence of improperly parked e-scooters.

Participants report regularly finding e-scooters parked on the sidewalk and either blocking the pedestrian path of travel, or blocking Audible Pedestrian Signal (APS) buttons. According to one participant, **“...scooters [were] blocking the path to be able to get to the signal light, buttons, blocking the sidewalks...”** Another participant described the e-scooters he encounters daily, **“...common to have them [e-scooters] parked in the middle of the sidewalk so they're a hazard.”**

A third participant told how she helped her blind friend navigate around an e-scooter parked in the sidewalk, **“we encountered a scooter that was improperly parked right on the corner of a street so there was traffic in both directions and the scooter was right in the middle sidewalk so luckily, I was with him, so I was able to bring him around it but had I not been with him, I'm pretty sure he would have tripped on that. And because he was training for the Olympics the consequences for him would have been huge.”**

Even if someone does not trip on an e-scooter parked in the sidewalk, they still have to either move it out of the way or go around it. An unpowered e-scooter is heavy and awkward to move. Getting around the e-scooter, on the other hand, requires someone to step off the sidewalk onto rough terrain, or into the road. **“There's also the safety issue for ... some seniors and persons with a walker. If there's something in front**

of them, they tend to be frail and they can't actually pick that up and move it out of the way. So, then they attempt to go around it. They have to go onto the road, or they have to take a step, you know, around, and there's a huge fall risk for these people.”

Not only are the e-scooters themselves a tripping hazard, their presence also makes participants feel unsafe, because they don't know whether the sidewalk ahead of them is clear. **“These are a safety risk. And, you know, it's really not acceptable that I, you know, feel unsafe walking down the sidewalk.”** **“...I try not to take high risk; high risk means just walking on your sidewalks now.”**

Sidewalk Riding

According to the City's e-scooter bylaw, **“Shared and personal e-scooters are not permitted to operate on sidewalks.”** However, all of our townhall participants reported experiences involving e-scooters being ridden on the sidewalk.

“And there were two times where I know I was almost hit. ...I felt something brush by me ... my dog dragged me out of the way. And I didn't hear anything go by like a bike or something else, so I'm just assuming it was an e-scooter. My partner who's low vision, coming out of Shoppers ... He came within inches of being hit by one on the sidewalk.” Another participant, who was fully sighted, described being on a narrow sidewalk, with a fence on one side and a parked car on the other. An e-scooter came towards her along the sidewalk, and there was nowhere for her to go to get out of the way. The rider did not slow down, and nearly hit her on their way past.

Unsafe riding, like improper parking, contributes to participants unwillingness to go out, and use the sidewalks. This contributes to increased isolation, an issue already exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. **“...the years when they tell us to get out, to get exercise, to help our mental health...the years they tell me to do that are the years when you totally clutter the sidewalks with dangerous things that can hurt me. So, how is that helping my mental health, my physical wellbeing, me getting through COVID?”**

Reporting and Enforcement

Another of the concerns expressed by all of our townhall participants was that of enforcement of the e-scooter bylaw. All participants expressed the feeling that, given

how often they encounter improperly parked and unsafely ridden e-scooters, the City is not doing enough to enforce the provisions of the e-scooter bylaw. One participant expressed it this way: **“And the real problem I see is, you know, we have the rules...But a rule without any way of enforcement is useless. And there really is no enforcement. The City, as far as I know, put no additional money to enforcement when they allowed the pilot.”** Another participant said, **“I agree that enforcement is a very big issue because it's always, not the severity of punishment but the actual certainty of consequences that lead to actual deterrence of behavior.”**

Townhall participants believe the onus of reporting out of place e-scooters should not be put on pedestrians. Instead, it should be the responsibility of the City. **“...I think the enforcement needs to come from the City who's approved it and not from the company, themselves, not from me; the onus shouldn't be on me to call them in.”**

There are many reasons why a pedestrian is unable to report an e-scooter, such as being unable to get through to 3-1-1 or not having a phone to call them in with (as is the case with many seniors). Participants also pointed out that by the time someone has tripped over an e-scooter it is already too late; they may well have already hurt themselves. Finally, participants expressed the difficulty they have in reporting: **“...they're blocking, you know, they're on the sidewalk and the onus is on us to report them, which I find terribly hard because I don't know where they are.”**

Recommendations

The overwhelming consensus from the members of our E-scooter Townhall was that **the e-scooter pilot should not be continued into a third year**, as e-scooters remain a safety hazard for individuals with sight loss and for other pedestrians. Participants noted that the e-scooter pilot period has taken place during a pandemic, where many of the most vulnerable citizens, including seniors and persons with disabilities were self-isolating, and spending less time outside on the sidewalks as a result. Assuming rider behaviour remains the same, as more pedestrians use the sidewalk, the likelihood of e-scooter incidents increase.

However, if, despite our strong recommendation to the contrary, City Council insists on running the e-scooter pilot for a third year, at minimum the City should enact the following recommendations in order to address current pedestrian safety and accessibility concerns.

Dangerous Parking

1. Designated parking areas, and/or e-scooter docking stations should be created around the city to encourage safe parking practices and easy access to e-scooters in highly travelled areas. Parking zones should be outlined using tactile markings and not within the pedestrian clearway. E-scooters should be required to park in designated e-scooter parking zones in order for riders to end their e-scooter ride.

Sidewalk Riding

2. E-scooters should emit a constant noise to warn pedestrians of their approach. This noise must be consistent across all e-scooters, distinct from other sounds, and loud enough to be heard over traffic. Ideally, e-scooters should also make an intermittent noise while parked to alert pedestrians to their presence. While we recognize efforts have been made in this regard, there is not a noise that is currently deployed which meets these requirements.
3. Any technology solutions designed to curb e-scooter misuse must be previously tested and implemented across the whole e-scooter fleet before the commencement of the next season. Piloting new technologies with a fraction of the e-scooter fleet or a limited trial area is insufficient, and leaves pedestrians at risk.

Enforcement & Reporting

4. City of Ottawa 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. These penalties must be applied consistently to all offenders.
5. The City must enforce the rules of the e-scooter bylaw, whether that is through Ottawa Police, or bylaw officers. The infrastructure must be in place for officers to patrol the e-scooter zones, consistently enforce safe riding and parking practices, and remove abandoned e-scooters when found.
6. Information for reporting an e-scooter (such as phone number and e-mail) should be included in large print, tactile lettering, as well as braille. The e-scooter should also include a scannable QR code, displayed prominently, and marked tactilely, that leads to an accessible website where one can report the abandoned e-scooter.

Conclusion

CNIB continues to collaborate with the City of Ottawa regarding e-scooter safety and accessibility. While some progress has been made, including the implementation of braille labels on all e-scooters, and the piloting of e-scooter sound emissions, this progress is slow, and only addresses a portion of our safety concerns. While new technologies are being piloted with a small fraction of the e-scooter fleet, the safety of pedestrians remains at risk.

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, CNIB does not recommend the City of Ottawa extend the e-scooter pilot.

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Appendix: Examples

The following photos represent a sample of the problematic behaviours shown by e-scooter riders.



E-scooter tipped over, blocking sidewalk



E-scooter parked in an accessible parking space



E-scooter blocking sidewalk in front of crosswalk



E-scooters on sidewalk in front of crossing and APS button



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Two e-scooter riders riding on sidewalk

The following picture is an example of a designated e-scooter parking space.



E-scooters parked in designated e-scooter parking space in a parking lot

Accessibility Advisory Committee, City of Ottawa

Ottawa City Hall
110 Laurier Avenue West
Ottawa, ON K1P 1J1

Tuesday, February 1, 2022

Dear Chair and members of the Committee,

On behalf of the CNIB Foundation, I would like to provide the following commentary for the consideration of the Accessibility Advisory Committee as part of its February 1, 2022, special meeting on the E-scooter Pilot Project. I have reviewed the presentation prepared by City staff on the 2021 e-scooter pilot season, and their recommendations for 2022. While CNIB is glad to see that City staff are adopting many of our recommendations (as outlined in the report I submitted to the AAC on December 14, 2021), we do not feel it adequately addresses our concerns. Despite the measures proposed, e-scooters will continue to be an accessibility barrier for pedestrians, especially those with sight loss. **We, therefore, remain opposed to the continuation of the e-scooter pilot for a third year.** I outline the areas of concern below.

First, City survey responses found that 79% of respondents encountered sidewalk riding, and 83% of respondents encountered mis-parked e-scooters. Those numbers are very concerning as it indicates high rates of both types of infractions, rider misbehaviour that makes our sidewalks unsafe for pedestrians. In fact, encounters with mis-parked e-scooters went up by 14% from last year. While staff recommendations, if followed, will hopefully prevent some of this misbehaviour, we are concerned it will not be enough.

Our second concern relates to a reliance on technology to prevent rider misbehaviour. We appreciate the stipulation that e-scooters must have the newest proven technology in preventing mis-parking and sidewalk riding on board across their entire fleet from the start. We are concerned that, while technology may eventually exist to prevent infractions, it has not yet been demonstrated to do so. We are concerned that technology will not deliver on the promised curbing of e-scooter infractions, and the streets will be as hazardous to pedestrians this year as they were last year.

Finally, we are concerned that, while City staff do recommend the creation of more e-scooter parking spaces, they are not recommending e-scooters be required to park in them. This strikes us as the simplest way to reduce mis-parking incidents, and make it

clear to e-scooter riders where they can safely park, and yet, City staff are not recommending this.

We are pleased to see that City staff recommendations include a requirement for all e-scooters to emit a sound while moving, and further, that the City will set the parameters of this sound. This means that all e-scooters will be emitting a similar noise. This is a good step forward. However, it does not mitigate our concerns about sidewalk riding and mis-parking detailed here.

The CNIB remain open to working with industry in developing solutions to improve e-scooter safety as it relates to pedestrians. We believe that e-scooters have the potential to become a means of travel that does not impede pedestrian safety. However, e-scooters should not be on our streets until they no longer pose a hazard to vulnerable road users.

In sum, while we are happy to see City staff taking on many of our recommendations for improving the safety of pedestrians, they do not go far enough in preventing e-scooters from being a safety hazard and accessibility barrier to vulnerable road users, such as pedestrians with sight loss. As such, **the CNIB remains opposed to the continuation of the e-scooter pilot into a third year**. We hope that, upon consideration, the Accessibility Advisory Committee will agree with us, and pass a resolution to that effect.

Sincerely,

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