



National Capital Region
Transportation Planning Board

MEMORANDUM

TO: Transportation Planning Board Technical Committee
FROM: Michael Farrell, Senior Transportation Planner
SUBJECT: Dockless Workshop Highlights
DATE: November 30, 2018

BACKGROUND

Departments of Transportation, planning staff, and dockless operators from around the region met on October 31 to discuss the evolution of Dockless Vehicle (Bike and Electric Scooter) Share in the District of Columbia, Montgomery County, Arlington, and Baltimore, and the results to date of the pilot permit programs, regional coordination efforts, and plans going forward. Over fifty people attended this workshop.

This workshop, one of a series sponsored by the Bicycle and Pedestrian Subcommittee of the TPB Technical Committee, was a follow-up to the dockless bike share workshop that took place on May 31, 2018. This rapidly-evolving subject is of great interest to the Subcommittee.

Agendas and presentations from both workshops can be found on the Subcommittee web site.
https://www.mwcog.org/events/2018/?F_committee=22

Topics discussed at the October 31 workshop are summarized below.

DEMISE OF DOCKLESS BIKE SHARE

Dockless bicycles have largely left the scene in the last six months. Only one Dockless bikeshare company remains in the District, Jump. Jump has electric-assist bikes that must be locked to a fixed object. Dockless bikeshare companies are largely moving to electric scooters. This appears to be a national decision.

Scooters have a higher revenue potential per vehicle than dockless bikeshare. They appear to be a commercial success in the two jurisdictions where they've been deployed, Baltimore and DC.

CUSTOMER APPEAL

Electric and electric assist shared vehicles seem to have strong customer appeal. Baltimore's dockless scooter program so far shows high ridership, and greater diversity of ridership than the previous bike share system. DC and Baltimore see significant benefits from shared electric scooters and intend to push forward with their programs. Capital Bikeshare is adding electric-assist bikes.

ELECTRIC SCOOTER SAFETY

There are anecdotal indicators of a higher crash rate for scooters than for bike share. Possible factors that participants mentioned included speed, vehicle stability on rough pavement, operator recklessness, and an operator learning curve. Collisions have occurred when scooters entered the street at a crosswalk, at a higher rate of speed than a pedestrian would.

Scooters have both age restrictions and driver's license requirements. Helmets typically are recommended but not required.

Hard data on scooter crashes is lacking at this point. There are significant data collection and crash coding issues, as well as unreported single vehicle collisions. Arlington Police reported reluctance by emergency rooms and hospitals to report even anonymized data, due to medical privacy concerns.

SCOOTER SPEED LIMITS AND SIDEWALK USE

The District of Columbia representative reported that speed limits fall on the riders, not the company. Sidewalk riding is permitted outside the central business district (the same rule as for bicycles). Arlington reported proposing a geo-fenced speed limit of 10 mph and a ban on sidewalk riding.

Scooter companies object to the 10-mph limit, which makes scooters less attractive for users than a 15-mph limit. They voiced concerns that 10 mph is too slow for mixed traffic, but too fast for sidewalks. Would a 10-mph limit lead to motorist road rage against slow-moving scooters, and cause riders to use the sidewalk? The scooter company representative mentioned video of one such incident in Arlington.

Scooter riders are encouraged to use bike lanes but most streets lack bike lanes. Laws vary; Virginia bans electric scooters on streets with speed limits higher than 25 mph, even streets with bike lanes.

TRAIL USE

Rules are set by the trail operator. There are inconsistent rules between agencies on the use of electric scooters and electric-assist bikes on trails. DOT's often say "yes," park operators often say "no." Differences may not be clear to the user.

SCOOTER PARKING AND RELATED COSTS

Improperly parked scooters are a source of complaints. Staff resources have been needed to regulate scooters, and to deal with public complaints. Scooter companies are required to pick up illegally parked scooters. However, scooters have a smaller footprint than bikes, and are better able to remain upright in windy conditions.

Designated scooter parking zones appear to be beneficial. Fortunately, these are low cost; they can be put in small spaces and delineated with paint. No racks or other fixed installations are needed.

There are some re-balancing requirements for companies. Baltimore requires that specified low-income neighborhoods have a minimum number of scooters.

SCOOTER MAINTENANCE

Every scooter is examined every day, for charging and maintenance. There has been a high incidence of damage to scooters, but they get fixed.

INTERJURISDICTIONAL ISSUES

Scooters are expected to cross jurisdictional lines. Geo-fencing has potential for resolving inconsistent rules. Workshop participants echoed calls voiced at the May 31 workshop for regional coordination.

OUTLOOK

Staff will continue to monitor the evolution of dockless vehicle sharing in the region. Updates will be reported to the Bicycle and Pedestrian Subcommittee, and to other committees as needed. Future forums are also anticipated.