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E-Scooters Are a Safety and Accessibility Risk for London Residents with Disabilities

March of Dimes Canada Brief to the London Civic Works Committee on
Commercial E-Scooters in the City of London

August 26, 2021

1. Introduction

March of Dimes Canada calls on the London Civic Works Committee to
reject the proposal that City Council allow e-scooters in public spaces.

E-scooters pose a significant safety risk for people with physical disabilities,
those who use mobility devices, seniors, and those with vision or hearing
loss. As one of Canada's largest non-profit organizations supporting people
living with disability, March of Dimes Canada has heard this firsthand from
the people with disabilities that we serve, and from members of our broader
disability stakeholder community.

A pilot project is not necessary to demonstrate that e-scooters will be
dangerous for people with disabilities, as we already have the evidence from
other jurisdictions. We call upon the committee to be a strong voice for
accessibility and safety on this matter, and to reject the proposal before its
August 31, 2021 meeting.

2. Dangerous Riding

E-scooters represent a safety risk for all pedestrians in the city. They are
silent, unlicensed, uninsured, and move at speeds of up to 24 kilometres per
hour. When a ride-sharing program is in place, they are often being operated
by first-time riders. Unsurprisingly, these users often ride on sidewalks to
avoid riding on busy city roads, despite prohibitions on sidewalk riding. Most
jurisdictions that have authorized e-scooter use experience illegal sidewalk
riding.¹

The safety and accessibility risks are compounded for pedestrians with
disabilities. People with limited mobility often do not have the time or space
to move out of the way of these fast-moving vehicles. Those with vision or
hearing loss may not even realize that a scooter is approaching. This can
result in collisions where both pedestrian and rider are injured. This is not a
hypothetical scenario; in Calgary, there were 700 scooter-related
emergency-room and urgent-care visits in the first season of their e-scooter
pilot.² By the city staff's estimation, riding a shared e-scooter is "potentially
about 350 times more likely to result in a serious injury than riding a shared
bike on a per km basis."³

While City Council has not yet authorized the use of e-scooters on London streets, they are already being used for private use, on both roads and sidewalks. While the greatest risk of injuries is to e-scooter riders, concerns about pedestrian injuries are well-founded: an American study found nearly one in ten scooter-related injuries is experienced by a pedestrian,⁴ while a Danish study found 16% of those injured were non-riders, with a median age of 75 years.⁵

3. Improper Parking

In addition to dangerous riding, improper parking is a serious issue, with e-scooters littering public spaces. Illegally parked scooters are not only a trip hazard, but also create an accessibility challenge for pedestrians navigating the city's sidewalks. An otherwise accessible pathway may become impassible when improperly parked scooters block the sidewalk. Again, this is not merely theoretical; in Montreal, the city opted not to renew their e-scooter pilot, given that 80% of e-scooter users parked illegally, causing serious accessibility issues in the downtown core.⁶

4. Proposed Solutions Are Ineffective

We have seen in other cities that e-scooter rental companies have proposed a patchwork of solutions to mitigate the issues of dangerous riding and illegal parking. They suggest they will employ rider education, that they will mobilize their own staff to enforce safe riding, or that they will pilot geo-sensing technology. Unfortunately, none of these solutions is sufficiently mature and proven to ensure the safety and accessibility of pedestrians with disabilities.

In the City of Toronto, earlier this year, city staff and council were unanimous in upholding the ban on e-scooters.⁷ Having listened to the voices of the disability community, they found that the safety, liability and accessibility risks were unresolved for both privately-owned and rental e-scooters.⁸

The reality is that cities across Ontario do not have the resources for enforcement, our infrastructure is not yet designed for this new form of transportation, and that riders are still learning how to use the technology. None of the proposed workarounds will be a silver bullet – and we have seen this play out in other municipalities with pilot projects.

5. Financial and Liability Implications

We must also consider the significant financial and liability implications for riders, pedestrians, and the City of London. The commercial general liability insurance carried by e-scooter companies does not cover riders who injure someone else or cause damage to property, nor does it cover individuals struck by an e-scooter. In many cases, the City may be found partially or fully liable where their infrastructure has resulted in accidents.⁹ In some others, riders themselves may be found liable. The cost to individuals and taxpayers in the event of inevitable injuries must be thoroughly considered. As noted above, the City of Toronto found these issues too great a risk to proceed with their own pilot.

6. Conclusion

As we hope you will agree, now is not the time for an e-scooter pilot project in London. Continuing to prohibit e-scooters is aligned with the City's stated commitments in the London Plan to develop high-

quality public spaces that are safe and accessible, and to foster development that supports a positive pedestrian environment.

As stated by the City of London's Accessibility Advisory Committee in their June 24, 2021 letter, "with little to no benefit, yet so much risk, we see no reason to move forward with this project." We hope you will listen to the voices of London's disability community and prioritize safety and accessibility for all.

Thank you for the opportunity to represent the perspectives of the March of Dimes Canada community. We will be following this issue closely.

About March of Dimes Canada

Founded over 70 years ago, March of Dimes Canada is one of the country's largest non-profit organizations supporting people living with disability. Our mission is to maximize the independence, personal empowerment and community participation of people with physical disabilities. Our vision is to create a society inclusive of people with physical disabilities. Operating out of two sites in London, March of Dimes Canada has a long history of providing services, supports, and programs to Londoners with disabilities.

www.marchofdimes.ca

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¹ B. Gray, *E-Scooters – A Vision Zero Road Safety Approach*, City of Toronto Transportation Services Report to the Infrastructure and Environment Committee, June 24, 2020. Retrieved from <https://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2020/ie/bgrd/backgroundfile-148266.pdf>

² E. Carpenter, "Injuries rise with popularity of e-scooters on Calgary streets," *CBC News*, July 21, 2020. Retrieved from <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/calgary/injuries-rise-with-popularity-escooters-calgary-streets-1.5657159>

³ Gray, 2020.

⁴ Gray, 2020.

⁵ S.N.F. Blomberg, et al., "Injury from electric scooters in Copenhagen: a retrospective cohort study," *British Medical Journal*, 2019, <https://bmjopen.bmj.com/content/9/12/e033988>.

⁶ R. Lau, "No more shared e-scooters in Montreal because they weren't being parked legally: city officials," *CTV News*, February 19, 2020. Retrieved from <https://montreal.ctvnews.ca/no-more-shared-e-scooters-in-montreal-because-they-weren-t-being-parked-legally-city-officials-1.4818347>

⁷ P. Tsekouras, "Toronto votes unanimously to opt out of e-scooter pilot," *CTV News*, May 5, 2021, Retrieved from <https://toronto.ctvnews.ca/toronto-votes-unanimously-to-opt-out-of-e-scooter-pilot-1.5415871>

⁸ B. Gray, *E-Scooters – Accessibility and Insurance Issues*, City of Toronto Transportation Services Report to the Infrastructure and Environment Committee, April 12, 2021. Retrieved from <https://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2021/ie/bgrd/backgroundfile-165818.pdf>

⁹ Gray, 2020.