



**COMMISSION ON SENIORS RECOMMENDATION 20181010-4C  
RECOMMENDATIONS ON SHARED SMALL VEHICLE MOBILITY SYSTEMS  
(DOCKLESS MOBILITY)**

Date: October 10, 2018

Subject: Comments on Proposed Regulations on Shared Small Vehicle Mobility Systems,  
Rule No. R161-18.09

Motioned By: Garcia-Pittman

Seconded By: Varteressian

**Recommendation**

The Commission on Seniors recommends that regulations related to Shared Small Vehicle Mobility Systems or “Dockless Mobility Units” (DMUs) prioritize pedestrian safety and maintenance of an accessible and comfortable sidewalk system that is also safe and accessible for seniors and people with mobility impairments. The regulations should be enforceable to provide meaningful governance of rider conduct and safety of all sidewalk users.

The Commission makes the following recommendations on the proposed Rules for Dockless Units issued by the Austin Transportation Department.

**Description of Recommendation to Council**

- **Adopt rules and penalties governing rider behavior.** While both an “awareness” campaign and Code of Ethics (Sections 4 L and M and Section 6C) are important, these alone, with no real enforcement or consequence for riders, are inadequate to ensure the safety of both riders and pedestrians. The Commission on Seniors recommends adoption of traffic and safety rules applicable to anyone operating a DMU. The rules should require riders to obey all official traffic signals, signs and other traffic control devices that apply to vehicles, bicycles and pedestrians. Appropriate speed and passing behavior should be required for riding on sidewalks. Violations should be issued for reckless driving and inappropriate parking. These rules should be adopted in addition to any existing criminal violations and enforced as civil penalties, which would allow city staff to enforce safe riding.
- **Lower Speed Limits on Sidewalks.** The Commission agrees with lowering the current 20 mph speed limit. However, the proposed 15 mph limit is considerably faster than pedestrians are moving on a sidewalk.<sup>1</sup> In areas around Senior Centers and other places where senior congregate, riders should take even greater care when passing pedestrians.

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<sup>1</sup>The Commission notes that the speed limits for bicycles on the Butler Trail is 10 mph.

<https://www.austintexas.gov/sites/default/files/files/Parks/Homepage/parkrules11-18-14.pdf>



The Commission recommends the rules set a lower speed limit for use of DMUs on sidewalks when pedestrians are present.

- **MDUs should follow the same regulations that currently apply to bicycling in Austin.** This includes prohibiting MDUs in areas where bicycles are prohibited.
- **Prioritize Pedestrian Safety and Appropriate Parking.** The Commission recommends the education and outreach campaign and Code of Ethics proposed by the regulations provide more specificity on pedestrian safety and appropriate parking. The Commission recommends the following additions to the Code of Ethics (underlined).
  - Pedestrians First- People operating bicycles and scooters shall yield to pedestrians on sidewalks. Use appropriate speed and give at least two feet of clearance when passing.
  - Parking Responsibly—Units shall be parked in a secure upright position only in designated areas. Do not block the sidewalk, ADA ramps or bus stops.
- **Include Quicker Response to Emergencies and Include All Obstructions of ADA Accommodations and Obstructions to Transit Stops as Emergency Parking Violations.** Ideally, a DMU obstructing sidewalks, ADA accommodations and travel lanes should be removed immediately. Sixty minutes is too long a time to address an emergency that impedes access to mobility. The Commission on Seniors recommends that Emergency situations should be addressed as quickly as possible, but not longer than 30 minutes. Additionally, the Commission on Seniors recommends adding as emergency items in Section 4D the obstruction of any ADA accommodation (eg, ramps, disabled parking places) and obstruction of any transit stop. Obstruction of ADA accommodations should be considered an emergency whether on public or private property.
- **Require Bells or Other Audible Warnings.** The Commission agrees with the additional requirement for adequate lights and reflectors (Section 2C). This provision will improve safety for both the rider and others on a sidewalk, road or bikepath. The Commission recommends adding a requirement for a bell or other means of giving an audible warning. Because DMUs will generally be travelling faster than pedestrians on sidewalks they will come upon pedestrians more quickly than a pedestrian, particularly a senior, can react. An audible warning will alert those who are being passed. It is our observation that most units already have bells.
- **Include Technologies that Serve Seniors and Other Mobility Impaired Persons in Equity Outreach.** The Commission supports Section 6F requiring marketing and outreach to underserved neighborhoods. In addition, the Commission recommends that licensees should be encouraged to explore technologies that could make dockless mobility more accessible for seniors and others with mobility impairments. This could include 3-wheeled scooters and bikes that provide a more stable ride.
- **Promote 311 for Complaints and Make Reports on Complaints Public on a Monthly Basis.** Ensure the non-riding public is aware of how to make complaints or ask questions about DMUs.

### Rationale:

Dockless mobility units (DMUs) are an emerging transit option that can provide “last mile” connectivity, consistent with the Age Friendly Action Plan. For example, dockless mobility units could expand access to Capital Metro for people with limited mobility, including seniors.

Austin permits dockless mobility units such as electric scooters and bicycles to operate on sidewalks, bike lanes and on the street. The Commission on Seniors believes dockless mobility should be regulated in a manner that recognizes this shared use of sidewalks, roads and bike paths and prioritizes the safety of dockless mobility riders and pedestrians, people in wheelchairs and traditional cyclists.

Current city policies such as Vision Zero recognize the need to adapt policies to ensure safety of older pedestrians. <https://www.statesman.com/news/20180924/austin-prepares-for-silver-tsunami-of-older-pedestrians-at-risk-of-injury>

The Draft Austin Strategic Mobility Plan includes the following policy goals applicable to dockless mobility units, including shared use of the sidewalk:

- **Make the sidewalk system accessible and comfortable for all:** Implement sidewalk system projects and complementary transportation investments that increase accessibility to, and comfort using, the sidewalk system
- **Maintain the usability of the sidewalk system:** Proactively maintain and provide incentives to ensure our existing sidewalk system is functional and clear of obstructions
- **Ensure sidewalks are safe and accessible for people with mobility impairments:** Recognize that children, seniors, and people with mobility impairments face disproportional difficulties when sidewalk infrastructure is not properly provided, operated, and maintained

The recommendations made by the Commission on Seniors are consistent with policies for comfortable, accessible and usable sidewalks for all.

### Vote

For: Briesemeister, Varteressian, Angel, Bordie, Cagle, Garcia-Pittman, Grampp, Hauser, Jackson, Lugo, Nicola

Against: None

Abstain: None

Absent: Kareithi, Sheth, Van Sickle

Attest:

