

The Oregonian

E-Scooters May Return April 26, Portland Says, With New Regulations Geared to Curb Sidewalk Riding

*By Andrew Theen
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Depending on your viewpoint, it's time to celebrate or shake your fists to the sky: Electric scooters may return to Portland streets as soon as April 26, transportation officials said.

The Portland Bureau of Transportation announced Monday that it would accept applications for a one-year permit, and the companies will face a new set of regulations geared toward eliminating illegal sidewalk riding and preventing users from jamming up Tom McCall Waterfront Park.

Dylan Rivera, a transportation spokesman, said the companies would have until April 9 to apply for a permit, and they would then potentially be approved to hit the streets by April 26.

"Some of the companies may not be quite ready to start that soon," Rivera said, "But they are capable of applying, and they are in fact eager to," he added.

Portland believes the new rules offer a little bit for everyone. Those who clamored for more scooters on the streets may get that wish if the companies follow the city's blueprint. People who said the city didn't do enough to stop people from riding on sidewalks and endangering or inconveniencing people with disabilities or other pedestrians will see users suspended or fined for violating that law.

Companies will face different requirements to legally operate in the city than those that Bird, Skip and Lime faced during a four-month trial period that ended Nov. 20.

It's unclear if the companies will find the new regulations acceptable, but in November, three companies urged the city not to pull the plug on the first trial -- citing the overwhelming success experienced in Portland.

The changes are substantial.

Portland said companies that can offer accessible seated scooters as part of their fleet and/or the ability to lock the devices to public bike racks could score better in the next application process.

Transportation officials will charge the companies a one-time daily "Right of Way Fee" for every scooter, with a 5 cent charge if a ride ends in east Portland or 20 cents for parking at any time up in the Central City (meaning broadly the downtown, Pearl District, South Waterfront, Central Eastside or Lloyd District neighborhoods). Anywhere else, scooters will face a 10-cent one-time charge. If there are multiple trips, the city would charge companies the higher geographical rate.

"Their growth in Portland will be directly tied to their ability to reduce carbon emissions, serve underserved communities and preserve sidewalk access for people with disabilities," Rivera said of the program.

The city will start with allowing the same number of scooters — 2,500 — as it did in 2018.

But the new rules will put pressure on the companies to penalize scooter riders who illegally ride on sidewalks by warning them through the smartphone application, issuing fines or banning them from using the devices altogether.

Rivera said companies must also provide a “geofence” around Waterfront Park and the riverfront multi-use path to prevent riders from parking the devices there.

But the geofence won’t prevent people from riding through the park or on Willamette River bridges altogether.

“The companies are concerned that making e-scooters suddenly slow down or stop at the entrance to a park could pose a safety hazard,” Rivera said in an email. “We are requiring the companies to participate in local testing of geofenced areas that restrict speed.” Companies will also have to let riders know they are entering a “no ride” zone, but how the companies will do that remains unclear.

If the companies meet those and other requirements, they will be allowed to add more scooters periodically. Rivera said that if all companies achieve all of their incentives outlined in the new administrative rules, there could be as many as 15,000 scooters on Portland streets by January. Rivera said it’s unlikely the maximum figure will materialize. City officials believe 9,000 is a more realistic and achievable figure.

“Getting riders to obey rules is critical to the success of this,” he said in an interview.

Other incentives include drawing high ridership in east Portland and achieving various benchmarks for number of rides per scooter, the city said.

Sidewalk enforcement is going to be a chief focus of the next permit application.

Disability rights advocates had criticized the city and the companies for not doing enough during the 2018 trial period to penalize users who rode on sidewalks.

The companies will be required to charge users 25 cents per ride and to explain through the application that the surcharge will go toward bike lane infrastructure and other transportation expenses. Rivera said that is so scooter riders “understand that they are part of the transportation system.”

According to Rivera, the scooter pilot program in 2018 cost the city \$75,205 to operate. Permit costs to the companies and the 25-cent surcharge per ride brought in \$212,077, but the city spent \$287,282. He said the cost of the final report, focus groups on the scooters’ popularity and public opinion surveys drove the excess spending.

The scooter users logged more than 801,000 miles during the trial run, with an average trip length of 1.2 miles and a supply of roughly 2,000 devices¹⁰ on the streets for much of the period.

Bird, one of the three companies, had pledged to give all cities it operated in \$1 per scooter per day to help build protected bike lanes. Rivera said the city has not received any funding from the companies “beyond the fees and surcharges we required them to pay.”

The Portland Tribune

City Maps Out New Greenway Linking Lloyd to Woodlawn

By Zane Sparling

March 23, 2019

The project on 7th and 9th avenues adds traffic diverters, bike lanes and ped crossings in Portland.

Two new projects will grease the wheels for foot-and-pedal commuters traveling between inner Northeast Portland neighborhoods, planners say.

The Portland Bureau of Transportation announced it will create a new neighborhood greenway for hikers and bikers along Northeast Ninth Avenue and similarly improve conditions on Seventh Avenue as part of the Lloyd to Woodlawn program.

After construction begins in spring 2020, locals can expect to find prominently striped pedestrian crossings, speed bumps to slow leadfoot drivers, new diverters to prevent cut-through traffic, extended bike lanes, wayfinding signs and adjustments to on-street parking.

"We're so grateful for the black community's engagement in this process," Interim Transportation Director Chris Warner said in a statement Thursday, March 21. "All of us want safer streets for our children and to get to where we are going comfortably, efficiently and affordably, no matter how we travel."

The traffic diverters are proposed along Ninth as it crosses Ainsworth, Emerson and Webster streets, as officials say too many drivers are using those spots to avoid congestion on more auto-oriented north-south arterials.

On Seventh, workers will add path markers, street paint and re-adjust stop sign locations at the intersections with Going, Morris and Tillamook streets. PBOT says it will additionally remove existing traffic circles and orange centerlines in order to "reduce conflict between people."

The final leg of the project builds a Seventh Avenue bike lane from Weidler to Tillamook streets, one of the final links in the chain for the Sullivan's Crossing bridge over Interstate 84, which is slated for construction in 2020 as well.

The project will help residents enjoy a stress-free walking and riding route between the Lloyd District and the Woodlawn, Vernon, Sabin, King and Irvington neighborhoods. It will also establish connections to Martin Luther King Jr. Elementary School, Two Plum Park, Irving Park and the Albina Head Start.

"Throughout the process, PBOT was open to listening, learning and responding to community concerns," said Ron Herndon, director of the head start founded in 1965. "As a result, these projects are a fair representation of the community and neighborhood's interests."

At this point, the transit bureau has released a \$552,000 price tag for the project, with funding allotted from the city's 10-cent gas tax. PBOT says that amount will cover design, engineering and "partial implementation."