

The Oregonian

E-Scooters Are Back on Portland Streets: 5 Things You Need to Know

*By Andrew Theen
April 25, 2019*

By the time you read this, electric scooters will be back on the block.

At some point Friday, you should be able to rent a dockless e-scooter somewhere in Portland.

Depending on your point of view, this is either terrific or terrible news.

Here are five things you should know.

1) Scooters are fun: Beyond the hullabaloo about e-scooters as an annoyance to some, there is an inherent truth: they are fun to ride. The Oregonian/OregonLive took a scooter for a spin in 2018 when they were in town for the first four-month trial run, and we summarized the experience here. Basically be safe, have fun, stay off the sidewalks, and use common sense.

2) Sidewalks and parks: We'll say it again – please stay off the sidewalks. It is illegal to ride on sidewalks with a scooter, and the city said it would ramp up enforcement and lean on the companies to warn riders if they are riding illegally and institute fines or ban riders altogether if they violate those rules. The companies are also expected to create “geo-fences” to keep riders from terminating their rides in Tom McCall Waterfront Park.

3) Helmets: Helmets are still required for all users, despite some effort in Salem to address that, but don't expect rigid enforcement of those rules. Sidewalk riders are the top priority.

4) How many: City officials say they expect as many as 2,500 scooters from the outset, virtually the same amount as last year. But Portland said it would incentivize companies to grow their fleets over time. Ultimately there could be as many as 15,000 by January, but Portland said 9,000 is a more realistic number.

5) Which companies: Portland on Friday morning announced that Lime, Bolt and Spin were awarded permits to operate in town. Four more companies -- Clevr Mobility, Jump, Razor USA, Shared Technologies, Inc. -- are in “the final stages” of providing necessary information for a permit. If they meet city standards, PBOT said Friday those companies may deploy their fleets “in the coming weeks.”

The Portland Mercury

Hall Monitor: Shaking the Status Quo

*By Alex Zielinski
April 25, 2019*

Commissioner Jo Ann Hardesty's first three months in City Hall have been definitively successful. In February, Hardesty called on the city to sever its relationship with the FBI's Joint Terrorism Task Force (JTTF), a group accused of unfairly targeting people of color. Three out of five city commissioners agreed with her. Weeks later, Hardesty revised a city ordinance

regarding Portland's earthquake-unsafe buildings, responding to financial concerns from low-income property owners. Again, three commissioners backed the decision.

Hardesty championed these policies with a certain determination and bluntness rarely seen in city council chambers. It's a style that's drawn quick critique—and head scratching—from longtime city hall denizens. According to one city staffer, Hardesty's approach has made Mayor Ted Wheeler's office certain that she'll run for mayor in 2020.

Some of these reactions have been painfully public: Earlier this month, Mayor Ted Wheeler scolded Hardesty during a city council meeting after she posed several critical questions to a landlord who had specifically been invited to answer city council's questions.

Other critiques are less overt, but more direct. The most recent example has been the behind-the-scenes negotiations over a draft ordinance meant to clarify the city's new relationship with the JTTF. Another city hall staffer, who asked to remain anonymous, says the process has underscored Hardesty's resistance to collaboration with her fellow commissioners, including the mayor.

“This council is made up of five strong, smart people with shared core values,” the staffer says. “But the differences between them is what's most exciting and what allows them to make good policy. When those differences are divisive, you lose seeing the value in others' points of view.”

Tim Crail, chief of staff for Commissioner Amanda Fritz, says Hardesty's early successes might have emboldened her to cut corners by only pursuing the support of two other commissioners before introducing a new policy—not the entire council.

“That's not how city hall works best. You need to hear all the commissioners' voices and do everything you can to accommodate concerns that others raise,” says Crail. “Sometimes you can't, and you pass policies with three or four votes. But you certainly try to get to five.”

Hardesty's governing style might feel unconventional for those familiar with city hall's mechanics. But none of this should come as a surprise—Hardesty is doing exactly what 165,220 voters elected her to do: shake up the status quo.

Hardesty, a longtime activist and former state legislator, campaigned on the promise to represent the underrepresented in city hall—a forum that adheres to rules made by middle-class white people—as the first Black woman on city council. It's no wonder she's forging her own path to navigate that arena. Coming across as obedient to those within City Hall's walls is mostly likely the last item on her to-do list. Instead, Hardesty is giving space to the underrepresented voices in council chambers by hosting public forums and meeting with groups who've historically distrusted the city's government.

In city meetings, Hardesty doesn't dance around uncomfortable topics, she plows straight into them—sending those content with “Portland polite” politics running for cover (where they can passively Tweet about it). In city budget meetings, she's pressed bureau directors to explain how proposed budget items won't unintentionally harm minority groups.

If there's one thing Hardesty and her City Hall critics align on, it's the genuine drive to create good public policies. But the future of Portland might lie in areas where they differ.

The Skanner

Study: Low-Income Areas in Portland at Higher Risk of Flooding, Extreme Heat

*By Dallan Adams
April 25, 2019*

A Portland State University study determined that low-income neighborhoods around Portland are disproportionately affected by flooding and extreme heat – and those risks are only expected to increase as a result of climate change in the coming years.

The research team mapped flooding and excessive heat and then tested this data alongside sociodemographic data (e.g. income, education, etc.) and other variables such as proximity to green space and impervious ground surfaces.

In major cities, as green space is replaced by pavement and buildings, hot spots known as urban heat islands develop. The Urban Heat Island effect can raise temperatures up to 5 degrees Celsius. The PSU study found that the areas with the greatest heat hazards are found in East Portland, North Portland and places situated along major thoroughfares.

These largely paved areas also increase an area's flood risk as there are fewer plants to absorb accumulating precipitation and hold this water in the soil. The researchers pinpointed "high flood potential areas" along I-205 and in East Portland. The greatest risk of both extreme heat and flooding were found in pockets throughout East Portland, SE Portland, and North Portland.

"Not surprisingly, those poorer, low-lying areas on the eastside along Highway 205 are disproportionately exposed to floods and urban heat islands," said Heejun Chang, a geography professor in PSU's College of Liberal Arts and member of the research team behind the study, in a press release about the study. "Those are the potential target areas where the city needs to pay attention."

Cities around the globe are using creative approaches to minimize flood risks and heat islands including both low- and high-tech solutions.

In Los Angeles, the city painted several streets white to reflect sunlight and minimize heat absorption. Any initiatives designed to address both urban heat islands and flooding is certainly something to consider and green space creation does just that.

"Planting trees or constructing green roofs would both be great ways to minimize the urban heat island and also to slow runoff from intense rainstorms," said Jillian W. Gregg, a researcher with Oregon State University's Department of Crop and Soil Science. "Plus, there will be evaporative cooling from the moist soils and transpiration from the foliage that will absorb some of the moisture and also return a portion back to the atmosphere which would help some with the flooding."

Consequently, proximity to green space is an important factor in determining an area's risk of extreme heat and flooding. But there's a high correlation between wealth and an individual's access to canopy coverage in Portland.

Portland's tree canopy is not distributed evenly throughout the city and is correlated to income "Portland's tree canopy is not distributed evenly throughout the city and is correlated to income," according to a recent Portland Parks & Recreation report

"West of the Willamette river tree canopy is 56 percent, while east of the Willamette tree canopy is only 21 percent. Tree canopy in individual neighborhoods varies from 5-70 percent. This vastly uneven distribution means that tree services and benefits are not accessible to many of Portland's residents," per the report.

The PSU study concluded that the more affluent neighborhoods in Portland (those situated in the SW, central NE, and in the western hills) had the lowest combined risk of extreme heat and flooding.

Pacific Northwest residents should expect more frequent extreme weather as a result of climate change. The Oregon Climate Change Research Institute's 2019 assessment, models suggest increases in winter precipitation and, by midcentury, western Oregon may experience a 10 percent increase in extreme precipitation.

"In places where flooding is already a problem and relocation efforts and climate change adaptation strategies are already underway, the expected 10 percent additional rainfall with the more intense storms will only add to the difficulty of responding to these flooding events," Gregg told The Skanner.

Portland was awarded the C40 Cities award for its climate action plan and 2016 inventories projects and the city has taken steps to minimize flood risks and also incentivize greenspaces such as green roofing. Programs like the Stormwater Discount Program offer discounts on stormwater management charges and even "tree discounts" through Clean River Rewards for tree canopies covering a minimum square footage.

"I think that the City of Portland has done some of the most sophisticated hydrologic modeling and hope that we could create some decision-relevant information with diverse stakeholder engagement (e.g., residents, industry, developers) in the near future," Chang told The Skanner. However, Chang said officials could further spur the use of flood-and-heat mitigating solutions around the city.

"In general, planting trees is helpful for reducing both extreme heat and flooding, but in some areas like the commercial and industrial areas in East Portland, green roofs are better suited because they could control storm runoff at a site scale. There are many green roofs around the city, and I think that there is still room for the city to incentivize the spread of green roofs in commercial and industrial buildings," Chang told The Skanner. "The city could lower sewer or water bills or property tax based on [the percentage of] building area covered by green roofs or other green infrastructure."

Based on current estimates, the total number of homeowners in Portland may be eclipsed by the total number of renters in the next few years – and for the nearly half of Portlanders who rent, the aforementioned programs geared toward property owners are not applicable.

Currently the city sponsors private-and public-property tree planting programs, with some proposed modifications that could help renters. Right now, all Portland-sponsored right-of-way tree planting programs require the owner of a property to give permission before planting. Portland Parks and Recreation is working on an alternative to this "opt-in" program, allowing the city to give property owners notice of upcoming planting and requiring property owners to opt out. This program is still under development.

In a recent interview, Anthony Bencivengo with Portland Tenants United expressed concern about green investment and the rise of a new type of displacement -- "eco-gentrification."

We tend to see investments focusing more on green space while the communities who most need it get priced out.

“Unfortunately keeping people housed isn't nearly as profitable to capitalism as remodeling neighborhoods to make them look nicer, so we tend to see investments focusing more on green space while the communities who most need it get priced out,” Bencivengo told The Skanner.

Bencivengo explained that climate change-related property damage may only lead to future displacement and unsatisfactory living conditions.

“If flooding does any significant damage to houses and apartment buildings, landlords will take that as an excuse to renovate the buildings, mass-evict vulnerable tenants and dramatically raise prices. Landlords who don't do that may simply never make adequate repairs, forcing tenants to live in substandard housing,” Bencivengo told The Skanner. “Redlining, discrimination and exploding housing prices have forced many immigrants, single parents, elderly tenants, tenants with disabilities and tenants from communities of color into areas with the lowest environmental health and the highest disaster risk.”

OPB

Portland Looking To Increase Traffic Safety After Recent Crashes

*By Meerah Powell
April 25, 2019*

Eighteen people have died in Portland traffic crashes so far this year.

The Portland Bureau of Transportation, also known as PBOT, is responding by implementing citywide safety improvements, such as updating older infrastructure.

“Many of our traffic signals date to the 1970s, so not only is the technology old, but the design of the intersection and the way it works is based on older technology,” said Dylan Rivera, public information officer with PBOT.

Some of the specific fixes PBOT will be making involve installing Leading Pedestrian Intervals, also known as LPIs, which give pedestrians a head start in a crosswalk before traffic lights change. PBOT will be adding at least 10 LPIs each year to existing signals citywide.

PBOT will also be installing at least three protected left turn signals each year on streets prone to crashes.

In addition to changing infrastructure, the bureau is establishing a new crash response protocol. After every fatal crash, PBOT will install electronic signs at crash locations to mark those sites and raise awareness.

There is currently one on Northeast Broadway from a fatal crash last week, when a pedestrian was hit and killed by a delivery truck.

PBOT is in the process of installing temporary safety fixes to Northeast Broadway in response to that crash, such as extending the sidewalk space with a barrier so that pedestrians have a shorter distance to cross the street.

“We are really trying to do more in response to specific fatal crashes as they happen,” Rivera said.

Just in the past two weeks there have been four fatal crashes in Portland. Rivera says this is far above average.

“Compared to the last 26 years, since 1993, the 14 days from April 12 to April 25 — that two-week period — has an average of 1.15 traffic fatalities,” Rivera said. “Four versus one is a dramatically high difference.”

2019 is already proving to be a particularly bad year for traffic deaths, with the most fatal traffic accidents in the last three years, at this point in the year.

By late April last year, there were 12 fatal incidents; 2017 saw eight fatalities and 2016 had 19 at this point in spring.

“This is not enough to consider this a trend in any regard,” Rivera said. “We’re hoping for the rest of the year we can get these numbers down and continue to have a downward trend in annual traffic fatalities.”