



feet first

promoting walkable communities

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June 28, 2019

Mayor Jenny Durkan
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Subject: Motorized Scooter Rentals in Seattle

Dear Mayor Durkan:

All of us expected Seattle eventually would allow rental motorized scooters to come to Seattle, so we welcome your stated committed to thinking it through and getting it right. In doing so, our focus should be on making all transportation uses function well together to ensure the safe and efficient and movement of pedestrians, bicyclists and other transportation system users, and the quality of urban life along our streets.

However, Feet First proposes Seattle's approach to scooters should involve a more comprehensive evaluation of the cumulative impacts to sidewalks and pedestrians, as well as all other competing uses for streets. From our perspective, Seattle has focused too much attention on modal planning and regulating each disruptive modal element of the emerging transportation environment as it arrives, instead of doing the harder work of figuring out how they will all or won't work together in the overall street system.

If Seattle is prepared to consider how and where each use can coexist safely and promote the type of urban experience we strive for, Feet First would like to be at the table. Rental scooters would join bicycles, motorized bicycles, motorized skateboards and other new devices all mixing with the pedestrian flow with varying degrees of safety and courtesy. This year the legislature legalized robotic delivery vehicles to join the fracas, and others appear almost sure to follow.

Our specific interest is to ensure that sidewalks are not the prime battlefield for disruption, to the detriment of pedestrians. Many of these new uses are converging on sidewalks and crosswalks and making them increasingly narrowed or obstructed. But we know that pedestrians are not alone in disruption - bike paths now host a mix of slow and fast bicycles and other wheels that change direction rapidly in a tight space; buses face more challenge navigating vehicles approaching from every sightline, and freight faces more challenges accessing local businesses. Looking freshly and defensively at each new modal use as if it exists in isolation is a losing game, and we urge you to look holistically at where each of these uses makes sense and can coexist safely and comfortably.

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We've seen challenges with existing mode-specific regulation efforts. Free-floating bike-share has been very popular, but we have yet to perfect a system that doesn't leave walkways blocked, adversely affecting those with mobility challenges. Rental users often prefer sidewalks to streets so as to avoid mixing with traffic without a helmet. And interaction between pedestrians and bicycles does not follow expected patterns of behavior, often resulting in frustration, surprise or conflict. These challenges are likely to be more pronounced with motorized scooters in the mix, so we need to keep fine tuning our regulatory approach to achieve better outcomes.

Feet First hopes to participate and contribute to a holistic view of how streets should be used in Seattle to meet divergent and sometimes conflicting needs. Our recommendation is to focus this exploration first on the downtown area, where modal conflicts are most pronounced and challenging to resolve. If we can solve this problem in downtown, the benefits would ripple to all parts of the city. At a minimum, we urge you to at least identify bottom-line pedestrian access, safety and experience outcomes that new scooter regulation should achieve, and a realistic enforcement plan to maintain them.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jon Cowin', written over the word 'Sincerely,'.

Jon Cowin, Board President
Feet First
cc: Sam Zimbabwe, SDOT Director
Seattle City Council Members