

Report to Council



Date: January 22, 2024
To: Council
From: City Manager
Subject: Micromobility Program Update
Department: Integrated Transportation

Recommendation:

THAT Council receives, for information, the report from Integrated Transportation, dated January 22, 2024, with regards to the Micromobility Program.

AND THAT Council continue Kelowna’s participation in the provincial e-scooter pilot, with the changes outlined in this report.

AND FURTHER THAT Council gives reading consideration to Bylaw No. 12609 being Amendment No. 44 to the Consolidated Traffic Bylaw No. 8120

Purpose:

To provide Council with an update on the provincial e-scooter pilot, Kelowna’s Micromobility Program, and recommended changes.

Council Priority Alignment:

Transportation

Background:

The City of Kelowna is one of 13 communities participating in the provincial e-scooter pilot project which was first announced on March 23, 2021. Subsequently, Council amended the Traffic Bylaw in April 2021 to allow e-scooters to be ridden on city streets under the same rules as bicycles.

Previous Council Resolution:

Resolution	Date
THAT Council adopt Bylaw No. 12183 being Amendment No. 39 to the Consolidated Traffic Bylaw No. 8120	April 19, 2021

Shared e-scooters and e-bikes are regulated through the City’s Micromobility Permit Program. There is currently one operator permitted until April 2024.

The provincial pilot was slated to end April 5, 2024. However, in December 2023, the provincial government announced a four-year extension of the e-scooter pilot from April 2024 to April 2028. The purpose of the provincial extension is “to study the benefits and effects of people using e-scooters in detail to help more local governments across B.C. evaluate how this clean and popular mode of personal transportation can be safely integrated into local transportation networks.”

Discussion:

Current Pilot Summary

Ridership

Over one million trips have been made on shared micromobility in Kelowna since the pilot began in April 2021. Ridership more than doubled between 2022 and 2023. Kelowna has the sixth-highest ridership of the 30 Canadian cities with shared micromobility and is among the highest in per capita ridership.

Surveys of shared e-scooter and e-bike riders indicate that the share of trips that replace driving has been steadily increasing from 33 per cent at the start of the pilot to 51 per cent as of 2023. Therefore, shared micromobility reduces congestion and emissions by providing an alternative to driving.

In the summer months, when the pressure on the road network is greatest, usage was equivalent to one-quarter of transit ridership. This data suggests that shared micromobility has prevented 900,000 kilometres of driving since 2021, with an estimated annual public benefit of \$500K to \$600K in terms of reduced emissions, collisions and deferred infrastructure costs.

Roughly one-third of shared e-scooter riders also said they never ride bicycles, demonstrating that this service is reaching new user groups for our active transportation network.

One change for 2023 was the addition of e-scooters to UBC Okanagan. Over 89,000 trips were made on the campus and surrounding area in 2023, or approximately 15 per cent of total ridership. A letter of support from UBCO is attached to this report (Attachment 4).

Safety

Interior Health has partnered with the City since 2021 to monitor the health and acute care impacts of the program. In 2021, Interior Health suggested several safety recommendations. Following the adoption of these recommendations, e-scooter related emergency department (ED) visits decreased, indicating a positive effect from the safety measures.

Interior Health has continued to monitor the program and provided an update for this report (Attachment 2). An excerpt is below:

"Since the launch of the e-scooter pilot in April 2021, there was a sharp rise in confirmed e-scooter related injury visits in 2021 which was reduced and stabilized in the following years, from 72 visits in 2021 to 48 in 2022. While data for 2023 is incomplete (only reflecting January to August) we see a similar stable trend of 41 presentations.

In comparison, bicycle presentations at the KGH ED [emergency department] accounted for 373, 345, and 245 in 2021, 2022, and 2023 respectively, and motor vehicle presentations accounted for

290, 168, and 120 in the same time period pointing towards the need to expand efforts to a broader road safety strategy to encompass all modes of transportation.”

Using ridership data, the City is able to calculate the rate of emergency department visits from the shared micromobility program. There were 41 ED visits at Kelowna General Hospital related to e-scooters from January to August 2023. This includes both shared and privately owned e-scooters. During that time, there were 324,000 trips on shared e-scooters. The number of trips on privately owned e-scooters is unknown. Overall, 99.99 per cent of e-scooter trips finished without serious incident.

Using the number of trips on shared e-scooters only, staff estimate the rate of emergency department visits has decreased by 55 per cent since the first year of the pilot. Another notable finding is that the rate of ED visits has decreased the most on weekends. The highest rates are now midweek.

Staff have incorporated Interior Health’s recommendations into the program moving forward. Staff are also working on a Safe Mobility Action Plan that will look comprehensively at reducing injuries and fatalities across all modes of transportation. This aligns with both Interior Health’s recommendations and Council’s Priority on traffic safety.

Education and Enforcement

The Micromobility Program uses technology, education, incentives, and operator-led enforcement to minimize the use of RCMP or Bylaw resources. For example, e-scooters must have sidewalk detection technology and deliver audible warnings to riders. Riders must also take a photo of how they parked to end their trip. In 2023, the operator issued 18,900 warnings and fines for improper riding and parking (~3% of trips). There were also 244 fines and 107 account suspensions.

Operators provide the City with a continuous feed of their vehicles' locations. This data is used to monitor compliance with the terms of the Micromobility Program, including restricted or “geofenced” areas. Approximately 60 slow speed, no-parking, and no-riding areas have been established throughout Kelowna, most notably the no-riding zone on the Downtown Waterfront.

Staff have tested the operators’ geofencing technology to confirm it is active and will continue to monitor as concerns arise. E-bikes and e-scooters lose all electric assist when entering this zone. People can manually push e-scooters or pedal e-bikes into this zone, but they cannot end their rental until they leave.

The RCMP has 28 files related to e-scooters from January to August 2023. Most of these (21) were related to privately owned e-scooters. Seven files were related to shared e-scooters out of roughly 324,000 trips made during this period.

Parking and Accessibility

One of the key concerns staff have heard is that improperly parked e-bikes and e-scooters block sidewalks for people with disabilities. As noted above, riders must take a photo of how they parked to end their trip. The operator reviews these photos and issues warnings and fines for improper parking. In addition, the Micromobility Program includes a mechanism for random parking audits by City staff to ensure operators are in compliance. Operators who fall below the 97 per cent parking standard can be fined and have their fleet size reduced.

Staff conducted 16 audits this year, assessing between 15 and 25 per cent of the operator's fleet at a time. Audits are focused on high-traffic areas but have covered all neighbourhoods in the service area. In 2023, parking compliance has been consistently near or above the 97 per cent standard.

If residents see a vehicle that needs to be moved, they can call the phone number printed on the vehicle. Residents can also submit a service request to the City that will be forwarded to the operator for action, though these are not monitored outside of business hours.

The operator is required to move vehicles within 1 hour (4 hours between midnight and 4am).

Service Requests

Staff have monitored feedback from the community through various channels including the City's service request system. The rate of service requests and other correspondence has decreased 99 per cent since the start of the pilot. In total, the City received 51 service requests in 2023, approximately one for every 11,000 trips.

Changes for the New Pilot

Changes to Shared Micromobility Rules

The current rules allow e-scooters and e-bikes to be parked on boulevards or sidewalks in the 'furniture zone' in line with streetlights, parking meters, benches, etc. There must be at least 1.5m of clear space, and e-scooters should not block the path of travel for people on the sidewalk. E-bikes and e-scooters can be parked along the curb on residential streets without paid parking.

There are designated parking spaces downtown that people currently receive a discount for using. If the program continues, these parking areas will become mandatory to better manage accessibility issues and clutter. Riders will not be able to stop their rental until they have parked the e-bike or e-scooter in designated spaces.

This change is only foreseen to be implemented in the downtown. Outside of downtown, people would be able to park according to the current rules. This will retain the convenience of the service in more suburban neighbourhoods where other alternatives to driving are less viable.

The Downtown Kelowna Association has requested that shared e-scooters be allowed on Bernard Avenue during the summer closure. Riding on the sidewalks would be prohibited, and vehicle speeds would be limited to 15 km/h (i.e., slower than most pedal bikes). The Downtown Waterfront would continue to be off-limits.

Further, in response to recommendations from Interior Health, staff would continue the shared mobility education campaign, with an increased educational focus on preventing underage and double riding.

Shared Micromobility Program Changes

If the program continues, the shared micromobility program would change from a permit to a contract model. This would be more in line with procurement for other services with the City where the number of operators is limited.

The contract term would be two years, with two optional extension years at the City's discretion with the number of operators limited to one, and the maximum fleet size (700 e-scooters and 300 e-bikes) unchanged from previous years.

Single-operator markets are becoming more common in Canada. Recent examples include Vancouver, Surrey, Hamilton, and Waterloo. A single-operator model would maximize ridership, minimize staff time related to monitoring adherence to the contract terms, and provide the certainty needed for companies to invest in local staff and facilities.

The existing financial penalties for not meeting service standards (e.g., 1 hour response time to move improperly parked vehicles) would remain in place.

Traffic Bylaw Update

If the program continues, the City's Traffic Bylaw would need to be updated to reference the new Provincial pilot regulation to allow privately owned or shared e-scooters to be ridden in Kelowna after April 5th 2024.

Conclusion:

Micromobility is becoming an everyday transportation option in Kelowna. Shared e-bikes and e-scooters are reducing congestion and emissions without impacting taxation. Three years of safety data show that e-scooters are not uniquely dangerous compared to other ways of getting around. However, like other modes of transportation, user behaviour requires ongoing education and management to ensure the program operates as successfully as possible.

Based on strong performance on the key metrics of safety, congestion, and emissions reduction to date, staff recommend continuing Kelowna's participation in the provincial e-scooter pilot.

If approved, staff will begin a competitive selection process for the new operating contract as soon as possible to have a contract in place prior to the current permit expiring in April of 2024.

Internal Circulation:

City Clerk
Climate Action and Environment
Communications
Community Safety
Purchasing
Real Estate
Risk Management

Considerations not applicable to this report:

External Agency/Public Comments:
Legal/Statutory Authority:
Legal/Statutory Procedural Requirements:

Submitted by: C. Noonan, Transportation Planner

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Reviewed by: B. Hallam, Integrated Transportation Department Manager

Approved for inclusion: M. Logan, Infrastructure General Manager

Attachment 1: 2024 Micromobility Program Update Presentation

Attachment 2: Interior Health Report

Attachment 3: DKA Letter of Support

Attachment 4: UBCO Letter of Support

cc: Divisional Director Financial Services
Divisional Director, Corporate and Protective Services
Divisional Director, Corporate Strategic Services
Divisional Director, Partnership & Investments
Divisional Director, Planning, Climate Action & Development Services
City Clerk