



Legislation Text

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City of Alexandria, Virginia

MEMORANDUM

DATE: NOVEMBER 7, 2018

TO: THE HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF CITY COUNCIL

FROM: MARK B. JINKS, CITY MANAGER /s/

DOCKET TITLE:

Consideration of a Nine-Month Pilot Shared Mobility Program.

ISSUE: Consideration of a nine-month pilot program to allow private companies to operate fleets of rental dockless shared mobility devices within the City of Alexandria.

RECOMMENDATION: That City Council authorize the City Manager to enter into a Memorandum of Understanding, similar in form and substance to the draft provided as attachment 1, subject to City Attorney approval, with participating companies for a nine-month pilot program for operation of private dockless shared mobility devices within the City right-of-way.

BACKGROUND: As described in a September City Council briefing, staff has been developing a proposal for a pilot program to allow operation of shared mobility devices (SMDs, i.e. “dockless” bikeshare and electric scooters) and seeking to understand how other communities are handling these particular transportation options. Staff reviewed the District of Columbia and Montgomery County pilots, industry publications and guidance, and evaluations from cities across the county.

Five companies operate SMDs such as “dockless” bikeshare bikes (both pedal and electric pedal-assist) and electric stand-up scooters in the District and Montgomery County, MD. The District and Montgomery County pilot programs, which started in fall 2017, include minimal operating agreements and no permit fees. These jurisdictions have extended their pilot programs through the end of 2018. DC considers its pilot successful and intends to continue allowing SMDs to operate beyond the end of 2018 under permanent conditions.

In October 2018, Arlington County began a pilot program, allowing up to 350 vehicles, per type of vehicle, per company, for a period of nine months. Thus far, two companies have begun operating, with others expressing interest.

DISCUSSION: Staff determined that the best approach in Alexandria for both users and SMD companies would be to allow a pilot program with terms comparable to Arlington County with a coordinated approach and similar timeline.

Over the past month, staff has conducted community outreach in gather feedback from the public about the proposed pilot. The outreach included two community events, presentations for several groups and an online feedback questionnaire, which yielded over 500 responses. Based on the input gathered, staff made several changes to the proposed pilot program and implementation tactics. The main concerns voiced by the community that were addressed in the proposed pilot include the following topics:

Obstructed sidewalks and improper parking: In response to survey data identifying this as the top concern about this pilot, staff has written into the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) (Attachment 1) a requirement for vendors to continue development of app-based tools to ensure proper parking (such as peer reporting or providing a photo to end a trip). In response to particular concerns from the business, instructions will be developed for Old Town Clean Team staff to help ensure clear pedestrian paths along the King Street corridor and reporting of issues to the companies.

Riding electric scooters on sidewalks: Riding on sidewalks was a concern brought up during every outreach event. Participating companies would be required to encourage users to operate scooters on streets and not on sidewalks. The Code of Virginia authorizes localities to prohibit the use of electric scooters on sidewalks by posting signs to give notice of the prohibition in general areas where such use is prohibited. The City Code does not address the issue. City staff is developing a plan for how to regulate the use of scooters on sidewalks in accordance with applicable law. City staff also intends to solicit feedback throughout the pilot program and provide recommendations for how operating rules on sidewalks should be addressed in the long term in both City and State Codes.

Riding without helmets: This concern came up both in online survey and in-person outreach. Consistent with the State Code, helmet use in Alexandria is not required for anyone over the age of 14. However, staff has already purchased helmets for giveaways at events and will continue this through the pilot program. Several vendors operating in DC and Arlington also conduct free and discounted helmet giveaways for users. As staff develops education and awareness messages for the community, they will include guidance on safety measures and encouragement to wear helmets.

The proposed approach outlines a nine-month pilot demonstration program starting after City Council approval in November 2018 to evaluate the operations of SMDs in the City of Alexandria. The purpose of this demonstration period is to observe how and whether SMDs help further the City's transportation goals, promote safety and provide real-world information that can guide the development of a longer-term approach. The terms of the proposed program closely resemble the pilot in Arlington County, which was discussed with several SMD providers and was approved by the County Board on September 25. The pilot will include opportunities for public feedback and a data-driven evaluation which will be incorporated into future Council consideration of whether such a program should be formalized. T&ES staff is coordinating with APD on enforcement and crash reporting issues as well the Call.Click.Connect team to determine appropriate measures for customer service and issue reporting.

Alexandria's proposed pilot program would require participating companies to sign an MOU that is similar in form and substance to the draft provided as Attachment 1, subject to City Attorney review and approval, and obtain approval of a permit (Attachment 2). This permit process would allow the SMD providers to officially operate in the City and would stipulate the parameters within which they must operate. Key features of the MOU and permit would include:

- A permit fee of \$5,000 per company
- A cap of 200 total devices per company in the City of Alexandria at any one time (could rise if ridership benchmarks are reached)
- Required safety features for all devices
- Device parking and use regulations which companies must communicate to users
- Clear information on how to report problems and provide feedback to companies
- Commitment to respond to customer and community issues in a timely fashion

The proposed pilot would run for nine months, from roughly November/December 2018 until August/September 2019. The proposal also requests the ability for staff to extend the pilot administratively beyond this date if necessary, in order to accommodate any additional evaluation and subsequent recommendations without interrupting ongoing operations by the SMD companies.

SMD companies will be required to submit data during the pilot (Attachment 3), similar to the data received from the City's operator of Capital Bikeshare. These data requirements are consistent with those of Arlington County and many other cities.

As part of the evaluation of the pilot program (Attachment 4), staff will gather community feedback and provide information to the public throughout the process. At the end of the pilot, staff will review the data and feedback and prepare a proposal for Council consideration for the future of SMD services in the City.

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT: Over the past month, staff has begun gathering feedback from the community about this pilot program and the requirements. The City launched a website (<https://www.alexandriava.gov/106050>) with FAQs and other information about the program as well as an online feedback form to solicit feedback from the community. Staff attended meetings of the Alexandria Chamber of Commerce and Old Town Business Association to provide information on the pilot and gather input that could help make

the pilot more successful. Additionally, the City hosted a Community Open House on October 6, 2018 where three companies brought vehicles for the community to test and provide feedback. Another Community Open House was held on October 25, 2018 for residents to ask questions and provide feedback on the proposed pilot. Staff is currently scheduled to attend the Old Town Civic Association meeting on November 14, 2018. The Transportation Commission endorsed the program at their October 17, 2018 meeting (Attachment 5). Staff has also participated in several regional and statewide meetings to discuss best practices in regulating SMDs.

FISCAL IMPACT: The total fiscal impact for the pilot program is approximately \$25,000. Funds will be used for outreach, set up, management, staff time and evaluation. To offset these costs, the proposal includes a one-time flat fee of \$5,000 per company, which is consistent with Arlington County. This fee includes any extension months if applicable. Currently, five providers offer service in DC that could expand into Alexandria. If all five choose to enter the City, fee revenue would be \$25,000, consistent with the estimated costs for the project. If fewer than five companies participate, the Complete Streets program will make up the difference.

ATTACHMENTS:

Attachment 1: Draft MOU

Attachment 2: Draft Permit Application

Attachment 3: Draft Vendor Data Requirements

Attachment 4: Draft Evaluation and Outreach Criteria

Attachment 5: Transportation Commission Letter of Support

Attachment 6: Dockless Pilot Program Presentation

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