Planning fundamentals for public officials and engaged citizens

QUICKNOTES

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Managing Shared-Use Micromobility

Shared-use micromobility is rapidly becoming a realistic transportation option for cities. *Shared mobility* is a transportation strategy that allows users to share vehicles, reducing the need for vehicle ownership to complete both routine and special trips. *Micromobility* is a transport mode encompassing vehicles that are relatively low in weight and maximum speed. Bike sharing is the most popular shared-use micromobility option; other types include scooters and even electric skateboards.

The synergy of this transportation strategy and mode of transport accommodates short-distance trips, complements fixed public transit lines, and offers accessible alternatives to congestion-inducing, pollution-producing cars. But to maximize benefits and minimize potential nuisance issues, local officials and planners must consider how best to introduce and implement shared-use micromobility in their communities.

Shared-use micromobility can provide clean, accessible transportation options that meet multiple community goals. Photo by Minneapolis Public Works TPP, Flickr (CC BY 2.0)

BACKGROUND

Shared-use micromobility has emerged in U.S. cities at the intersection of economic changes and environmental stress. Climate change concerns demand that cities think about carbon emissions. Shared-use micromobility addresses climate change concerns by reducing car trips and the production and consumption of vehicles of all sizes. A well-designed shared system can reduce demand for personal vehicles while simultaneously increasing access to micromobility options for those who do not already use them.

Local governments can push to prioritize public benefit over private profit as shared-use micromobility is introduced. Implementation should align with community goals, which may include promoting equitable access for disadvantaged groups, environmental compliance, or traffic reduction. Plans should thoughtfully and strategically address systemic mobility issues, such as *spatial mismatch*, which describes the lack of access to jobs centers experienced by minority communities, and *spatial entrapment,* which adds a gendered element to mobility issues by identifying the effects of limiting women's access to resources outside of their communities. By keeping these systemic issues at the forefront, planners and officials can ensure that shared-use micromobility brings community-wide benefits.

REGULATE SHARED-USE MICROMOBILITY COMPANIES

Controversies over uncontrolled e-scooter proliferation on city sidewalks highlight the importance of proactively managing these transportation modes to mitigate potential negative impacts. Issuing permits for shared-use micromobility companies is one way to regulate their presence in cities. The key functions of permits should be guiding the deployment of equipment, articulating metrics for success and expansion, and establishing performance standards.

Implementation should be compatible with local policy goals. For example, if a city wants to increase the mobility of historically disadvantaged populations, the deployment of equipment should be targeted to fill those gaps. Local officials can use their expertise to determine what fleet sizes and fleet makeups are appropriate for their communities' demographics. Fleet makeup is especially important for areas with significant populations of people with disabilities or the elderly. Additionally, the city should maintain its right to revoke the permits of noncompliant companies.

Local officials also have a responsibility in ensuring the safety of users. Permits can require companies to provide features that protect the safety of users and pedestrians. This can include requiring helmets, limiting maximum speed, and designing system elements that increase visibility.

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DESIGN CITIES THAT CAN SUPPORT SHARED-USE MICROMOBILITY

Local governments can support safe use of shared-use micromobility vehicles by promoting physically and socially secure streets. Transportation policies should address safety features and appropriate infrastructure for these alternative transportation modes. Planners and local officials need to consider both the material conditions and the technological capabilities of their cities to determine what is needed to successfully launch a shared-use micromobility system.

Street design that can accommodate shared-use micromobility is compatible with existing pedestrian needs and multiple community goals. A good first step is building the political will to move beyond car-centric streets and road design. Having this support allows planners to move forward with public investment projects, such as protected lanes and greenways, in disinvested communities. Another option is converting dedicated parking spots for cars into designated areas for parking or docking micromobility vehicles. Planners can also incentivize the integration of micromobility in and around transit-oriented development, which can help address the "first mile/last mile" challenge of connecting residential and commercial districts to nearby public transit lines.

City data systems can provide important information to supplement these changes to the urban streetscape. Smart city tools can define metrics, collect data, and develop insights regarding shared-use micromobility systems. Planners and officials can then leverage this data to make informed decisions about regulations and guidelines for use. While doing so, it is important to remember that protecting user privacy should be nonnegotiable. For example, the use of GPS tracking for vehicles should primarily be used as a mechanism to increase user safety, not to punish misuse.

ENGAGE WITH COMMUNITIES THAT WOULD BENEFIT THE MOST

Shared-use micromobility is a topic easily incorporated into the planning process. Depending on the community context, discussions about micromobility are relevant to include not only in comprehensive plans, but also in functional plans (e.g., transportation or green infrastructure plans) and special districts plans (e.g., downtown, neighborhood, or commercial districts plans).

During community visioning and goal-setting processes, it is imperative to reach out to mobility stakeholders (e.g., people with disabilities, the elderly) to discuss their needs and concerns. PAS Report 583, *Planning for Shared Mobility*, offers guidance on how to meaningfully engage stakeholders in these conversations. After shared-use micromobility is introduced in the community, planners can strategically align community feedback meetings with reoccurring compliance checks for micromobility companies.

Municipal governments should also work with companies to maximize community benefits. Shared-use micromobility companies can be required or incentivized to contribute to local economic development, such as by hiring local residents, especially those in underrepresented or disadvantaged populations. Local officials and planners can help companies establish special programming, such as discount pricing for low-income residents. Local transit advocacy community groups can work with companies to develop educational or outreach activities, such as events teaching residents how to use vehicles safely.

CONCLUSIONS

Regulation, development, and public engagement strategies are important elements in helping shared-use micromobility become a reliable transportation option in cities. As shared-use micromobility companies proliferate across the country, local officials and planners must develop clear regulations that prioritize community needs. Planners can also encourage development work and public investment that creates adequate infrastructure and safe spaces for shared-use micromobility vehicles. Finally, a robust and targeted public engagement process is necessary to ensure that disadvantaged communities are not further overlooked in the transportation planning process.

PAS QuickNotes (ISSN 2169-1940) is a publication of the American Planning Association's Planning Advisory Service (PAS). Visit PAS online at planning.org/pas to find out how PAS can work for you. Joel Albizo, FASAE, CAE, Chief Executive Officer; Petra Hurtado, PhD, Research Director; Ann Dillemuth, AICP, Editor.

FURTHER READING

Published by the American Planning Association

Cohen, Adam, and Susan Shaheen. 2016. *Planning for Shared Mobility*. Planning Advisory Service Report 583. Chicago: American Planning Association. Available at bit.ly/3fNLmYX.

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Other Resources

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NACTO. 2019. *Guidelines for Regulating Shared Micromobility*. September. Available at bit.ly/3fOv7dS.