

# Scooters, E-bikes, Rideshares, and More: Learning from Dockless Bikeshare

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**Privately-operated mobility services have changed how people get around cities. While fixed-route public transit remains the backbone of most cities' transportation networks, new mobility modes provide additional options for short, spontaneous, and/or multi-modal trips. The unfortunate reality is that most city budgets for transit expansions are inadequate and staff capacity is maxed out. Cities rarely have enough money to keep up with the demand for affordable, reliable transportation options that serve all neighborhoods and destinations, which results in people continuing to rely on personal vehicles for most trips.**

## **NEW MOBILITY—FOR FREE?**

Despite demonstrated success in New York, Montreal, Barcelona, Mexico City, and hundreds of cities in between, some cities have been reluctant or unable to find funding to support a capital-intensive docked bikeshare system. Recognizing and, in some cases, capitalizing on this, private companies have stepped in, providing dockless bikeshare accessible through mobile phone apps. These bikes are equipped with built-in locks, eliminating the need for expensive docking systems. More recently, privately-funded dockless electric scooters have emerged alongside, or in lieu of, bikeshare. However, such offers from the private sector to foot the bill for new mobility services comes on the companies' terms. They've crafted a narrative that public funding can be freed up for other uses when private companies are permitted to provide transportation services.

Private mobility providers tend to market their products as posing "no cost" to cities. However, "no cost" is misleading. Dockless bikeshare, for example, has been associated with negative impacts including overcrowded, cluttered sidewalks, neglected bikes, and widespread vandalism. These outcomes have forced cities to respond, spending staff time and public resources to address parking complaints, hold public forums, and ultimately design programs to better regulate negative outcomes. Streets, sidewalks, and public spaces are necessary for operating bikeshare and other light individual vehicles like e-scooters, but they are also critical to a city's overall mobility and access—and they are not free. Cities must recognize the value of these spaces, and should not allow private companies to use them for free if doing so jeopardizes their value to the public. It's also critical to ask: Who actually benefits from unregulated mobility solutions offered by private companies? And for how long? Is this the best case for users?

## **PRIVATE SECTOR, PUBLIC GOOD**

Privately-operated, technology-enabled services can, in fact, have a positive impact on urban mobility. Bikeshare and scootershare extend the reach of transit networks by providing first-last mile connections to rail and bus riders and



Top: An e-scooter user and bikeshare rider in downtown Portland, OR.  
 Below: A dockless bike in front of a metro station in Beijing  
 Photos: ITDP

can help shift travelers away from relying on private cars for short trips around the city.

Compared to the cost of other transit modes, well-managed new mobility services like bikeshare, scootershare, and even transportation network companies (e.g., Didi, Uber, Ola) require relatively minimal long-term investment from cities but can generate massive improvements to accessibility. Cities should be proactive and manage new mobility systems in a way that leverages private-sector capital while preserving the public interest.

Cities can do this by:

1. *Planning with citywide goals in mind:* Implementing new mobility services like bikeshare and scootershare just for the sake of having them, or because other cities are doing so, is hardly worthwhile. Cities must identify what they want from these emerging systems and what steps will get them there. For example, a city could implement bikeshare as a tool to help increase bike mode share to a certain percentage of all trips. Meanwhile, the city might also install more bike lanes and/or bike parking which can be used by riders of personal and bikeshare bikes.
2. *Requiring that private operators share data:* Data sharing has been a contentious issue between cities and private mobility operators. Some companies are concerned about the risk of proprietary information falling into the hands of competitors, as well as about cities' ability to store and protect the personally identifiable data of users. It is entirely possible for cities to adopt data policies that protect user information and companies' proprietary information, and this must be part of every deal. Cities

must set a strong precedent that sharing certain data is non-negotiable, and communicate intended applications for the data, such as for planning, system monitoring, and enforcement. It is also critical to establish data reporting standards to harmonize the format in which data is shared. Real-time data on device locations should be made publicly available for use in third-party trip planning apps, and for further research and evaluation.

3. *Integrating new mobility with transit:* As cities work to redesign their transportation networks to maximize ease and efficiency for users, new mobility services can be seamlessly integrated with public transit. For example, cities like Los Angeles, Mexico City, and Montreal enable users to make per trip and annual bikeshare membership payments with their transit cards. U.S. cities like Detroit and Marin, CA, have partnered with Uber and Lyft to provide subsidized rides to users when connecting to transit or along recently removed bus lines. Privately-operated bikeshare has yet to offer integrated fare collection with transit or reduced fare transfers. Requiring transit integration from new mobility operators could preserve affordability and help facilitate multi-modal trips that can actually compete with the convenience of private cars.

4. *Prioritizing equity and community engagement:* Private companies are profit maximizing, and often have little incentive to ensure equitable service across the whole city. As a result, many of their service areas do not reach less dense, lower-income communities, where reliable, affordable transportation options are most needed. Integrating equity into major system decisions is key—as was done when planning Memphis’ Explore Bikeshare—along with requiring companies to meet equity-focused service levels. Cities should simultaneously design an engagement strategy that includes operators, community groups, and residents from all neighborhoods.

Shared point-to-point transport options can massively improve accessibility and connectivity in crowded cities, with the private sector playing a major role in these solutions. City policy will ultimately control the destiny of new mobility, and embracing emerging modes like dockless bikeshare and scootershare could contribute to more livable spaces that are cleaner and less congested. These modes can also help cities move toward existing goals to improve air quality, increase mode share of sustainable transportation, and reduce single-occupancy vehicle trips. But it is up to cities to ask for what they want: new mobility services that are affordable and safe, complement higher occupancy modes, and support environmental, economic, health, and other citywide goals.



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