



October 2, 2018

The Honorable Sylvester Turner
Mayor, City of Houston
P.O. Box 1562
Houston, TX 77251

Dear Mayor Turner,

Houston Bike Share is pleased to submit these recommendations for how the City of Houston can implement a dockless mobility program in partnership with private operators. With input from a robust group of stakeholders, the enclosed recommendations set forth a creative framework for new dockless vehicle options (bikes, e-bikes and e-scooters) to diversify Houston's transportation landscape while respecting the public realm and right-of-way.

These recommendations are the result of a thoughtful and thorough process. We built a stakeholder committee comprised of local leaders within transportation, academia, land use and property districts. We received proposals from dockless operators, studied dockless programs and consulted with other cities for best policies and regulations. Through strategic stakeholder discussions, we considered the benefits, challenges and opportunities of dockless mobility and formulated guidelines for the city to build upon.

As the nonprofit operator of the Houston Bike Share Program since 2012, we remain committed to our mission to provide equitable access to bike share that fosters recreation, mobility and personal wellness. As we envision a Houston where everyone has access to a bike for work, play and transportation, we are excited to recommend a framework that allows for dockless micro-mobility options to provide even greater options for residents and visitors to explore and get around Houston.

Under your leadership, Houston has already made great strides in improving bike/ped infrastructure. Embracing new forms of personal mobility will leverage public transit investments and provide Houstonians with options that reduce traffic congestion and pollution, boost public health and wellbeing, and increase overall mobility. It is our hope that these recommendations will serve the City of Houston in crafting appropriate regulations for managing a dockless mobility program that will improve and transform Houston's transportation landscape.

Sincerely,

Beth Martin
Executive Director, Houston Bike Share

Enclosures



Stakeholder Committee for Dockless Mobility

Bicycle Advisory Committee
BikeHouston
Buffalo Bayou Partnership
Central Houston, Inc.
Citizens' Transportation Coalition
City of Bellaire, Position 1
County Commissioner, Precinct 1
East Downtown Management District
Emancipation Park Conservancy
Energy Corridor District
Fifth Ward Community Redevelopment Corporation
Free Wheels Houston
Greater East End Management District
Greater Houston Coalition for Complete Streets
Greater Northside Management District
Greater Southeast Management District
Hermann Park Conservancy
Houston-Galveston Area Council
Houston Administration and Regulatory Affairs
Houston Community College
Houston Museum District
Houston Parks Board
Houston Parks and Recreation
Houston Planning and Development
Houston Public Works
The Kinder Institute for Urban Research
LINK Houston
Memorial Park Conservancy
Metropolitan Transit Authority of Harris Count
Midtown Management District
Rice University
Scenic Houston
Southwest Management District
Spring Branch Management District
Strollin' and Rollin' Southeast Houston
Super Neighborhood Alliance
Texas Southern University
Tour de Hood
University of Houston
University of Houston-Downtown
Visit Houston



Recommendations for Dockless Shared Micro-Mobility Vehicle Transportation October 2018

Guiding Principles

Dockless, shared micro-mobility transit in Houston should provide low-cost vehicles (e.g. bikes, e-bikes, and e-scooters) as transportation options that are available and accessible to all Houstonians, regardless of income level or neighborhood. Houston's system should promote active and healthy transportation options for residents and visitors alike. Additionally, the system should strive to improve the health of our environment by promoting environmentally sustainable transportation options.

In order to ensure equitable access, the vehicles must also be deployed in low-density and low-income areas. Because dockless vehicles are free-floating, respect of the public realm and protection of right-of-way should remain high priorities throughout the process. The eventual system should have a framework that allows for organic expansion and new forms of shared transportation.

Houston Bike Share (HBS), City of Houston (COH), and private Operators should work together to implement a successful program. Private Operators should roll out their shared transportation options within the policy guidelines and regulations set by the City. HBS should assist the COH with day-to-day management of the system. The goal is to have a partnership that facilitates a successful system that can be maintained with minimal governmental oversight and resources. Success should be defined as universal access to shared mobility and negligible negative impacts on public rights of way.

Permit Process

HBS recommends that the City allows dockless, shared micro-mobility vehicle transportation through a permit and credit process that ensures the development of proper infrastructure as the system grows. HBS could enter into a contract with the city to serve as its agent and partner in an oversight role throughout the process.

A city-approved third-party aggregator would support data management and reporting. In order to ensure that all data required of Operators is eventually attained, the aggregator should be hired and utilized prior to the City finalizing regulations.

The process would be structured as follows:

Permit Fees

All permit holders would be required to pay an annual permit fee of \$5,000, with a renewal fee of \$1,000. A performance bond of \$40 per vehicle capped at \$20,000 per Operator would be required.



Operators must indemnify the COH and maintain liability insurance throughout the entire term of the permit, at no expense to the COH. Lastly, a franchise fee of 2% of revenue would be required from each

Operator. These fees and bonds would be collected by the COH and would cover all costs to monitor the dockless program. Operators must reimburse the COH for additional costs incurred from noncompliance. Any funds in excess would be used to fund bike and dockless micro-mobility infrastructure in the City.

Shared Vehicle Corrals

The creation of Shared Vehicle Corrals (Corrals) would allow Operators freedom to grow their operations while managing impact on public right-of-way. Corrals are marked spaces where shared vehicles would be parked. Operators would be responsible for placing and constructing the Corrals in accordance with guidelines established by the City. Methods for demarcating Corrals would vary by property owner and application.

Once Operators place Corrals, they would earn vehicle credits that determine the amount of shared vehicles they can add to the system. Corrals can be located on private or public right-of-way and would have different guidelines based on their location. See the “Shared Vehicle Corral Permit and Credit Framework” section below for more details.

Applications for Corrals would be managed by the City’s Administration and Regulatory Affairs (ARA) Department. ARA would reserve the right to approve or deny applications for Corrals on City-owned land. The City should not deny credits for Corrals located on private property once the Operator has provided a formal agreement.

Standard stencils for Corrals could be designed by HBS, and created and distributed to all Operators by the City. HBS could serve as the City agent for Operator auditing and vehicle parking compliance.

Fleet Size

Operators’ permissible fleet size would be calculated based on vehicle credits issued by ARA. Operators would earn credits by placing Corrals within the City. Adaptive vehicles (e.g. standard trikes, side-by-side tandems, or hand-cycles) could be certified on a case-by-case basis and, once approved, would not require a vehicle credit for deployment. See “Shared Vehicle Corral Permit and Credit Framework” section below for further details.

Parking and Relocation

Vehicles from any permitted Operator may be parked in any Corral. On a daily basis, all Operators must ensure that all unused vehicles are in a Corral by 4:00AM each morning. Any shared vehicles parked outside of a Corral are subject to relocation to the nearest available Corral. Operators would pay a relocation fee of \$25.00 for each vehicle moved into a Corral by HBS.



Operators must educate and inform users about where they are legally allowed to ride and park the vehicles. Operators may penalize riders for privatizing vehicles.

To encourage consistent and appropriate rebalancing of shared vehicles across the City, the City should contract a third-party data aggregator, who would assist in analyzing data and reports. To accommodate adequate Corral space for vehicle parking, COH could request or direct the expansion or addition of Corrals.

Equitable Access to Shared Vehicles

To ensure equitable access to shared vehicles, Operators would be required to implement their fleets across broad geographic areas. Operators must deploy twenty percent of their fleet and twenty percent of their Corrals in underserved communities as identified by the City's Planning Department. Operators should submit a plan for achieving twenty percent access in the identified underserved communities on an ongoing basis.

Equipment

Operators would be required to deploy vehicles that meet minimum safety standards per local, state and federal laws. The vehicles should always be in safe working condition and equipped with working front and rear lights and GPS tracking capabilities built into the vehicle. Solely relying on the GPS in a rider's cell phone would not satisfy this requirement.

All Operators would place a visible logo (minimum 0.5 x 2 inches) and a 24-hour customer service telephone number on each vehicle. Each vehicle must also have a visible, unique identifier or serial number.

E-scooters should have their speeds capped at 15 mph.

Maintenance and Operation

Operators would respond to any customer calls within 24 hours. Operators must install and maintain the quality (visibility, cleanliness) of the Corrals. In their application, each Operator should submit a Vehicle Maintenance Plan that outlines how they plan on identifying and repairing or removing damaged or broken vehicles. Operators should face penalty if they deploy any vehicles above the credited amount.

Open Data

Operators must make real-time bike location data available to HBS and the City via a publicly accessible application program interface (API) that shows at a minimum the current location of all deployed vehicles at all times, including the type of vehicle and the recent trip data for that vehicle. Data should be in General Bikeshare Feed Specification (GBFS) format.

A third-party data aggregator, determined by the City, would provide the necessary API data management services.



Reporting

For the first six months after deploying vehicles, Operators would be required to submit a monthly report on trips, revenue, maintenance, and customer-reported issues. After the initial six-month period, this report would be due on a quarterly basis. A detailed annual report will also be required from each Operator, as outlined by COH.

Shared Vehicle Corral Permit and Credit Framework

The end goal of the Shared Vehicle Corral system would be to have Corrals spread throughout the City where shared dockless vehicles can safely reside while awaiting their next user, creating a network throughout the city of pick-up and drop-off locations for said vehicles.

Operators would be responsible for land use agreements with the private landowner or public authority, as the case may be. Operators would be responsible for all permitting, deployment, and maintenance costs associated with the Corrals. Operators must present proof of land use agreement, a geo-referenced picture of the Corral, and documentation of the Corral's dimensions, in order to receive vehicle credits for said Corral.

Corrals would be placed so as to comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act and so that they do not affect walkability. Corrals may be located on private property with the owner's permission through a formal agreement, on public right of way with the appropriate City of Houston Public Works (HPW) permits, at METRO facilities, in County Parks with the Commissioner's permission, or in neighborhood parks, libraries, health clinics, etc., with appropriate authorization.

Corrals on City-owned land would abide by guidelines developed in coordination with HPW to ensure that Corrals do not restrict accessibility and are located appropriately relative to adjacent streets, intersections, building entrances and sidewalks.

Corrals should be marked according to a standard design created by HBS and approved by the City. The design should make it clear that the Corral is where shared bikes, e-bikes, scooters, or adaptive vehicles belong.

The standard Corral could be approximately the size of an average parking space, 16' x 8'. The standard vehicle credit allocation could be 10 credits per standard Corral. One credit could earn an Operator the right to deploy one bike or two scooters. Larger Corrals could be permissible in 8' x 8' increments. Larger Corrals could be built where justified by demand.

Smaller, 8' x 8' Corrals may be built in low-density, low-income areas as defined by the City Planning Department. Operators could also request approval of smaller Corrals in other areas when working with Houston Public Works. Smaller Corrals could earn an Operator 5 credits.



As an example, if an Operator wants to deploy 500 bikes (or 1,000 scooters) in Houston, they must first create 50 approved standard 16' x 8' Corrals (or an equivalent number of approved smaller or larger Corrals) with at least 10 Corrals in underserved communities.

All Corrals should be available for use by any permitted Operator. Entities such as apartment owners, the Houston Parks Board, Management Districts, and others could develop Corrals and own the vehicle credits associated with those Corrals. Operators could utilize those vehicle credits, subject to an agreement with the entity that owns the vehicle credits (and the submission of that agreement to ARA per standard protocol). Licensed operators could sell vehicle credits.

Role of City of Houston

The City's Administration and Regulatory Affairs (ARA) Department's primary role would be to review permit applications, private Corral location agreements and city-owned Corral location agreement and dole out vehicle credits to the Operators accordingly.

The City's Planning Department would provide Operators with a map that outlines low-income, low-density areas, so that they can fulfill their equity requirements.

HPW would work with Operators on a rolling basis to approve Corral locations on City-owned land, providing Operators with an authorized agreement when approval is met.

COH 311 could create a "dockless vehicle" category prior to final regulations to receive any related maintenance requests.

Role of HBS

Houston Bike Share would monitor Corral parking compliance through daily audits, relocate vehicles to Corrals (\$25 fine), and collect the associated fees. HBS would consider further oversight responsibilities of the dockless mobility program with fair compensation as requested by COH.

Conclusion

With the implementation of this proposed system, the City would not need to select a given shared vehicle Operator or Operators. Small companies and big companies, US based and international, should all be welcome in Houston.

Any Operator that desires to test its system in Houston should be allowed to do so as long as the Operator helps build the required amount of Corrals, or purchases vehicle credits from another operator. Other Departments of the City (for example Housing, Parks, and Public Works) would be able to decide on a departmental basis their interest in providing land for Corrals.