

BUSINESS

They're back: Electric scooters make return to streets, sidewalks of downtown Miami

BY ROB WILE



City of Miami considers scooter rentals in certain areas of the city, April 2, 2019. BY [CHARLES TRAINOR JR](#) ✉

A familiar form of travel has returned to Miami's streets and sidewalks after an extended time out.

Electric, dockless scooters are once again permitted in the city of Miami — but only in limited quantities, and only in the city's second district, which extends from Coconut Grove up to Morningside.

The roll out marks the official launch of a pilot [program the city approved last fall](#), after it kicked out electric scooter companies [in June](#), because they were in violation of Florida statutes. The companies did not appeal that ruling, opting instead to work with the city to craft a mutually agreeable pilot program.

“This is the most highly regulated scooter rollout of any major city in the country,” said Miami Chairman and District 2 Commissioner Ken Russell in an interview. Russell is spearheading the program, which was met with initial resistance from other city commissioners over safety concerns. By a vote of 3-2, the city approved a pilot program restricted to Russell’s district on second reading several weeks later. Russell says the city cannot be held liable for any accidents. The CDC is [currently conducting a study of scooter-related accidents in Austin, Texas](#).

The pilot has the endorsement of the Downtown Development Authority. Executive Director Alyce Robertson said she believes they will help reduce local congestion.

“If you’re going from public transit to your office, you now have another alternative to get there that doesn’t involve your car,” she said in an interview.

Under the pilot program, six companies — Bird, Bolt, Uber-owned Jump, Lime, Lyft and Spin — will be allowed to deploy up to 50 scooters each. The city will monitor usage and allow a company to increase its fleet to 100 scooters if data indicate enough demand, or to decrease the allotment if usage rates decline. No helmet is required to ride, but riders must be at least 18 years old. Scooters must be left upright after usage, and only on public property unless prior permission by a private property owner is given. The scooters cannot block rights of way.

Miami’s return to a scooter experiment follows on the heels of successful deployments in Coral Gables, which has an ongoing exclusive license with Spin, and Fort Lauderdale, which has allowed scooters since November. ([Approximately 40,000 scooter trips in Fort Lauderdale were recorded in the first month of operations](#), according to the Sun-Sentinel.)

The six scooter companies in the Miami program are hoping to boost ridership through programs that allow individuals to make money through re-charging scooters (Bird)—or touting the fact that their charger-employees earn a living wage (Spin).

In an interview, Vivian Myrtetus, a spokeswoman for Lime, noted her company was the first to bring dockless bicycles to Miami, and that it designs its scooters in-house, as opposed to companies that buy them off the rack.

And Miami Beach-based Bolt, which launched a year ago and is now in multiple East-Coast cities, is positioning itself as a hometown favorite. The company has also signed track superstar Usain Bolt as a pitchman. The company says it already has more than 40 corporate employees.

And Lyft, the rideshare company, is rolling out scooters in a bid to diversify its revenue streams. The company said in a statement that riders will be able to connect with scooters without leaving the Lyft app.

One area where the companies are not yet competing is price: Almost all are charging a flat \$1 service fee and \$0.15 per minute. The exception is Uber's Jump scooters, which are free to unlock and \$0.15. per minute. Uber riders can also connect to scooters through Uber's app.

"Riders have told us they like having multiple transportation options available within a single app to fit their various needs," said João Barbara JUMP General Manager, Miami, in a statement.

The Miami Parking Authority has been tasked with enforcing the pilot program. Any Miami resident who sees a scooter in violation of [any of the program's rules](#) should contact 305-579-4900