

As more scooters hit the streets in Raleigh, Durham still debating what to do about them

The Herald-Sun By Dawn Baumgartner Vaughan September 20, 2018

Raleigh got its second electric scooter company in downtown this week, while Durham kicked its scooter can down the road.

The Durham City Council postponed a vote on a proposed scooter ordinance for the city, even though scooters could still show up on Durham streets anyway.

The Raleigh City Council is still working on its own scooter ordinance, but already has two scooter companies operating in the city. On Wednesday, scooters from Bird, which have been in the city for weeks, were joined by scooters from Lime. That's the same company behind LimeBikes in the city.

Green LimeBikes are all over downtown Durham, too, but neither the Lime nor Bird scooters have yet to appear in the city.

Lime scooters debuted on the N.C. State University campus in Raleigh on Wednesday morning and made their way downtown by evening.

Kevin Ernest and Luke Netto took them for a ride.

"I like them better than Bird ones right now," Ernest said, pointing out that Lime has a speedometer. Ernest already had the Lime app on his phone from riding the scooters in Austin, Texas.

"This has a better bell [than Bird]," Netto added, ringing the bell on his Lime scooter.

Both men were in Raleigh for work, and they rode the scooters to dinner downtown.

"It's a little easier than Lyft or Uber," Netto said.

"And fun," Ernest said.

The Durham City Council talked about its proposed scooter ordinance — which it refers to as a "shared active transportation ordinance" — briefly at its meeting Monday. But it decided to wait until council members had more input from the Durham Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Commission, as well as what the Durham Police Department says about enforcement.

The city's interpretation of state law classifies the scooters as mopeds, which would require lights and a rearview mirror. Bird and Lime scooters on the streets in Raleigh have lights, but no license plate or mirror. And while helmets are suggested by the companies to ride scooters, most people do not.

Durham City Council member Charlie Reece asked for the delay in the scooter ordinance this week after riding a Bird scooter in Raleigh earlier this month. Reece described the electric scooters as "fun and terrifying in equal measure."

"Where there are bike lanes, these devices are amazing, but where there are no bikes lanes, they seem much less safe than bicycles because it appears that the drivers of cars and trucks have a harder time seeing these scooters," Reece wrote in an email to Durham leaders.

He said he missed having a rearview mirror and that while he wore a helmet, "nearly every other motorized scooter I saw in Raleigh was ridden on the sidewalk by someone who was not wearing a helmet."

Durham Mayor Steve Schewel responded to Reece in an email that he hopes they can figure out a way to regulate the scooters in a way that makes sense and goes along with state law.

"I do have concerns that the scooters will simply show up and get dumped on us unregulated," Schewel wrote. "This worries me for the safety of the users as well as for the inconvenience they could cause."

Although scooters did show up on Raleigh streets before the city passed regulations, no scooters are in Durham yet.

In Chapel Hill, Bird scooters descended on the UNC campus briefly as part of a "[university pop-up tour](#)", [The News & Observer reported](#) in August. But then they were quickly picked up again by Bird as the university considers a partnership with the scooter company.

A representative from Bird scooters, Servando Esparza, came to the Durham council meeting this week. He asked that the draft ordinance, which calls for a \$100 fee per scooter, be reduced. Durham City Council members will discuss the scooter permitting ordinance again at a work session meeting in a few weeks.

Fred Lamar, a senior city attorney in Durham, told the council in August that "there are a number of hurdles these companies are going to have to overcome if operating on the streets."

"If not in the streets, they wouldn't necessary fall to state law on mopeds ... but in Durham, we have ordinances that do not allow motorize vehicles or bicycles on the sidewalk," Lamar said.