



Mpack Podcast Episode 82 Cities and E-Scooters: The Portland Approach

With **Jacob Sherman**, New Mobility & Electrification Program Manager, and **Dylan Rivera**, Public Information Officer, both at **Portland Bureau of Transportation**, City of Portland, Oregon

[00:01:00]

Jeff Wood: Jacob Sherman and Dylan Rivera, welcome to the podcast. Thank you. Thanks. Thanks for being here. Before we get started. Can you tell us a little bit about yourselves?

Dylan Rivera: Sure. Dylan Rivera. I was a career newspaper reporter and my final beat was transportation policy and planning and projects for the Oregonian here in Portland after culminating 14 years in newspapers and those jobs went away.

I was at Metro here in Portland for a couple of years, and I've been doing media relations and related work here at the city of Portland Bureau of Transportation P BOT since 2013, everything from potholes to snowstorms to streetcar expansions and federal funding, state funding, Vision Zero, [00:02:00] all soup to nuts and smart tech, new economy stuff too.

So pleased to be here.

Jacob Sherman: Great. Hey, Jeff Jacob Sherman use he, him pronouns. I've been working here at the Portland Bureau of Transportation for about 6 years now in my work on new mobility. And over time, the work has really evolved to also include electrification and a number of other.

Programmatic areas, so I've been working really closely on these scooters since 2018, but my team and I also work on topics like automated vehicle policy. We're doing work right now on 0 mission delivery, electric vehicle, car charging around the city and a variety of other things in the kind of emerging technology kind of space.

Prior to that, I worked at the Portland Housing Bureau for a number of years as a project manager on a 100 million concept plan in Portland, and then before that spent just under a decade at Portland

State University, working on urban sustainability partnerships, both with [00:03:00] government, with business and with nonprofits.

Also a longtime reader of your newsletter and super excited to be here today. Awesome.

Jeff Wood: I want to know also, was this always something that you all were interested in? Transportation, urban policy. Was it something that you figured out as a kid or was it something that you came on to later in life?

Dylan Rivera: That's interesting. I first came to Portland in the early nineties to go to small liberal arts college called Reed College. And, but I found myself drawn back to Portland because of the quality of life. And I remember vividly thinking the rail transportation and accessibility of biking. And that was, in the nineties context.

So when I was recruited to come back to Portland in the year 2000, it was those things that, Made moving back to the city attractive that combination of livability and of course, the professional opportunity, but there are plenty of places that offered a professional opportunity, but we're [00:04:00] nowhere near the livability that Portland would offer.

And so I just immediately took them off my list as a 20 something professional as a place to move up to. And so transportation is always innately something that I valued. And eventually, little by little in journalism, I learned that transportation was something that the community cared a lot about, got a lot of interest from readers and got me on the front page a lot when I started writing about it for the Oregonian back in the day.

Jacob Sherman: Yeah, that's a really interesting question, Jeff. The, as a kid component made me think, yeah, as a kid playing Sim City always thought about the cars and the traffic jams happening there as I was, listening to Atlantis more set on CDs, but, really never tuned in much, I think, on transportation beyond that.

On my mom's side, I'm a 5th generation Portlander, so I grew up here, grandparents, even great grandparents, Who've actually [00:05:00] shared stories about how the transportation system has changed over time. I remember when the max opened I think we might have even went to 1 of those opening activities and I've always appreciated even as a middle schooler or high school, the ability to bike around town pretty conveniently.

I think I probably got most interested in transportation where, and outside of work, it was really involved in my neighborhood association and. We lived in 1 of the parts of the city that had been annexed into the city in the late 80s and lacked a complete sidewalk network lack to complete street network and over time, connecting with other community members started actually advocating for community projects that are now actually getting delivered here at 10 years or so later.

I think I found my way into transportation. Mostly recognizing some of the innovation that was occurring. I'd gone back to school and was doing an MBA focusing kind of innovation and entrepreneurship. And meanwhile, was seeing, some of the [00:06:00] changes that were happening and said, this seems like a really interesting sector to work, especially with.

Transportation contributing so much to our greenhouse gas emissions and climate change. And as someone who's been focused on that for a long time, it seemed like an opportunity to find a place to have greater impact.

Jeff Wood: This might be a tricky question, but do you all have a primary mode that you get around Portland on or in?

Dylan Rivera: I think the honest answer for me is multimodal, for my commute to work, it's almost always bike. I've got about a 4 mile each way bike commute 25 minutes or so door to door. And then, if I need to wardrobe adjustment before or after there's always that, but then I'm constantly supplementing and substituting with public transit and occasional bike share and ride share.

Jacob Sherman: I, for commuting to work, transit is my preferred mode. We have a max line that's very close to my house. And so often do the walk, sometimes take the drive to the park and ride, and then just [00:07:00] jump right on that. It's super convenient. It's so much faster than driving and it's quicker than biking.

And although I enjoy doing that, like on a nice sunny day, often the convenience of the light rail wins for me.

Jeff Wood: I hear you. I understand. So let's talk about micromobility a bit. I'm curious about kind of the overall landscape for micromobility at this moment in Portland.

Dylan Rivera: We were thinking it might be helpful to go over a little bit of somewhat the context here for when this whole micromobility movement.

Arrived because in Portland, it was a little different than a lot of places, a pivotal part of our history dates to the 70s and 80s and 90s of environmental protection and trying to protect rivers and forests by literally in some cases, removing a highway and replacing it with a park in downtown Portland in the 70s, refusing a new highway project that would have.

Erased 2 percent of the housing in the city for the sake of a new [00:08:00] interstate highway connection, and instead. Diverting those federal dollars into light rail, and then in 1993, becoming the 1st city to adopt a goal to reduce carbon emissions. And so all along Portland, for generations has had this environmental ethos that we then translated into public policies and our everyday life.

And the built environment that makes our everyday life work. So biking and public transit, especially light rail, especially streetcars as a way to improve our everyday quality of life while we're reducing carbon emissions has been a mantra here in Portland for generations, going back to the nineties.

And then with the start of the first Modern streetcar line in America in 2001 here in Portland. And so that movement for innovation and transportation with environmental [00:09:00] goals at the forefront has. Been growing and evolving, and then all of a sudden we had massive venture capital going into new mobility and smartphone based technology with ride sharing.

Uber came to Portland after launching itself in dozens of other cities in America and across the world and launching itself in these cities, irrespective of the local wishes, irrespective of any regulatory

environment, irrespective of readiness by the community, and we saw them coming and they Thank you.

Arrived here in December of 2014 before we were ready for them and it prompted a confrontation that was unique in the United States. We took them to federal court immediately and reached an agreement where they agreed to halt service. In Portland, the 1st time they'd ever halted service in the U. S.

city. And it was because we demanded [00:10:00] the opportunity to create consumer protections, environmental protections, equity goals, and other rules of the road for ride hailing. And that experience was really formative for us here in Portland that 2014, 2015 experience with Uber, and that informed. How we approached e scooters in 2018, because we did not want a repeat of what happened with Uber.

And we saw scooter companies launching themselves in cities across America without any notification, without any collaboration with local officials or policymakers. And so we took proactive steps here in Portland to write the rules for a scooter program. And invite the companies in on the timeline that we needed to have permits ready for them to apply for.

With scooters, we said, [00:11:00] we welcome you to come to Portland. They had been knocking at our door and calling us already. And we said, we welcome you. In a few months when we're done writing the rules of the road and creating a program for you, and that set us on a path that made us unique in America that has given us data that no one else has.

That's really helped inform our planning and policymaking as a city in ways that no other cities been able to.

Jacob Sherman: As Dylan was saying there, we said, give us 90 days, stand up some rules, some requirements, and then we can move forward. And so we initially in 2018 moved forward with what was a 4 month pilot.

I actually started at the agency a few months into that pilot. Love to give a shout out to my colleague, Brianna Orr, who was managing things at the time alongside another colleague, Erica Nebel. And, we manage that for a month pilot with kind of a test and learn approach. And I was [00:12:00] really asking ourselves whether and how scooters help us advance our climate, help us advance our safety and help us advance our equity goals that we have as an agency.

I think in general, in the kind of new mobility technology innovation space, we're really focused on policy driven approaches and want to know how these technologies are helping us move forward on some of these goals that we've established as a community. It's not just innovation for innovation's sake.

But it's purpose driven innovation. And so in that pilot, we finished the pilot. We actually told companies they had to leave and pick up their scooters. And we went into a process where we wrote a fairly exhaustive report about our initial findings. And that report is available up on our website.

We saw promise in it, and we still saw some kind of peril and some challenges. And so we actually recommended that we do another pilot. That report, I haven't checked the web account, but

[00:13:00] initially, when we wrote that report, we were 1 of the 1st cities in the U. S. to do exhaustive reporting like that.

I think New York times wrote something saying it was the most detailed analysis of scooters at the time and downloaded 10s of 1000s of times and certainly something we shared in many conversations with other cities. And we said, let's do another pilot because we haven't answered all of the questions.

And so then in 2019, we stood up what was supposed to be another relatively short term pilot. We had that pilot though, different than the first one. The first one was really structured maybe in a fairly traditional regulatory sense of here's a permit, come fill out the paperwork, get the permit to operate and go.

This second pilot, we actually structured it as more of a competitive permit. And so again, established kind of our goals and a framework. And then we asked companies how they could meet those goals and actually, submit an application. We had I believe it was about 12 companies [00:14:00] apply and six made it through that permit process and over the course of 2019 through this day, there's been a lot of churn and a lot of challenge in the scooter market.

Pandemic certainly accelerated, I think, some of the market challenges that probably would have happened. Anyways, venture capital, I think, as folks know, as well as interest rates have really tightened or, so it's been an interesting space for us to be in partnership or kind of in a quasi partnership space with an industry.

That's really had its ups and downs over the last 5 years.

Jeff Wood: I'm curious how different it was to think about a vehicle, like a car, like Uber versus the micro mobility space where scooters or shared bikes or things like that, because they're different animals to a certain extent.

Jacob Sherman: They're definitely different animals.

And I think that's part of the reason folks, maybe didn't have as much concern about Uber when Uber showed up is, we have cars all over the [00:15:00] place. So it's and you don't really. Maybe absent the big pink lift mustache that used to float around on the front of some of those cars.

There's no differentiation of those vehicles, right? You really have to be in the app and see that little gray ball moving around where Maybe it really is or maybe it isn't where it's supposed to be Says it is, but that's a different story. And I think the difference in form factor for a scooter being not a bike, which people are also used to seeing and not a car, which people are also used to seeing me in this other thing was some of what, captivated people's attention.

And the media's attention at the time.

Jeff Wood: The media has died down on scooters. It feels like to a certain extent, I haven't seen as much fervor as I used to on the topic.

Dylan Rivera: Back in 2018, the newness was a big deal. Newness with any of these technologies. Newness with light rail. The first light rail line in a community, the first streetcar in a community, it's a big, enormous deal.

And new can be scary to [00:16:00] people. New can mean change that people think is scary and uncertain. And so it helps to have some sort of comparison that, Touch point to say it could be like this could be like this. And for us, it was treating Uber and Lyft, ride hailing with a regulatory and permitting relationship, much the way we had always had with taxi companies, right?

Your taxi company, you get a permit from us. We're going to make sure your driver is safe. And some other basic rules are followed. We had to have some different rules to handle, uber and Lyft don't have, street hails and things like that, but also we had some public service requirements that were consistent city wide service was a big deal for us with Uber and Lyft.

We didn't want them to just serve downtown and make a ton of money. By excluding more outlying areas where immigrants and minorities have been relocated to and priced out into. Citywide service is 1 of the values. [00:17:00] And with scooter companies, it was to make sure your service area includes some of these historically underserved neighborhoods and also.

to work with us on public education for safety, where you're providing free helmets for scooter riders, that sort of thing to really promote helmet use to work with us and with local disability rights advocates to educate the public about how to park a scooter respectfully. To make sure it's not blocking sidewalk space.

That's essential for people who are living with a visual impairment or who depend on a mobility device. And so working with those disability stakeholders to convey that message to scooter riders. Was critical and that's something that you don't necessarily have with vehicle drivers. Generally speaking, aside from some general public safety and public interest campaigns about, don't drink and drive.

And the other safety things are [00:18:00] ongoing with people behind the wheel. The issues with scooters were different. And you had some really dramatic media reports out of San Francisco with, people, protesting, the economy in some respects by piling up e scooters and lighting them on fire, other acts of protests that involve e scooters at the time that raise a question of what's the meaning of all this?

Jacob Sherman: The only other thing that I'd add is I was just, I think, reflecting on 2018, 2019, in the transportation innovation space, e scooters, mobility as a service. Self driving cars, every everybody, I think, at that time was predicting we'd already be driving and fleets of automated electric self driving cars everywhere.

I don't know if you're familiar or any of your listeners are familiar with the Gartner hype cycle is like a framework for thinking about technology. But at that point, we were, like, at the peak of. Inflated expectations, and then everything dropped into the trough [00:19:00] of disillusionment. And now I think we're actually working our way out of that into the stable space, especially as some of the scooter companies that are still around are talking about 1 of them the same publicly we're profitable.

We're making money. So it's just, I think that's also a key thing to just rewind the tape to that moment where there was just a lot of hype and energy and attention in the transportation space broadly.

Dylan Rivera: Yeah. Absolutely. So much so that in 2017, before e scooters even came to Portland, 2017, we were told autonomous vehicles are on their way.

They will be here this year. And so we wrote a policy, code language, and a permit. For you to operate an autonomous vehicle in the city of Portland, and we had that on our website on the books in 2017, so I've been ready for that revolution. Yeah, we're still ready. It still hasn't arrived. There's some testing, but yeah.

The technology has nowhere met come close to [00:20:00] expectations in terms of the timeframe. Now, there's still some testing going on in other cities, but yeah, dramatic differences, but it's important for government to be nimble. And we find cities play a critical role in being nimble. In responding to change in industry, responding to change in environmental concerns, cities are really at the forefront of fighting climate change and reducing carbon emissions while growing our economy and finding solutions.

And so it's up to cities to keep learning from each other and adapting. So we continue to bring on innovation in a safe way. Way that serves underserved communities in a way that helps meet our equity and climate goals and growing our economies.

Jeff Wood: What have you all learned from working with private companies as opposed to, it's different than previous regulations related to streets or transportation.

It's working with private mobility providers. I'm wondering what the key to those partnerships are and what it's like working with a private company [00:21:00] from the public sector.

Jacob Sherman: Yeah, that's a really great question, and it's an exciting space to work in, but it also changes quickly. I think one of the key things in working with the private sector is being able to very clearly talk about what we're hoping to get out of a partnership or a project.

And again, we center that in our adopted policies and goals, climate action plan, bureau strategic plan. All sorts of electrification policies and those kinds of things and to be able to share that with companies and also to be able to put yourself in their shoes and understand what it is that they're hoping to accomplish.

And I think, when you can really get the stars to align, it. Really does help create those opportunities to use some business jargon of creating shared value, businesses that are doing more than just making profit, but also solving social or environmental [00:22:00] problems along the way.

And you don't need to be a registered B Corp to do that kind of work. You can think about the e scooter companies or bike share companies that are in this space that are providing access to opportunity, access to jobs, access to recreation, access to medical, all sorts of things. And that's beneficial in the broader social sense access to mobility that doesn't rely on creating lots of carbon emissions.

And so I think that's where it's important for both public and private sectors to understand one another's perspective to as much as possible. I say, take the time to build that trust and be able to speak one another's jargon. And then figure out how you can align the incentives.

We were the 1st city in North America to relaunch free floating car share after car to go and reach.

Now, we'll left North America. I think it was 2019 and we did that with a free [00:23:00] to move, which is not operating anymore owned by Stellantis major. And, there was a lot of conversation with free to move, for about 9, 10 months before we even launched of working through what we hoped, as Dylan was talking about equitable access was 1 of those things.

We spent a lot of time in conversation with them about. What their service area was going to look like, and how that service area could help expand access into some parts of the city while also recognizing from our perspective that if we said, we want city wide service that doesn't work in the pro forma.

And some of the negotiation along those sorts of things. And so I think that is a big part of the kind of public private partnership that often comes in this space, whether it's with a scooter company. A car share company are utilities that are the ones delivering charging infrastructure in our city and, probably a whole host of others.

Jeff Wood: Do you [00:24:00] get pushback from the companies when you're doing this because they're trying to make money for their investors and, venture capital and that type of stuff? Because I feel like that's probably a tension that would arise.

Jacob Sherman: Yeah. Yeah. I think there's definitely some pushback. That, that happens at times I think is in many negotiations, you have to be prepared for that pushback as well.

And I think there's also times where in being prepared for that pushback, Needing to be ready to stand your ground and saying, these are the things we care about. And we're going to hold firm on and being clear with what are some of the things you might be able to part with and maybe say, an exchange, let's think about that service area expansion next year or the year after because what you would need to do right now is establish a business that can begin to succeed.

But we're going to revisit this topic and, so you could write that into your regulations or your permit or other things like that. As Dylan mentioned with you scooters. We had a 1st in the nation requirement, my late colleague, Peter Hurley to [00:25:00] ask the scooter companies to provide us with ISO compliant life cycle analysis.

And this was, I think, really coming out of what we saw in 2017, early 2018, where scooters were off the shelf and disposable and we were like, whoa, this doesn't, this doesn't work. If this is how it's going to continue to be like, this doesn't seem like it's good towards our environmental goals, but we didn't ask companies to do that immediately.

That was the thing. We gave them a deadline of a year or so runway to be able to work on those sorts of things. And it was a really interesting, without naming names, 1 of the major scooter companies. I remember there, some of their sustainability staff said. We've been advocating for this internally for a while, and we couldn't get any traction.

But when you said it was a condition of coming to your market, and it was a yes or no sort of thing. Suddenly, I had traction within my organization because we wanted access to Portland. And so now we're doing this and, that was, I think, a thing that really did help [00:26:00] revolutionize the industry.

Because, a year or so later, companies started to look at their own environmental footprint and say, wow we can not only improve from an environmental perspective, but we can also save a ton of money. If we start to engineer these things differently.

Dylan Rivera: There are 2 lessons that Jacob just illustrated.

1 is, you want some information you have a goal. The question of life cycle. Yes, we wanted to know what the life cycle was question was, but we wouldn't let that stand in the way. Of getting the pilot started, right? Let's get this thing started and let's learn along with the companies. But the second thing is knowing as a city that we have some market share that the companies want.

And realizing that gives us some power for lack of a better word in the negotiation, they want to be here and we want some public goods. So how do we meet both of our goals? And a lot of local government policy makers and staff. Are not used to [00:27:00] thinking of themselves as controlling access to a market.

And yet that's really how a lot of private companies view us. That's how Uber viewed us when they entered here. No holds barred back in 2014, they wanted access to customers that we had some say over and a role in protecting. And when we think of ourselves as regulating access to a market, that really helps us understand where we stand in the negotiation.

Now, it doesn't mean that we can ask for whatever we want, but it means that we can assert some rules of the road, consumer protections, safety protections, data that's in the public interest with the market. Privacy protections and other elements like that, that are in the public interest. And frankly, oftentimes are in the companies and the industry's best interest too, because we've been able to show how people are using e scooters [00:28:00] in a way that the companies themselves couldn't show in a way that makes this technology compelling to advocates of sustainable transportation in a way that makes this more appealing to them.

And Makes it clear to them that this is not just some profit making enterprise, but potentially a sustainable greener transportation option that local environmental advocates might consider embracing. And that's something that the companies we don't think on their own could have necessarily done.

Jeff Wood: I think that's a really interesting point because cities have the ability to leverage the valuable space that they control, right? Most cities, 30 percent of the land is actually streets and roads and rights of way, right? So you have this valuable asset that companies want. Access to, and you have the leverage to help protect the citizens that you're serving from, predatory situations or whatever it may [00:29:00] be.

So I think that's an interesting way of thinking about it and looking at it. I do want to ask you about, how people do see scooters. Now the customers, the residents, how do they see the scooters as something that they maybe use day to day? And what are some of the data points that you've

collected over the years that maybe, like you said, share with the companies that people are doing different things with the scooters than they expected?

Jacob Sherman: Yeah, that's a great question, Jeff. I think today, 6 years into our scooter experiment, e scooters are just a piece of the everyday fabric of the city. We continue to get a few complaints here and there, mostly about a vehicle being parked in the wrong spot, but. Some of the community questions or concerns that we had earlier, 5, 6 years ago have really dropped off.

1 interesting kind of insight from, I think it was back in 2019 or 2020. We went through some of the complaints that we had been receiving. We actually found that the vast majority of the complaints was from less than the same dozen individuals. And that probably resonates on [00:30:00] a lot of city issues.

So it's probably not just specific to e scooters, but that was really helpful for us, I think, to understand. And, clearly people continue to be concerned about access and safety issues. We're actually in the process right now, going maybe from past to present of winding down our second five year e scooter pilot and getting ready to transition towards a long term program.

And these long term programs are actually moving out of this kind of regulatory permit structure into using a contract based approach that cities use for bike share, for example, all the time. And we use for our bike town program. And so these contracts that we've been through long procurement process on are going to provide the companies long runway in our cities, and that is really, I think, beneficial for a few different reasons. 1 is it lets the [00:31:00] user have more stability and know that, that line scooter and that lift scooter are going to be there for a while, and they don't have to check 15 different apps. And if 1 company goes belly up, what do they do?

It gives the consumer kind of more consistency to it also gives the companies more stability right now. They can actually plan for a more. Multi year contract in our city, and, make some of the investments and decisions that they need to do. It's been really interesting and talking with some company representatives and I had frankly, never even thought about it.

But when in some cities, they're on these year to year permits, like a year to year, do, if you're going to be in that market next year. You've got a lease on a warehouse and you and that warehouse has a landlord that wants to know if you're going to be there next year. And it's just, it's really interesting to think about the other set of shoes on the other side of the table and the things that they're thinking about.

We think these long term contracts are going to provide more stability for the operators as well. And then we also know that these long [00:32:00] term contracts are going to. Decrease the administrative burden on us. 'cause we, have two operators instead of six or six then you have a bunch of them disappear along the way and it allows us to invest in those relationships that can help us identify what's the next big thing that we innovate on together, as opposed to trying to, chase six different companies around.

Dylan Rivera: There's a temptation to think that because we're dealing with relatively new technology that. The relationship with the companies is somehow like. Esoteric or strange or weird, but, most cities have always had a regulatory relationship with. Taxi companies, right? They regulate taxi companies to some extent.

Most mid to large size cities do most cities hire contractors to perform work for them. Build a bridge, build a water sewer pipe, or some other public works, right? So there's all these relationships that [00:33:00] we have. Then you think about okay, we've had a permit for taxis. Let's have a permit for the scooters.

For operating that okay. Is that enough? Do we want to have instead? Maybe a different relationship, maybe a closer relationship instead of city as regulator. Do we want to be city as partner? And so that could be where. Our bike share system is, it started out more of a city as partner.

And so we recruited a sponsor that brought millions of dollars to the table and branding expertise and goodwill to invest in our bike share system. And so we were a partner with the operator. And our major sponsor, Nike, our local portion 500 company in the area. And so that's a partner relationship that's.

Different than a regulator relationship. It also, nominally speaking, it also gave this bike share system exclusive right to be the bike share system in the city. So there's [00:34:00] that sort of market based context. And then that is since evolved where we've seen some advantage mutual advantage to be more like we're hiring.

Bike share company to operate that on our behalf, and so we no longer own the bikes, for example, but we still have a partner with our leading title sponsor when it comes to street cars. Those street cars are the property of the city of Portland, but we hire a nonprofit operator to do that. To operate the system, provide customer service and all those things for us to operate the streetcar system.

Different relationships at different times. And so that is really evolved with the scooter space. And where we've been on this, and I think Jacob was going was our next iteration of our relationship with scooters is we started out from this city as regulator. And then city as partner, and then I think we're going to more of the city is hiring a contractor to provide the service.

Right?

Jacob Sherman: Yeah, I want to [00:35:00] underscore. I think what Dylan saying, because our deputy director for policy programs projects, Art Pearce. We have a vernacular kind of in our organization about thinking about. What is our role and, I think is Dylan was saying we really think about it as this kind of question ourselves around.

Do we regulate? Do we enable or do we partner? And, I think scooters has been a perfect kind of example where we started as a regulator, like this new thing. This form factor, nobody recognizes it's causing chaos on our streets, let's regulate it. And I think over time, we then shifted into particularly, I think, in our 2nd pilot in this kind of enable space we know this guy's not falling anymore.

What's a little bit of that give and take with the companies in order to help them succeed and to help us again, meet some of those broader climate safety and equity goals. And now we're really moving into that partner space where through these long term contracts, [00:36:00] we're going to be working more closely, sharing more risk with Lime and Lift as we get these contracts out.

Hopefully by the time your listeners are listening to the podcast, but that way that we approach things is really fundamental to the ethos, I think, of our organization right now and over the last number of years where again, company comes knocking on the door and we'll go and take that call and ask ourselves, how is this helping advance our goals and based on those conversations, we start to then think about how we're going to be approaching that company.

Jeff Wood: So in this contract phase, then you talk about, the different types of things that you're required of companies for the first and second contracts. I'm wondering how the equity issue works out into this contract phase, the next iteration of the program, because that's something that was really important early on.

And I'm sure it's really important now.

Jacob Sherman: Yeah, in the contract negotiations, we've continued as we have through 1st pilot, 2nd pilot to require the companies to provide an equity program. [00:37:00] So that is continuing. And how that's looking without getting into a lot of the details is again, focused on discounted pricing.

And as we structured, Greg. The, this kind of new long term program in our 1st pilot and our 2nd pilot, we had set broad geographic requirements in terms of deploying a certain percentage of the fleet and historically underserved areas. We've really refined that. I think over the last few years and we're.

Drawing directly from this neighborhood coverage zone approach that we've used in our bike share system and we're going to be applying that to scooters where we're setting kind of neighborhood based minimum deployment numbers at a much finer grain than we had in our kind of broader approach early on.

And we think that's going to help provide better access because, if the scooters not their community member can't use it. We're also really excited to see, I think both Lime and Lyft have had very successful equity programs [00:38:00] here in Portland, with Lyft being the operator of Biketown, our bike share service, they already have a fairly robust equity program called Biketown for All.

And we're interested to see how. A dedicated user base, they already have might take to their scooter equity program. They're also going to be standing up and how people maybe move between scooters and bikes and if differently, somewhat differently Lime has been operating scooters in Portland since day 1 of our scooter adventure.

We also know that they have a fairly robust equity practice and are excited to see how it continues to grow. So I really think that focus on price, that focus on access is a key thing and then bringing maybe a scooter into a bike share system and seeing how that plays out is one of the other big things.

Jeff Wood: There's a paper from 2023 that includes Jennifer Dill analyzed Peabot's data from e scooter pilots to look at patterns of usage. I'm [00:39:00] wondering, what stood out to you most from that report and from the data that you all have seen come through as you've been collecting it all these years?

Jacob Sherman: 1 of the things that really stood out from some of the E scooter survey data that Jennifer Dill and some of her other colleagues worked on for me, and I'm trying to remember if it's actually in that paper, but it was actually how E scooters help grow the active transportation pie. And so what I really mean by that is through some of the survey work that we had done, we really came to realize that early on a lot of the E scooter riders.

E scooters. I think it was something about 70 percent were not cyclists. They did not use bike share. So these are like new people coming to the bike lane or coming to the street. And I think for us, that was something that was super interesting to see. Then also through focus groups, again, shout out to one of my colleagues who was managing some of the work early on.

We also heard from black Portlanders, for example, [00:40:00] that he scooters don't have, maybe some of the cultural cues or baggage that it might be to ride a bike while black that riding a scooter is was. Was cool was different. And I think there was things like that were really interesting.

I apologize Jeff. I haven't read that paper from a bit a little bit ago, but those are some of the things and there's a lot of really great stuff in there as well. And

Dylan Rivera: we've also, because we have the data. We're able to see how E scooter use on a corridor changes and grows as the corridor has more protected bike lanes and other bike facilities.

Close in inner Portland neighborhoods have a network of neighborhood greenways, we call them, these sort of quiet residential streets that we've prioritized for. Comfort and safety for people biking, we've reduced the speed and the number of motor vehicles on those streets [00:41:00] and we find those are the places where people naturally want to use an E scooter as well.

And we have some neighborhoods. Unlike a lot of cities are. Much like a lot of the sunbelt cities, actually, we have some parts of our city that have very large blocks, very low density of housing and jobs and a very long distance in between intersections and few bike lanes, few sidewalks. And so in those areas, Those bike lanes become critically important for e scooter users.

And we see a very significant difference in the response. The e scooter traffic increases tremendously in response to safety improvements on those corridors. And because we have the data, we can see the change year to year, month to month, even versus the data we have for cars is based on literally a half a dozen pneumatic tubes we have.

That, means in [00:42:00] a city of 600, 000 traffic counts from 6 or 8 years ago is the most current thing we've got for some car traffic, right? But for scooters, we can say this month that month. The same month, a year ago, the same month after a protected bike lane was put in that kind of thing. And it really helps tell the story in a way that we can't with other technology.

And so sometimes scooter advocates might bristle at all this data stuff, but it's it helps tell that story and really show the importance of the technology and the possibility. And it helps argue for the case for additional infrastructure that can make using a bike. E bike e scooter safer and more comfortable for everyone.

Jacob Sherman: Yeah. Maybe circling back on, my kind of joke and actually very serious comment about playing SimCity as a kid, listening to Atlantis Morissette with the AOL dial up modem going,

we've got a bunch of e [00:43:00] scooter data and bike share data available on the web. So we've been working for a long time with.

Company called ride report. They were local here to Portland. They were just recently acquired by Enrix, but we have a public dashboard that maybe you could drop a link to your readers where you can go in and look by quarter, where we're bike share trips or scooter share trips occurring. And I think, as Dylan was saying, for us, and my planning colleagues, it's really interesting to be able to use this data to look at, if you build it, do they come?

And the answer more often is yes, and being able to say that empirically is really important, especially as maybe you go to a community town hall about this active transportation project, or that active transportation project, and you're probably, maybe bound to have someone come and say, I drive here every day and I never see a cyclist and to have, literally millions of records of scooter trips and bike trips and to be able to say.

Hey. No, on North [00:44:00] East, 122nd, we can go in and we can count all the trips and communicate that and share that. And we actually have used some of that data in federal grant applications that have 1 and it's, it, I really feel like the mobility data space is the cutting edge of kind of 21st century transportation planning and there's a lot there and I think we're just starting to uncover the tip of the iceberg on what we can do as we start to get smarter about some of the data streams and sources that we now have at our fingertips.

Jeff Wood: From an infrastructure standpoint, I'm wondering if having all that data makes you reconsider the design of bike lanes or reconsider the design of streets that, you're having all these active transportation modes on your street. And do they have to interact with vehicles that are much larger than they are?

Does that make you reconsider the design? And also, the safety of E scooters might be different than the safety of E bikes and the safety of other modes of transportation as well.

Jacob Sherman: Great point, and I [00:45:00] don't know if anyone's I don't know if anyone's really answered that yet. Jeff. These are some of the kind of current conversations I think that are going on within the planning side of our organization, maybe step out of scooters and step into.

Class 1, class 2, class 3 bikes, those class 3 bikes on in protected bike lanes or on multi use paths. Should they be allowed? There is an active conversation going and we're actually getting ready to participate in a statewide task force looking at. I think e bike safety specifically where they maybe should, or maybe shouldn't be allowed.

You

Jeff Wood: should let folks know too, what a Class 3 e bike means. Oh

Jacob Sherman: gosh. Yeah. It's about

Jeff Wood: over 25 miles an hour. I think it's over 25

Jacob Sherman: or 28 with the throttle. Even I

Jeff Wood: don't know. Yeah, exactly. Yeah. There's,

Jacob Sherman: there's some nuance there in terms of the wattage on the motor. And the speed of the vehicle interestingly enough, we also made sure that as the state updated vehicle classification for ebikes last year, [00:46:00] we made sure that pedals were added to the description of a class 2 bike, because in a proposal, they weren't.

There, but it's there now. Yeah, as different micro mobility vehicles of different sizes of different weights and different speeds are all using, limited space, whether that be the bike lane. A multi use path protected bike lane, or even a single lane of traffic. I think there are more and more questions about what we should be planning for.

I know the city of New York and the work they've been doing on E cargo bike regulations for, delivery of goods has really been thinking about this topic a lot. And I think these are things that are, like I said, very active conversations here, things we haven't resolved yet.

And I think cities and planners haven't resolved yet.

Jeff Wood: It's interesting because here in California, Scott Wiener, a representative from my specific state Senator actually just proposed, putting governors on vehicles, not governors, but like speed alerts, where if you go over 10 miles an hour over the speed limit, [00:47:00] you get an alert from your vehicle.

It's not as strong as a governor per se, but in speed limits have been put in for e scooters in a lot of places too. And so that's interesting kind of concept of not just the infrastructure you're building, but also what you're asking the companies to do in terms of safety too.

Jacob Sherman: Yeah, I think it's a very interesting question.

The fact that we do have speed governors on scooters, limiting them to 15 miles an hour where they can travel faster than that, could and should we think about that from a safety perspective when I think the reality is in most U. S. cities, scooters aren't killing people. It's automobiles that are killing people.

And we know that speed and distraction and. Intoxication as well are some of the main contributors there and, since 2016, most vehicles are connected in a way and could have some of those technologies in place. Yeah, it could be a possibility. I think it clearly be a much broader policy conversation.

Dylan Rivera: It sounds like there definitely may be lots of implications of all these things and ongoing implications of [00:48:00] bike and pedestrian conflict, even on sidewalks.

Jeff Wood: Yeah. That's another thing is, where there's no space on the road, people will tend to go up onto the sidewalks with their bikes or e scooters.

And so that creates lots of conflicts, obviously. I'm wondering what would happen if you had more budget for micromobility, if you had more budget at Peabot for doing more things related to the space and what the funding looks like for infrastructure related to that. If you had SimCity, right? And you could just have it on the budget, right?

Dylan Rivera: Like priorities and we had more funding,

Jeff Wood: right? Sure. Sure.

Jacob Sherman: I think if we had more budget for micromobility at the city. I think we'd be digging into our scooter data some more and really asking ourselves, where are those places where we might be able to do, quick, relatively inexpensive safety projects, whether it be, helping build out a crossing or adding a bike lane, like we're starting in that process right now.

But I think also having the money to be able to deploy on that would be great and exciting. And this is 1 of the things [00:49:00] that actually the Portland clean energy fund, which is a program ran out of 1 of our sister bureaus is, I think. Helping provide some opportunity on this is a tax on big businesses.

Doing a certain level of sales in the city of Portland and nationally is really designed by community advocates as kind of Portland's green new deal and has generated significant revenues that the city is working to kind of program and some of the exciting things there is actually an allocation of money that has been made for us to do quick build projects in order to close safety gaps around the city.

So we're really fortunate there. I think. I think another thing, we could use the SimCity cheat code to get all the money we wanted, is also thinking about promotion of different modes and services. And again, this is a place that Portland Clean Energy Fund is getting ready to make a 20 million dollar investment in e bike rebates and [00:50:00] safety in this city.

And we think, as. Denver or other cities or states have seen this is probably going to be fairly transformational and we're super excited. That our sister Bureau is doing some of that. I think if we also had more money, how do we get more bikes into our bike share fleet or more scooters out there or service area?

Or credits to, help make the service more affordable. We've been running a transportation wallet program for a while now, providing people direct incentive in order to choose to not take a car and instead get some incentive to take the bus, ride a scooter. Maybe use an uber in order to get around and meet their mobility needs.

It's been a very successful program. That program as well is going to be a beneficiary of some of our Portland clean energy fund funding, but it would be interesting to expand that further as well. So those are a few things that kind of come to mind. So I think that

Dylan Rivera: transportation wallet started for [00:51:00] us as a way to incentivize people to forego.

Paying for a neighborhood parking permit and instead accept a transit pass bike share membership, annual membership and other benefits package in lieu of. A right to an on street parking space in the neighborhood, and we expanded it to. Be a program where we do outreach to people living in affordable housing to help them understand how to sign up for low income transit benefits and to offer them, a discounted a free scooter share benefits.

That is a way to with the outreach, help people access a benefit. That they're already eligible for, but they just need help understanding, and they need help overcoming the hurdle of trying something new and trying to, hail a ride with their phone. Hail a scooter with their phone, they're still getting over that hurdle and scared of the affordability [00:52:00] question.

And so to make it affordable to people who are living on low incomes is something that we think helps achieve our climate and our racial equity goals.

Jeff Wood: The green fund I read the other day has almost 500 million, which is a fair amount of money, which is awesome. And then my suggestion for you as some city lovers is to just leave your computer on overnight.

And then in the morning, when you wake up, you'll have millions of dollars to spend on whatever you want. Good trick. That was the trick in some city, 2000 anyways. I'm curious, what the climate impacts are of the program and whether you're seeing emissions reductions from it.

Jacob Sherman: We spent a lot of time looking at climate impacts of e scooters as part of our 2nd e scooter pilot.

We talked about this, I think, in our 2019 e scooter report, and this was based and informed on the life cycle analysis that companies provided us as well as other research that we were doing and going back to some of the survey research as well. And I think, We saw that, between 30 and 40 percent [00:53:00] of e scooter riders were using e scooters to replace an Uber, a Lyft trip, a taxi trip, or a single occupancy vehicle trip and working with some sharp colleagues of ours talking with a number of experts.

Went through an exercise to actually calculate the greenhouse gas emissions benefits and costs, because we also know that, some e scooter trips are replacing that walking trip or that transit trip. But, on balance, when we looked at the emissions that comes from the average personal vehicle, or the average taxi.

And you balance those out with the emissions from scooters or the other trips that maybe the greener trips that also got replaced on balance. We found scooters to be net positive. And so that was, I think, really helpful for us. And we know that since then, the industry has really improved the overall life cycle of scooters because again, it saves them [00:54:00] money to have the device that last 5 years as opposed to a much shorter kind of lifespan.

So that was a little bit of our thinking. Some of that's talked in much more detail in our reports that you can find online.

Jeff Wood: I have one last question for you. What kind of advice do you have? And you've given a lots of advice throughout the show already, but I'm wondering what kind of advice you have for

other cities that might be looking to tweak existing regulations or retool the ones that they have, or build new ones for micromobility programs that they might be putting together.

Jacob Sherman: Advice for folks that I would encourage them to think about is to go back to that guiding question that. Ask yourself or talk in your agency of what's your North star and, again, as we've talked through the podcast, we often are approaching kind of innovation and transportation and technology with this question of how does it help us advance our climate.

Our safety and our equity goals, and, I think that using that as a lens can help folks focus [00:55:00] on, maybe what matters more than other, the whole nice to have versus need to have kind of thing and to be thoughtful about that.

Dylan Rivera: Thinking about what's the public good you're negotiating for and how can you achieve that?

So a lot of times with transportation, especially new mobility, you might not be able to directly put something in the hands of people who have historically been underserved. But can you put that resource in their zip code? Can you require that the company deploy that resource in that zip code on a regular basis?

So it's. Accessible at least geographically, right? A short distance from homes, public transit is a metaphor in that regard, right? That transit line is putting that service in a neighborhood that didn't used to have that convenience. And so everyone in that neighborhood, [00:56:00] if they. Have historically been underserved, or if you have a disproportionate high number of people of color, immigrant communities there, then you're making that more accessible.

That transit stop is a shorter distance from home for them than the previous transit stop was and that's a goal. You can work on with. The new mobility service provider, and if you're not able to get to citywide service, can you get something in that direction? Can you get something bigger than just the downtown area?

Our bike share system was founded 8 years ago, and we still don't have citywide service right? Hailing. Citywide service from the get go from day 1, Uber and Lyft have had a requirement to serve. All of Portland, so different levels of market reality and technology. For different technologies and different industries, right?

Jacob Sherman: And I just say, these are things I think we're [00:57:00] actively grappling with right now around electric vehicle car charging, where in kind of some limited use cases, we've completely changed our rules and are working through a process to open up the right of way for car charging. But we also want to make sure that.

The companies providing EV car chargers are providing equitable service around the city. When you look at a map on the alternative data fuel center of where all of our EV chargers are, there's a lot of them located in the central city and the inner more affluent neighborhoods. And as part of the new kind of regulations, we're standing up.

We're actually making it some sort of an equity requirement of, needing chargers to, go where the market finds them attractive and also provide a certain number of chargers than other parts of the

city in order to make sure that. Community members aren't left behind in the transition to cleaner, [00:58:00] more efficient and as some say, more cost effective modes of transportation.

There's some research out there that talks about electric vehicles being cheaper to operate and the total operating costs and so want to make sure that people have those opportunities. And that's by saying, what is the purpose of our work? And it is about making sure all members of our community have access to some of these services.

And in some spaces, you can pull that off in some places, maybe it's going to take some Sim City cheat codes to get some more money in order to, again, make the service a pencil in a way there. We're not treating a lot of these transportation services as utilities and regulating them in that sort of way.

So we're not, setting things like caps on profit or anything like that. Within the market based approach that we currently have, I think, being really thoughtful and intentional about. Like what Dylan was saying about what can we ask for? And what are those trade offs and trying to push as far as you can.

Dylan Rivera: And it's important [00:59:00] for all city officials to remember. We can be a regulator. We can also be a client hiring someone. We can also be a partner, we can be an enabler variations on different relationships that may be more appropriate for different kinds of industries. And if we're able to achieve a greater good, that may warrant us to be a partner rather than a regulator.

Even when we were thinking through hypothetically, okay, autonomous vehicles are coming, we can regulate them. But would it ever warrant us to be a partner, potentially even invest in the infrastructure for autonomous vehicles? And so we started thinking through if they're shared, if it's green, if it's safe, if it's accessible for low income and communities of color Yeah.

That might warn [01:00:00] a partner relationship with. An autonomous vehicle provider and so to just know your values and know that you can change your relationship with the private sector based on those values. It should be hopefully empowering for a lot of cities.

Jeff Wood: Where can folks find your work and the things that you guys

Jacob Sherman: So folks can learn some more about our work at e-scooterpdx.com. That's the link to our e-scooter page. We have a number of our reports up there. You could also, I talked about our micromobility dashboard where folks can see some of the trips that have occurred, both on scooters and bike share and scooter and micromobility trips in other cities.

And you can find that on public.ridereport.com. Forward slash PDX

Jeff Wood: ours. We'll put these all in the show notes. Jacob and Dylan, thanks so much for joining us. We really appreciate your time. Yeah. Thanks, Jeff. Thanks

Dylan Rivera: for having us.[01:01:00]

Kammy Horne, CEO, Mpact: Thanks for listening. And thank you to Hillary Reeves who leads Mpact VOICES and the development of this podcast. Find out more about our work by visiting our website, mpactmobility.org. That's M as in mobility and pact as an agreement, mpactmobility.org. Sign up for our newsletter to make sure you hear about new podcasts as they come out.