

Disability rights advocate sues rental scooter companies, alleging blocked sidewalks

Advocate says the deluge of vehicles, unsafe riders is a violation of the ADA.

By **Andy Mannix** (<http://www.startribune.com/andy-mannix/366674391/>) Star Tribune |

OCTOBER 16, 2019 — 9:21PM

An advocate for disability rights says the recent deluge of rental scooters in Minneapolis has clogged the sidewalks and made the city unsafe for people with impaired mobility, joining critics around the country who allege the popular scooters violate the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Noah McCourt filed a lawsuit in federal court Wednesday against the city of Minneapolis and e-scooter startups Bird Rides Inc. and Neutron Holdings Inc., which operate as Bird and Lime, respectively. McCourt has autism and a developmental coordination disorder, which slows his reaction time, he says. Since the scooters arrived, he's no longer able to stroll around Minneapolis without tripping over scooters on public transit platforms or dodging riders speeding toward him on city sidewalks, McCourt said in an interview.

"I literally have to jump out of the way," he said. "I've been hit by these things before."

The suit alleges that Minneapolis officials have failed to "adequately maintain the system of sidewalks, crosswalks, curb ramps, transit stops, pedestrian crossings and other walkways." While making a hefty profit, the e-scooter companies have transformed public space into "private retail stores, showrooms, highways, and storage facilities," the suit alleges, all "in abject disregard for the safety and access rights of residents or visitors with disabilities to the City of Minneapolis."

McCourt says the city and scooter companies violate state and federal laws meant to keep public space accessible for people with disabilities. He said he's reached out to elected officials in Minneapolis asking them to enforce laws regulating riding scooters on sidewalks, but his complaints have been ignored.

McCourt, who serves on the Minnesota Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities and has previously sued over disability cases, said he filed the lawsuit because "it's becoming an issue for an awful lot of people."

The city of Minneapolis declined to comment.

"Dockless micromobility significantly improves the quality of life for millions of people around the world, but as we run into challenges, the onus is on us to innovate and educate. That's why we've engaged disability advocates and continue to educate riders and the community about proper riding and parking etiquette to ensure scooters are parked in an orderly, respectful way," a Lime statement said.

The app-based scooters started appearing in Minneapolis in summer 2018. They've since multiplied into several companies, including Bird, Lime and Lyft, launching fleets that collectively total more than 4,000 in the Twin Cities.

The electric scooters reach up to 15 mph. They are dockless, meaning users can leave them anywhere — a perennial source of criticism for those who find them unsightly. Riders aren't supposed to use sidewalks, but many do, and emergency room doctors say they've seen an uptick in injuries since the scooters arrived, mostly from people not wearing helmets.



RENEE JONES SCHNEIDER

Andy Emerson collected Lime Scooters from downtown Minneapolis on Aug. 1.



RENEE JONES SCHNEIDER, STAR TRIBUNE

Andy and Sarah Emerson collected Lime Scooters from downtown Minneapolis in August.

A class-action lawsuit filed in Los Angeles County Superior Court last year accused Bird and Lime of “gross negligence” and “aiding and abetting assault,” claiming startup companies dumped their products in the city without warning, leading to a multitude of injuries.

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