

CSAC Award Executive Summary – Implementation of a Successful Shared Mobility Device Program in the Unincorporated County.

Overview: Program to permit and regulate shared mobility device operations and to collect fees for their use of the County right-of-way.

Challenge: Transportation methods are changing rapidly with recent advances in technology. New transportation methods include shared mobility devices (SMDs) including bicycles and electric scooters. SMD companies place electric bicycles or scooters throughout an area to provide an easy, affordable, and dependable means to travel short distances throughout a community. This new and evolving service has the potential for both positive and negative impacts on the community. Positive impacts include providing clean methods of transportation over short distances, including the critical last mile connectivity for alternative transportation systems. However, unregulated SMD operations can have many negative impacts including nuisance and safety issues such as when devices are improperly parked or left in the road right-of-way.

Solution: To help County communities have the advantage and convenience of SMDs while limiting potential impacts, Santa Barbara County Public Works created a SMD program for the unincorporated area by changing the County code and implementing a program through the road encroachment permit process. Changes to the County code carefully considered California vehicle codes that govern SMDs, lessons from over or under regulation by other agencies around the country, legal defensibility, and input and concerns from all stakeholders.

The County's program includes participation from all stakeholder groups to help maintain a balance between providing on-demand service at the most locations possible while avoiding nuisance and safety issues.

A provision in the program includes abatement or removal of abandoned, wrecked, dismantled, or inoperative SMDs. The County also has the authority to remove a SMD when it is parked or left standing in the right-of-way in a position that obstructs the normal movement of traffic, or in a condition that creates a hazard to other traffic in the right-of-way. The County also has authority to, after notice, remove SMDs owned by businesses encroaching in the County right-of-way that have not acquired a permit. Annual permits may be revoked or not renewed if companies are not following conditions of the permit for operations, including exceeding fleet size limits or not being responsive to notifications of improperly parked vehicles.

Another key factor in avoiding the nuisance of SMDs is to limit the size of fleets allowed. The County custom tailored zones throughout the unincorporated area and determined the appropriate base number of vehicles allowed in each zone. This number can be adjusted as needed to balance having enough to create an effective network of operations with oversaturation and clutter.

Innovation: Companies that provide SMD services have been known to introduce too many devices too quickly, which leads to push back from communities. Instead of moving to ban SMDs completely, or taking years to develop a process for regulating the industry, Santa Barbara County Public Works developed a solution within months. The key to creating a successful program was to seek input from stakeholders and assign responsibilities for program success to each in proportion to the benefits they receive from having a robust program in place.

Stakeholders include SMD companies, users, community members, law enforcement, and the County Public Works encroachment permits section. The program assigns responsibility for proper use in proportion to the benefits received from the use of SMDs. SMD companies and users have the most responsibility to maintain a successful program, while a well-operating program should have minimal involvement from law enforcement and permit enforcement groups.

Results: Three goals of the program were to have a well-functioning alternative transportation choice for last-mile connectivity, decrease the number of violations and, and limit reports of negative impacts to the non-user community. The ordinance went into effect in early December 2018. Santa Barbara County Public Works used the community of Isla Vista to test the effects of the code change. Staff counted the number of scooters being used at three different intersections on December 12, 2018 and February 11, 2019. On December 12, staff counted a total of 91 violations. On February 11, staff counted six violations. Third District County Supervisor Joan Hartmann said, "It's important to have alternative transportation options for our community, and it's just as important that we keep our streets and sidewalks safe. This program shows that if we get creative and work towards a solution we can have both."

Replicability: Agencies could use the updated language in Santa Barbara County Code Chapters 9, 23, and 28 which conforms with the California Vehicle Code.

Project or Program Contact: Gary Smart, Traffic Engineer – Santa Barbara County Public Works, 123 E. Anapamu Street, Santa Barbara, CA 93101. (805)568-3308. gsmart@cosbpw.net.

Optional submission: None.