

Scooter Invasion

Written by Erik Bojnansky, BT Senior Writer; Photos by Armando Colls
February 2020

**They came. They cluttered. But they have not conquered -- yet.
Out of nowhere, e-scooters rained down on Miami, thousands of them, inspiring delight, outrage, and an intense scrutiny that could doom them**



ances are, you've seen them in Bayfront Park and elsewhere in downtown Miami, or Brickell, or Coconut Grove. Scooters.

Most look like the kick-scooters children often use. Some loosely resemble tricycles. However, these machines are propelled by lithium batteries and can travel up to 20 miles per hour. When stationary, they're often found on public sidewalks.

They go by different names and descriptions. E-scooters. Dockless scooters. Shared motorized scooters. Personal transporters. Last-mile transportation. Tourist toys. Whatever they're called, scooters have colonized cities across the globe. Although you can buy one yourself (Amazon lists them from \$59 to \$4000), usually e-scooters are controlled by startup companies that rent them by the minute to customers with smartphones and credit cards. It's all part of the growing micromobility industry that includes short-term bike rentals.

Over the past couple of years, e-scooter companies have established themselves in Fort Lauderdale, West Palm Beach, Orlando, Tampa, and Tallahassee. But within Miami-Dade County, e-scooters are primarily found in two places: Coral Gables and the City of Miami's Commission District 2, a medley of neighborhoods that includes most or all of Coconut Grove, Brickell, the Central Business District, Park West, Bayfront Park, Maurice Ferré Park, Omni, Midtown Miami, Edgewater, Morningside, and the Bayside Historic District, plus segments of Wynwood.

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The City of Coral Gables limits its public sidewalks to 300 e-scooters owned by two companies, Bird and Spin, but within District 2, nine companies are allowed to operate 3957 e-scooters, typically charging customers a one-dollar unlocking fee plus 15 cents per minute.



Plenty of people hate them. Grant Stern, host of the *Only in Miami* radio talk show and an Edgewater resident, says he became acquainted with the devices while walking his dog and pushing his infant daughter in a stroller: a man riding a scooter nearly slammed into him. Since then, Stern says, he not only has to detour around idle scooters frequently left near his condo building's entrance, but he must also be on the lookout for zooming riders.

"The e-scooters have turned our sidewalks into racetracks where pedestrians have to literally look over their shoulder to avoid high-speed blindside collisions," Stern complains in an e-mail to the *BT*. "With minimal effort, a scooter operator can reach 15 m.p.h., unlike a cyclist whose speed is limited by their expenditure of energy to work out."

Tom Falco, editor of the *Coconut Grove Grapevine* blog, says the e-scooters aren't popular there: "Many residents feel that there are no rules, the riders ride haphazardly, and they speed in and out of traffic. They also ride on the sidewalks and leave the scooters anywhere when

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they're done. This is the feedback I get from people in person and in writing.”

Falco adds, however, that he actually likes the e-scooters: “I feel they add life to the area.”

He's not alone. Last year, more than 1.6 million people rode e-scooters in Commission District 2, says John Heffernan, deputy director of communications for the City of Miami.



Among the frequent customers are tourists and visitors in search of an easy way to get around, and an amusement.

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“It’s just fun and cheap,” explains Gage Gonzalez, a 21-year-old college student visiting from Tampa, as he unlocks a Lime scooter at Bayfront Park.

They’re also used by people who work or live in Miami -- like Christian Cipriani, a copywriter who lives in West Miami and works downtown. For Cipriani, a former *BT* contributing writer, renting scooters is a solution to the “last mile” problem that has vexed mass-transit advocates: how to get to and from transit hubs. In Cipriani’s case, scooters are an easy way of traveling from the Metrorail station at Government Center to his downtown office and downtown-area clients.

“In Miami, eight months out of the year, you walk two blocks and you show up in a puddle of sweat,” he explains. All he has to do is use his phone app to locate the nearest scooter, plug in his info, and hop on. “You don’t have to expend energy, and when you’re done, you leave it right there. They’re extremely convenient. Extremely cheap,” Cipriani says. “I’ve gone from downtown to Brickell and not shown up sweaty, and you don’t have to park.”

Indeed, several representatives of e-scooter companies tell the *BT* that they find the City of Miami, and the State of Florida, very desirable markets, thanks to tourists, horrendous traffic congestion, and warm weather.

“The growth we’ve already had here -- I can’t share the number, but this place is profitable,” says Uhriel Bedoya, general manager of Lime’s Florida operations. (Bedoya told the *Sun-Sentinel* in January that Lime, which operates in District 2, Fort Lauderdale, Orlando, and Tampa, recorded “over 900,000 trips” and “over one million miles traveled” in Florida.)

Servando Esparza, senior manager of government partnerships for Bird, says his company is interested in operating in more City of Miami neighborhoods, as well as other municipalities, like Miami Beach and Aventura. They’re considering Key Biscayne as well, according to a Bird spokesperson. “I can see a lot of the neighboring cities creating a program that’s in line with the Miami program,” he says.

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