

**Interested Party Testimony**  
**House Transportation and Public Safety Committee**  
**House Bill 295**

**October 15, 2019**

Good morning Chairman Green, Vice-Chair McClain, Ranking Member Sheehy and members of the House Transportation and Public Safety Committee. My name is Ben Story, Vice President, Regional General Manager, North America for Wheels Labs and I work with a team of innovators determined to transform the shared mobility marketplace. We are led by a former Clevelander and are committed to bringing our technology to Ohio. Thank you for the opportunity to provide interested party testimony on HB295.

I would like to start by applauding Representative Hoops, the bill's co-sponsors, this committee, and the interested parties for their efforts to ensure Ohio is a pioneering state in transportation innovation and in particular, micromobility technology. We welcome the opportunity to bring Wheels' unique shared mobility devices to the state.

Micromobility transportation technology, which consists of scooters, ebikes and shared mobility devices, has advanced significantly over the past few years, and continues to evolve. Using smart engineering, we have come a long way in making devices safe, more user friendly, environmentally friendly, and long-lasting. With these advancements, demand for this technology has soared. In 2018, Americans took 84 million trips via dockless scooters, bikes, and traditional bikeshare systems – more than double from 2017. With demand ever-growing, industry analysts describe this as “the fastest technological adoption in history.”

That is why it is so important for Ohio to craft legislation at the state level and to establish permitting programs on the local level that all embrace this ever-evolving, innovative field. We encourage you to use language that does not bind us to antiquated definitions written decades ago but rather enables Ohio to always be at the forefront of innovation, which is key to bringing valuable transportation innovation to Ohioans.

At Wheels, safety is not only our number one priority, much as we know it is yours, it is literally the reason we started our company. Unlike other offerings, we have designed our mobility devices to be seated, to have a lower center of gravity, to have 14-inch wheels that better navigate uneven surfaces than the much smaller wheels found on scooters, and we will very soon be rolling out a smart helmet system that will be directly integrated into the bike. In addition, our bikes use LED lighting that is easy for cars to see, and use five points of contact: two hands, two feet, and a seat. All of this creates better balance and the lower center of gravity that I described. Our device is fully electric, so it does not require pedaling and instead uses footrests. The seated design with footrests makes the Wheels bike particularly comfortable and accessible to a truly mass market, including those who may not be able to stand on a scooter or to get onto or ride a much higher pedal bike. The Wheels bike also features dual independent front and rear brakes for better stopping power. Finally, with respect to the shareable helmet system that I mentioned, this will be the first ever such system on the market. Users will be able to unlock the helmet attached to the device through the app and peel off a fresh head liner for every use. And because the system will be connected to the bike's electronics, we will have numerous options to encourage helmet use, which is something I'm sure we all agree is critical to the successful proliferation of micromobility.

Maximizing high-tech innovation, smart engineering and sustainability are key priorities for Wheels. As a later entrant into the micromobility transportation field, we were able to improve upon the initial model to address challenges experienced by the first wave of devices. The modular design of our product and in-market service leads to long vehicle life, which is up to 10 times longer than other devices. This translates into less vehicle miles traveled to service our fleet and batteries do not need to be discarded with scrapped vehicles. It is also one of the lightest devices on the market, enabling all shapes and sizes to be able to lift and maneuver it.

Unfortunately, many transportation laws are outdated and not keeping pace with technology. Innovative tools should be available to all who want to use them – from Baby Boomers to Generation Z and active Ohioans to those with physical limitations. One barrier in the current law is the definition of an ebike that requires ebikes to have operable pedals, something that can be difficult for some to operate and is unnecessary on an all-electric device.

Wheels is proud to have been approved, in late-September, as a vendor to participate in the City of Cleveland’s six-month demonstration for dockless rental scooters and bikes. Because of the city’s forward thinking around shared mobility devices, modeling Chicago’s very successful shared mobility device program that includes ebikes without operable pedals, Wheels’ device that has footrests instead of pedals was granted a permit. Darnell Brown, the city’s Chief Operating Officer said, “The Wheels device adds diversity to Cleveland’s shared mobility options, and the sit-down model may expand access for those who are not able to ride a stand-up scooter.”

Expanding access is vital to making innovation accessible across the state. Ohio is the birthplace of aviation, one of the original locations for the electric long-distance railway, and the location of the first traffic light and service station. This committee has the power to make the decision to keep Ohio on this path – the path of innovation. As a national leader in the Smart City movement, autonomous transportation systems, hyperloop and numerous engineering feats, it makes perfect sense for Ohio to be a national leader in the adoption of shared mobility devices.

To accomplish this, we must work together to ensure the legislative language determining the parameters for micromobility devices makes sense and enables future disruptive innovation for the benefit of Ohioans. We have been working with the sponsor and interested parties on a proposed amendment that acknowledges the broader class of micromobility devices and appreciate your support as we work to include it in the Senate version of this legislation. It would change the term “low speed electric scooter” to “low speed micromobility device” to better reflect the many options we now have in micromobility transportation. The definition for this would remain the same but the speed at which it could operate would change from “not more than 15 MPH” to “not more than 20 MPH.” Additionally, it would ensure that cities creating micromobility programs at least seek to include devices in their program that are adapted to meet the needs of those with physical limitations. This language will allow micromobility to continue to innovate while prioritizing safety and access.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on House Bill 295, which proactively addresses the growing popularity and demand for micromobility devices. As mobility device technology, design and options are rapidly evolving and getting safer and more sophisticated, it is important for Ohio law to keep up with the pace of innovation and evolving technology. Making safety the top priority now and in the future requires this deliberate legislative action.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify and for working with Wheels and all the organizations in the micromobility space to ensure we use the most appropriate legislation. We look forward to continuing to work with you as this moves through the Senate to refine and finalize the language to achieve this. I am happy to take any questions.

