

Part 1: PRESS RELEASE

Understanding UCLA's Perception of E-Scooters and Dockless Vehicles

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UCLA's Transportation Team's Sustainability Action Research project focuses on better understanding attitudes and perceptions of e-scooters across campus. From left to right: Kyle Willenborg, Anna Weir, Brooke Shimasaki, Natalie Gonzalez, and Maddie Jordan

Source: Chloe Ney

From “*I hate [them] and everything they stand for*” to “*They are horribly annoying and unsafe,*” harsh opinions of the UCLA community may jeopardize the future of the latest active transport option on campus.

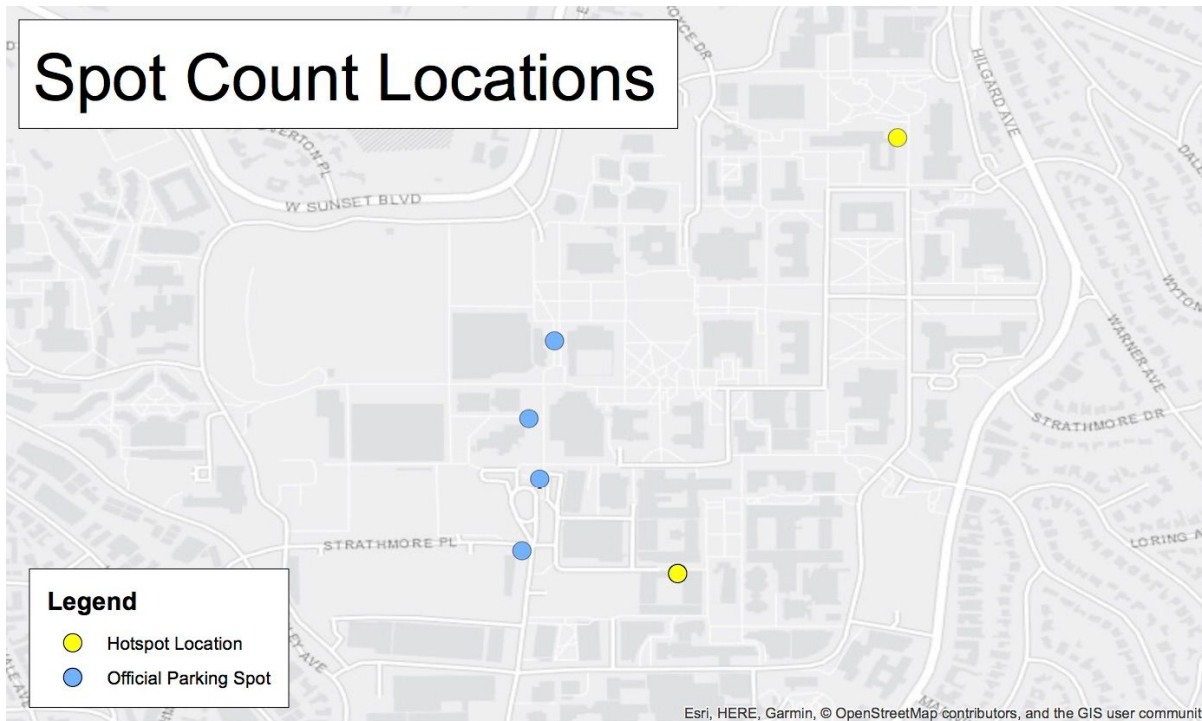
When dockless devices were first dropped off on the UCLA campus at the beginning of 2018, one of the major appeals was the unique way they combined accessibility, speed, and amusement in one transportation device. However, students' initial fascination soon turned sour, and a negative perspective took hold of the narrative surrounding this new transportation mode. As the use of e-scooters increased, so did the number of related accidents caused by unsafe

riders. This was addressed in an [op-ed from the *Daily Bruin*](#), which denounced e-scooters as “*menaces on our campus that cause injuries to innocent people.*” Despite efforts by UCLA and the UCPD, many e-scooter users are unaware of the regulations regarding the devices or how to safely navigate around pedestrians on a busy college campus. The lack of awareness of how to appropriately and safely use e-scooter may ultimately prevent them from becoming a long term viable transportation option on campus, despite all their speed, cost, and environmental benefits.

We are the Sustainability Action Research Transportation team, and our goal is to understand how the UCLA community feels about e-scooters, as well as mitigate unsafe e-scooter use on campus through utilizing positive, educational imagery that will allow pedestrians, cars, and e-scooters to coexist.

One of the first steps toward our goal was developing an understanding of the opinions present in our community, which we achieved through an attitude survey. Our survey presented a specific list of questions that changed depending on whether the participant did or did not ride e-scooters on campus. For those who rode e-scooters, questions focused on the reasons participants chose this mode of transportation as well as their average trip length. For those who did not ride e-scooters, questions asked what their primary deterrents to e-scooters were. After promoting the survey through Winter and Spring Quarter of 2019, our team received over 200 responses that shed new light on the UCLA community’s apprehensions and concerns in regards to e-scooters on and around campus. Of our 200 survey participants around 69% indicated that they had never used an e-scooter on campus, and of these respondents over 26.5% pointed out that their dislike for e-scooters was due to safety concerns. 8% even opted to write in their own free response answers. Responses, such as “*I hate [them] and everything they stand for*” and “*They are horribly annoying and unsafe*” generally aligned with criticisms seen in *Daily Bruin* articles and other online posts, yet did not go into much detail about why they felt that way. This indicated that the accidents, unsafe usage, and increase in critical op-ed pieces seen at the introduction of e-scooters in early 2018 may have had long term impacts on how our campus views this sustainable mode.

In an effort to monitor e-scooter rider habits, we also opted to take weekly spot-counts on campus. Over 10 weeks, our team took note of parking habits twice a day (during peak hours between 8:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m and 3:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m.) each Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday. We took note of parking abnormalities at the four “official” e-scooter parking areas, as designated by the UCLA Transportation Department, as well as in front of two buildings we deemed to be “hotspot” locations (see map below). We found that the designated parking areas were significantly underused, and that riders seemed to prefer to park in front of buildings, or at other destination points on campus.



Map of the spot count locations on the UCLA campus, with the Transportation Department’s official parking spots shown in blue and our team’s designated hotpots in yellow.

Source: Natalie Gonzalez

From the minimal use of parking spots across campus to the negative attitudes shared by many of survey participants, our team believes that the UCLA community would benefit from changes in the current campus-wide messaging directed at e-scooter riders. Posters on campus often are not very effective at communicating the specific ways students can ride safely, and intense verbiage, such as “Obey the Law,” could further deter students out of fear that their usage may be considered illegal. This messaging might be a factor in the persistent negative narrative associated with the new transportation mode.

We looked to the city of Santa Monica as an example of positive messaging regarding e-scooters, which coincidentally was the location of the first e-scooter pilot programs in October 2017. Recently the city launched an initiative called “[Take the Friendly Road](#)” as part of their commitment to Vision Zero, a global movement to eliminate all traffic fatalities and severe injuries while increasing safe, healthy, equitable mobility for all. The messaging used in this campaign has positive connotations and is based on their fundamental belief that a “friendly” Santa Monica is a safe Santa Monica. Advertisements such as “The E-scooter Rules to Know Before you Go” are simple yet eye-catching, and offer straightforward tips on how to ride safely. This messaging has a light-hearted tone and is intended to encourage riders to practice safe habits in order to support the well-being of their community, rather than intimidate them and prevent them from using the devices in the first place. By adopting more positive,

straightforward, and concrete instructions in signage, UCLA could change the way dockless vehicles are operated on campus as well as reduce the negative associations with e-scooter usage.

E-scooters are a promising addition to UCLA's sustainable transportation fleet, attractive not only because of their accessibility but also their low environmental impacts. However, with such negative perceptions prevalent among the community, they are at risk of becoming socially unsustainable. UCLA Transportation recognizes this, and have been working to pilot designated parking spots and implement campus-wide signage. However, the Transportation Department cannot change individual rider habits on their own. Riders have to make a conscious choice for change, and this change can come from a greater knowledge of how to successfully and safely navigate our campus. Our team has created a [story map](#) using spatial data of transportation modes on campus, including designated e-scooter parking locations to encourage students to park in safe zones that do not interfere with walkways, stairs, or doors. The goal of this story map is to provide accessible information to help the community navigate our campus, as well as showing how e-scooters can be promoted in a positive, safety-oriented way. Our hope is that this resource, and our project as a whole, will help foster a positive perception of this fast, fun, and sustainable mode in the UCLA community, as well as encourage more students to opt for environmentally-friendly forms of transportation as we move into the future.

Part 2: EMAIL DRAFT

To whom it may concern,

We are the UCLA Sustainability Action Research Transportation group, a student-lead research team that aims to assess emerging active transport modes around UCLA's campus. We have spent the past six months researching how people on campus view e-scooters and what can be done to integrate them into the community as a safe and socially sustainable mode of transportation. Our findings present a pressing public concern with e-scooter safety and a general distaste for the dockless vehicles. Our press release discusses what could be done to improve public opinion and overall safety of the vehicles, and a summary of our main findings are as follows:

- We conducted an attitude survey to understand how the UCLA community feels about e-scooters
 - 69% of survey participants indicated that they had never used an e-scooter on campus
 - Of this, 26.5% said their primary reason for not using e-scooters were safety concerns
- We also conducted counts of e-scooter parking spaces to judge their effectiveness in making e-scooters a more safe and responsible means of transportation.
- We believe UCLA could deal with some of the negative attitude by changing the signage used to address riders, and use the City of Santa Monica's "Take the Friendly Road" campaign as a successful example of doing so.
- We have created a story map resources to help students locate different modes of transportation around campus, including e-scooters

E-scooters are becoming more widespread by the day, as they have become one of the most talked about means of transportation in urban centers around the world. Their viability as a transportation mode will depend primarily on how audiences receive them, and negative associations with e-scooter users could easily shift potential riders to unsustainable, environmentally-damaging alternatives.

Thank you and we hope to hear from you soon,

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