

TRAFFIC AND TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE

February 25, 2025

A meeting of the Traffic and Transportation Committee was held on this date beginning at 3:32 p.m. in person in the Council Chambers at 80 Broad Street and over Zoom.

Committee Members: Councilmember Michael Seekings (Chair), Councilmember Karl Brady (Vice-Chair), Councilmember William Dudley Gregorie, Councilmember Jim McBride, Councilmember Boyd Gregg, and Mayor William S. Cogswell

Also Present: Michael Mathis, Robert Somerville, Elizabeth Dieck, Josh Martin, Jason Kronsberg, Magalie Creech, Melissa Cruthirds, Katie Dahlheim, Philip Clapper, and Donna Constance

Chair Seekings called the meeting to order.

Invocation

The meeting was opened with a moment of silence led by Chair Seekings.

Approval of the January 28, 2025, minutes

On a motion by Councilmember Gregorie, seconded by Councilmember Gregg, the Committee voted unanimously to approve the January 28, 2025, Traffic and Transportation meeting minutes.

Public Hearing - Senate Street Change street from two way to one way

Chair Seekings said this was a public hearing on Senate Street. He called the public hearing to order and said that the committee would now hear any comments from the public about turning Senate Street from two-way to one-way.

Chair Seekings said the public hearing was closed.

On a motion by Councilmember Brady, seconded by Mayor Cogswell, the Committee voted unanimously to close the public hearing.

Ashley River Crossing Project update

Mayor Cogswell said the City was evaluating cost estimates for the East Landing revision, which would be brought to the committee for review and decision-making. There was no change order for the ARC Bridge. The PermaTrak Systems sections for the West Marsh were being delivered to the site, which would be the actual platform for the bridge itself. Progress was being made on the ARC Bridge. They anticipated this would be on budget and schedule, with a completion date in the summer of 2027.

Lowline Update

Mayor Cogswell said the RFQ for the Lowline Phase 1 was issued on February 16th, and those

responses for the RFQ were due on March 7th. The proposed contract will be brought to the City Council on April 8th to reward the project. They were scheduled to break ground in December. They collaborated with Friends of the Lowline to help develop future fundraising opportunities for the project, which would fund the path, park space, and amenities. They would be getting funding from the private sector and nonprofit organizations.

Councilmember Gregorie asked if they would pursue federal funding.

Mayor Cogswell said they were.

Councilmember Gregorie asked which executive order applied to this project.

Mr. Martin said the federal grant system would be frozen without a written agreement. They signed the deal for the ARC Bridge, and any grant application agreement they did not enter into was put on hold.

Mayor Cogswell asked if it was not only an agreement that had not been entered into, but if there had not been any appropriation for it.

Mr. Martin said that was correct.

Chair Seekings said there was a judicial order on the appropriation portion. Things were also going on with the executive orders and the court system.

River Road improvements, Johns Island Elementary School Update

Mayor Cogswell said they were in contact with the CCSD and committed to attending the next meeting to engage in public dialogue so everyone could be informed.

Mr. Somerville said the City met with CCSD and committed to making all the adjustments or requirements per the right-of-way contract through the DOT, the roundabout, and the turning lanes required before allowing the students to enter the school. They wanted to ensure that everything was in place when the school opened, and if not, they would leave the students at the schools they currently attended.

Councilmember Gregorie asked if this would depend on the occupancy permit.

Chair Seekings said they would be getting the Certificate of Occupancy.

Mayor Cogswell said the permit would come from the State, not the City of Charleston.

Chair Seekings asked if the State did building and fire inspections.

Mayor Cogswell said it was their inspectors or the county's inspectors. They looked into the legal aspect of the Certificate of Occupancy, which was not in their purview based on State law. The school district had conveyed that they did not plan to open the school until the road improvements were completed.

Councilmember McBride said that the public was interested, as were the neighborhoods in that area. They thought they would delve deeper into this at this meeting, but asked if they could consider this at the next meeting. They wanted to have looked into this further so everyone would understand what was happening. They went to River Road so they could point out their concerns but discovered more improvements were needed from the Brownswood River intersection.

Chair Seekings said the concern was whether or not the school would open before those improvements were completed.

Charleston Spokes, Lime Bikeshare

Mr. Somerville said representatives from Lime were there to give an update on the Lime Bikeshare Program, which started in May 2022.

Ms. Antunez said she was the senior manager of government relations with Lime and that she was joined by her colleague John Phillips, their operations coordinator. They oversaw Charleston's e-bike program. In May of 2022, they launched their program in Charleston, sponsored by MUSC, an e-bike program, and it was station-based. Riders started and ended their trip at a station, they must be 18 years old, and no tandem riding or impaired riding was allowed. They used technology and features to implement no-ride zones, slow zones, and special geofencing for their parking corrals. There was a pay-as-you-go rate when riders approached the vehicle, and the cost was \$1 to unlock and .43 cents per minute. They had pass options ranging from a day pass to a 30-day pass to make micromobility a commuter option so people could choose to leave their cars and use a bike instead. They also had a Lime Access Program, which provided a 70% discount that ended up being .30 cents to unlock and .12 cents per minute for low-income people on any local, state, or federal assistance program.

Since its inception, they have had 255,000 lifetime trips, 500,000 miles traveled, and 10,000 unique riders. In 2022-2023, they launched their Year-of-Year Program performance. The first year, they had a 50% jump in ridership, which they attributed to having 12 full months, 100,000 trips, and 40,000 riders on average, and they remained consistent in trip and distance duration. This was in terms of how Charleston performed in comparison to other programs. In 2024, there was a decrease of 15% in total trips, miles traveled, and the number of riders.

Lime as a company liked to be in service to the communities it served. They participated in events, partnered to distribute helmets, and provided hands-on riding instructions through their Lime academies. They use their e-bikes for events throughout the year and promote alternative transportation whenever possible. They have a Lime Hero Partnership with Charleston Moves for riders to go into the application to round up their trip and contribute to the organization of their choice. They also rolled out some exclusive discounts in the City of Charleston. The most recent was in December 2024. They provided 50% off all trips for City employees, and they also have a special discount for MUSC staff and the campus.

For safety and compliance, they did a lot of rider education in person and through the app. The information was on local regulations and how to engage with the vehicle. An end-of-ride photo was required for every trip. At the end of their ride, AI verified that people were appropriately parking, and if not, they were put through a violation policy and issued a warning violation. They had a 24/7 customer support team, and they could be contacted if someone sees a vehicle where it is not meant to be, if anything is wrong with the bike, or if someone is riding recklessly.

Ridership decreased because their current vehicle was a Gen 4 e-bike, a pedal-assist-only vehicle. They introduced a throttle version of the vehicle, which was inaccessible to Charleston. The vehicle gave the rider a choice to pedal or engage the throttle and expand the use cases for trips they were doing. They tested the performance of throttle versus pedal assist, and on average, they saw 33% more rides on the throttled e-bikes, and 93% of those riders engaged the throttle when given the opportunity. They took the feedback of their riders and put that into the design of this vehicle, so a lower center of gravity made it easier to engage, was less intimidating, and had

a longer range. They had an aging fleet in Charleston, and when it came to the e-bike ridership, the Class 1 was not as booming as the Class 2 e-bikes. People were engaging with the throttle bikes, and it was not the same for the pedal assist. The recommendation was to modernize the Charleston fleet by adding throttles to its existing fleet. This was so they could have a mixed fleet with the Gen 4 bike vehicles. The next step would be to amend their current agreement with the City so they could have the flexibility of not just the Class 1 but the Class 2 e-bikes.

Councilmember Gregorie asked who was liable for any accidents and if they were insured.

Ms. Antunez said she could not speak hypothetically, but they were insured with All-State, and if there was an incident, their claims team got involved and assisted the rider through the process.

Councilmember Gregorie said they did not want to talk about hypotheticals. They wanted to know how many accidents there had been.

Ms. Antunez said she did not have those numbers, but they knew that 99.99% of trips ended incident-free.

Councilmember Gregorie asked how AI worked when it came to violation enforcement.

Ms. Antunez said whenever a ride ended, a photograph was taken, and AI looked at that photo to determine whether there was good parking or bad parking. Their team would then review those photographs, and riders would be put through their violation policy and issued a warning.

Councilmember Gregorie said that if low-income people wanted to receive discounts, they had to be enrolled in a low-income program. However, not all low-income people were enrolled in programs. He asked how they would handle that situation.

Ms. Antunez said they had a third-party platform that took a slew of different income verifications and that she would provide a list of what would qualify someone.

Chair Seekings asked how many stations were on the peninsula.

Inaudible.

Chair Seekings asked how many bikes there were.

Inaudible.

Chair Seekings asked how many violations were made to their policies in 2025 for their bikes.

Ms. Antunez said she did not have those numbers but would follow up on the 2025 and 2024 numbers.

Chair Seekings asked if they knew how many incidents involved Lime bikes.

Ms. Antunez said she knew the percentage but did not have the total number.

Chair Seekings said Lime listed distinct rides for 2023 and 2024 that were around 100,000, and there was a 0.01% accident rate, which was a countable number of incidents.

Ms. Antunez said it was a low number, and they were confident they were in the single digits.

Chair Seekings asked Ms. Copeland if they had any claims for Lime bike incidents in the City.

Ms. Copeland said they did not.

Chair Seekings asked if they knew why ridership was down, and if it was because a rider saw no throttle bikes, only pedal assist, and they decided not to ride a bike.

Ms. Antunez said when there was a Class 2 next to a Class 1, 90% plus of the time, the rider would pick the Class 2 vehicle.

Chair Seekings asked if there was a penalty for a rider who did not bring the bike back to a station.

Ms. Antunez said they would go through the violation policy, and the first offense was a warning.

Chair Seekings said Lime did not charge them to reposition.

Ms. Antunez said no, they did not charge for the first offense.

Chair Seekings asked what percentage of their riders did not comply with their repositioning policy.

Ms. Antunez said she could not provide the exact figures, but they were in the high 90s.

Chair Seekings said ridership was down in Charleston because of the positioning of bikes. They were everywhere and, on the ground, turned upside down. He saw bikes on his street daily, and when he walked to work, bikes were not at the stations.

Ms. Antunez said they saw that the highest ridership corrals were the second they were stocked with bikes, and then they were gone. This reflected the high demand, and they agreed there was an issue with deployments. They could add five times the number of corrals and stations they had in the City to meet the real demand, and they would continue to add parking pins throughout Charleston because it would positively impact ridership.

Chair Seekings asked who was in charge of repositioning bikes left in the street.

Ms. Antunez said their Lime team and staff went around daily to rebalance vehicles so they could be parked properly. They also addressed any reports they received from City staff and residents.

Chair Seekings said they would like to know the number of bikes that did not make it back to a station on the peninsula of Charleston.

Chair Seekings asked if Charleston Moves was one of their partners and how much money Lime had contributed to them in 2024.

Ms. Antunez said that because ridership was low, they sponsored events. They sponsored Pedal and Panache, and their contribution for that particular event was around \$1,000. They also supplemented their Lime Hero Program with local event sponsorships when the opportunity arose.

Chair Seekings asked if the prerequisite to riding one of their bikes was that the rider needed to be 18 years or older, and how they enforced that.

Ms. Antunez said they had a slew of tech capabilities they worked with to determine which was the right fit. They could be either an ID scan or a selfie scan, which they did in Charleston.

Chair Seekings said there was no way for them to enforce that.

Ms. Antunez said they could require ID and that they deployed all the tech solutions to address this issue.

Chair Seekings asked how long she had been in her position in government relations.

Ms. Antunez said she had worked for Lime for 1 year but had been in the industry for 5 years.

Chair Seekings asked if they were aware of the geofencing issues with their bikes.

Ms. Antunez asked if he could be more specific.

Chair Seekings said there were certain areas where Lime bikes should not go. They wanted to geofence those areas to turn down the pedal capability, but it did not work.

Ms. Antunez said she was unaware of the exact issue but that they could revisit the geofencing and see if it needed to be revised.

Councilmember Gregorie inaudible.

Ms. Antunez said it was not on time, but if they did not return it to a station.

Councilmember Gregorie asked if the bikes were out a week or more and if there was a charge.

Ms. Antunez said if the bike were active, it would charge the rider, and if an e-bike became inactive, it would automatically lock and trigger the alarm so their team would go and retrieve that vehicle.

Councilmember Gregorie asked if there were tracers on the bikes.

Ms. Antunez said they all had GPS technology, which was how they implemented the geofencing and told them where the bikes were.

Councilmember Gregorie asked if they had any privacy issues.

Ms. Antunez said they followed strict privacy regulations.

Rideshare Pilot Program

Ms. Pinkston said that since its inception in May 2024, the company has been ready to make the Rideshare Pilot Program permanent. They succeeded in getting most of their rideshare off of King Street and onto side streets, which helped traffic flow more easily and created a safe place for people to meet their rideshare vehicles. They received positive feedback from businesses and police that the program should continue. If this became permanent, physical changes would be made to help make things work better. When cars were parked in the zones, it became an issue because the whole system broke down. They currently have signage at each of the seven zones to keep the cars from parking there. They have had over 1,000 tickets and 200 tows since the program started. The best cues to keep people from parking in the zones were to bag the meters and yellow paint. The police were bagging the meters at each zone, and they wanted to take some of the strain off the CPD, so they could focus on parking enforcement. There was an opportunity to collocate pick-up and drop-off zones and commercial loading zones, given that rideshares were a nighttime activity and commercial loading happened in the daytime. Morris Street was one example of what they wanted to move towards. This was a commercial loading zone, and yellow paint was a good cue to keep people from parking in those zones. Morris Street was functioning well, but there were 5 that still had metered spots that could be improved. They discussed with their team and Councilmember Seekings to settle on making physical improvements to three zones on Canon, King, and Radcliffe Streets and Calhoun Street.

They had 2 ordinance updates. The first ordinance allowed riders with disabilities to request a modified pick-up or drop-off spot. The second would allow for food delivery drivers to use rideshare zones.

Councilmember Gregorie asked if they could get the City symbol to show it was Charleston.

Ms. Pinkston said yes.

Mayor Cogswell said they received complaints about people waiting at rideshare pickups collecting trash. They wanted to ensure ample trash cans wherever those rideshare pickups were.

Chair Seekings said the pilot programs were working. When the program first started, Calhoun Street was excluded, but they made it safer and more accessible, and the adjustments that were being made were working.

Chair Seekings asked if, when someone ordered an Uber or Lyft, there was a designation or signifier built into the app to meet the ADA requirement pickup rules.

Ms. Pinkston said she would look into that.

North Sterling Drive - one-way discussion

Mr. Wallace said they had collected preliminary data on North Sterling Drive. This was a 10- to 12-foot-wide dirt road on James Island. After the rain, they took volumes, which showed that about 140 vehicles per day was their highest segment. There was equal distribution, but there was more southbound than northbound. There were no crashes between 2020 and 2024. There were golf carts and about 5 to 10 pedestrians an hour, which made it a low-activity street. They received 12 to 13 comments opposing the one-way conversion, and the data they collected was consistent with what they collected in 2022.

Chair Seekings asked if they had recommendations.

Mr. Wallace said he would recommend they put this through their conversion process, which involved a petition and council member buy-in to make sure everyone was in support of a conversion.

Councilmember Gregg asked how this came about.

Mr. Wallace said Public Works was involved, and there was some hearsay that a dam was back there, and there was concern over its condition.

Councilmember Gregg asked if they had talked about closing the road.

Chair Seekings said they did. There was an earth and dam crossover from a lake that was back there, and the residents asked Councilmember Appel if they could look into this and if they should go through the process.

Mr. Wallace said fresh dirt was put on it on Friday via their traffic cameras.

Mayor Cogswell said he was an advocate of going through the process. They just approved the Senate Street project after it went through the process, but they needed to hear from the residents to make an informed decision.

Chair Seekings asked how long this would take.

Mr. Wallace said they needed a signed petition from residents of the street in support of the conversion, and whoever requested the data collection for the study, then they could get started.

On a motion by Councilmember Brady, seconded by Councilmember Gregorie, the Committee voted unanimously to accept Mr. Wallace's recommendation to go through the conversion process by getting a signed petition from the residents and the Council's approval.

Discussion and potential action regarding six nighttime pedicab decals

Ms. Cruthirds said the pedicab ordinance was amended in July 2021 to allow for six additional nighttime decals, which were approved by the Council in August 2021. The RFP was put out for those six nighttime decals, and in September 2021, the RFP was canceled. In October, they amended the ordinance by removing the requirement that the applicant provide a physical address for storage before being awarded the decals. In March 2022, they amended the ordinance, and since then, they have been on the insurance merry-go-round, which they have ironed out.

Chair Seekings asked if there was a motion.

Councilmember Brady said that this has been an ongoing issue for the past several years, and now that the issues have been resolved, they should move forward.

Councilmember Gregg asked if another RFP was needed to move forward.

Councilmember Brady said he amended his motion to go with another RFP and to move forward.

Mayor Cogswell said that since he was not present when the initial vote was cast to grant six more decals, he was not in favor of granting those six decals and would not be voting for this motion.

Chair Seekings said he would not be voting for this because, since this process began, there has not been an underscore or general groundswell of requests to increase the number of pedicabs on the streets, but a backlash against the number already out there. If they were to issue more decals, it would go from 30 to 36 at night, and if anyone had been downtown, they would see there were lots of them out there. Since there have not been any requests to add to the numbers, they should rethink their streets as they go through another look at tourism management.

On a motion by Councilmember Brady, seconded by Councilmember Gregg, the Committee voted to issue six nighttime decals.

On a motion by Councilmember Brady, seconded by Councilmember Gregg, the Committee voted to amend Councilmember Brady's motion to go through the RFP process for six additional nighttime decals. Councilmember Seekings and Mayor Cogswell voted nay.

Clerk of Council's Office

Donna Constance