

Research Project Name: Unlocking Access: A Qualitative Study of 236 U.S. Shared Micromobility Programs
Recipient/Grant (Contract) Number: University of Washington Tacoma
Center Name: Rural Safe Efficient Advanced Transportation (R-SEAT) Center
R-SEAT Priority: Resilience; Innovation and Technology
Principal Investigator(s): Jeff Walters, Angela Kitali, Heather Dillon, Panick Kalambay, Brandon Meyers, Alexander Brown, Mikell Smith
Project Partners: Anne Brown, University of Oregon
Research Project Funding: \$97,484 (Federal request); \$48,742 (Non-Federal cost share)
Project Start and End Date: 1/27/2026 to 1/1/26-2027
<p>Project Description: Shared micromobility—short-term rentals of e-bikes, e-scooters, and other small, low-speed devices—has grown rapidly in the United States, offering a potential solution to first- and last-mile transportation challenges. These services can reduce congestion and provide affordable alternatives to car travel. Yet despite their promise, the industry lacks consistent oversight and regulation. Rising per-minute pricing, uneven distribution, and limited infrastructure often restrict access for the very populations most likely to benefit. Previous studies show conflicting demographic patterns in ridership and point to a persistent “representation gap” in the data used to plan services, which in turn reinforces low access in underserved areas. Together, these issues highlight a need for a clear, operational framework to define and improve and scale-up access to shared micromobility.</p> <p>This project addresses that gap by systematically analyzing how access is conceptualized and implemented in shared micromobility programs. Building on a database of 236 programs developed by Dr. Anne Brown at the University of Oregon, the study will compile hundreds of documents—including MOUs, RFPs, and program guidelines—to identify the features, practices, and mechanisms that shape user access. Using both deductive and inductive qualitative coding, the research will examine how regulatory agencies and service providers define access, the tools they use to evaluate it, and the barriers and successes encountered in implementation. By comparing programs nationwide, the study will highlight best practices, uncover shortcomings, and generate actionable insights for improving the efficacy and impact in future shared micromobility systems.</p>
US DOT Priorities*:
<p>Outputs: The anticipated output includes a publicly available, systematically evaluated database of practices from hundreds of micromobility programs; a rigorous assessment of strategies that enhance service access; and recommendations for best practices to inform municipalities, operators, and policymakers interested in improving or implementing new micromobility programs.</p>
<p>Outcomes/Impacts: Deliverables will include a Section 508-compliant final report for the R-SEAT Center, a peer-reviewed journal article, and presentations to practitioners and research communities. Together, these outputs will provide the first large-scale, comparative analysis of access in shared micromobility, filling a critical gap in the literature and equipping decision-makers with actionable guidance for creating more effective and impactful shared micromobility programs.</p>
Final Research Report: In progress

* Section left blank until USDOT’s new priorities and RD&T strategic goals are available in Spring 2026.