

Motorized mobility scooters FAQs

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According to the government of Nova Scotia, more than one in four Nova Scotians will be 65 years and older in a little more than a decade from now.

With our aging population, we will see an increase in the use of motorized mobility scooters in our community.

I have already noticed an increase in the use of scooters in Amherst. I have also seen an increase in the number of questions we receive in relation to the rules for operating the scooters.

In this article, I will address the most common FAQs.

Are mobility scooters considered pedestrians or a vehicle?

When it comes to the rules of the road, mobility scooter and wheelchair users are considered pedestrians under the motor vehicle act. In the legislation, the definition of a pedestrian includes a person in a wheelchair. It does not specify if the wheelchair is manually operated or motorized. Therefore, electric wheelchairs and mobility scooters are considered pedestrians and must follow the rules of the road applicable to a pedestrian.

Can they be operated on a sidewalk?

Yes, they can. In fact, they are required to operate on a sidewalk when one is "provided". Section 127 (2) of the Motor Vehicle Act states: "Where sidewalks are provided it shall be unlawful for any pedestrian to walk along and upon an adjacent highway." This means, motorized mobility scooters and wheelchairs must be used on sidewalks where a sidewalk is available.

What if the condition of the sidewalk is not suitable to operate a mobility scooter?

If the sidewalk cannot be used, the mobility scooter can be operated on the road. An example of when a sidewalk may not be suitable is during winter weather conditions. While the Town provides an excellent snow clearing service there are times when snow/ice make the sidewalks impassable for scooters.

Can they be operated on a street? If yes, do you travel with or against the flow of traffic?

Yes, but only when no sidewalk is "provided." In the absence of a sidewalk, mobility scooters are to be driven on the left side of the road facing traffic.

As I mentioned previously, scooters are considered pedestrians. Section 127 (3) of the Motor Vehicle Act states: "Where sidewalks are not provided, any pedestrian walking along and upon a highway shall, when practicable, walk only on the left side of the roadway or its shoulder facing traffic which may approach from the opposite direction."

I have noticed several of our mobility scooters travelling on the roadway are going with the flow of traffic. I have also observed scooters driving down the middle of Robert Angus Drive. I can't emphasize enough how dangerous this is! First of all, there is a sidewalk on Robert Angus Drive, so scooters are required to operate on the sidewalk. If the sidewalk is impassable due to snow or slush, then please look for an alternate way to travel. I wouldn't recommend driving a scooter on Robert Angus Drive facing traffic either. While I respect and believe in accessibility for all, there are times when safety trumps all other considerations.

Some tips to think about before travelling on your wheelchair or mobility scooter.

Do not cross between parked cars because typically the chair user will be seated low and drivers will not be able to see you.

When crossing at a corner or crosswalk, make eye contact with drivers and wait for any approaching vehicles to stop before you move onto the roadway.

Increase your visibility. Wear a brightly coloured vest or light-coloured clothing. Reflective strips on the scooter or lights will also help with visibility. A flag on the scooter will make you more visible.

Do not enter a crosswalk when you see the flashing "Do Not Walk" symbol. If you have already started to cross, complete your crossing in safety.

Be mindful of traffic turning at intersections or vehicles leaving driveways.

Share the sidewalk respectfully with other pedestrians.

Ensure your battery is fully charged for your trip. Amherst has several hills which can be challenging for a scooter with a low battery. Our officers have rescued several residents whose mobility scooters have failed on the hills.

This article is just one of several initiatives the Amherst Police Department is taking this summer to raise awareness and promote the safe use and operation of mobility scooters. Our department will be working with various stakeholders to help educate our community about the rules surrounding the use of mobility scooters. We will be reaching out to those who rely on mobility scooters and operate them on our streets and sidewalks. Our officers will also be speaking to scooter operators who are observed operating in a manner that does not comply with the regulations. Our goal is to improve safety for mobility scooter operators and to reduce or prevent accidents involving mobility scooters.

If you have any questions regarding today's article, or if you have a topic you would like to suggest for Police Beat, please contact me at 902-667-7227.

Until next time Stay Safe!

Const. Tom Wood is the crime prevention officer with the Amherst Police Department.

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