

Questions for Spin

Submitted by Peter Houk
Ann Arbor Transportation Commission Member

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Tracking and Preventing Scooter Crashes

Background: In 2023, Ann Arbor witnessed two very serious scooter crashes with Spin scooters. One resulted in a serious head injury for the rider. The other resulted in a fatal head injury for the rider. Some key aspects of the two crashes were very similar: scooter riders crossed into oncoming traffic, hit the left front fender of the oncoming vehicle, and their heads impacted the lower left of the windshields. There were also some factors unique to each crash. Alcohol was a factor in the serious injury crash. The fatal crash occurred on a segment of city street (Hill east of State) that had been rated "2: very poor" on the city's [pavement condition dashboard](#).

In December, 2023, I sent emails inquiring about these crashes and what Spin might do to prevent future events like these to the following addresses at Spin: brandon@spin.pm, support@spin.pm, and brit.moller@spin.pm. I received no response.

Questions:

- How does Spin track crashes involving its riders?
- How common is the type of crash that occurred twice in Ann Arbor in 2023?
- Can Spin share the data it has for crashes involving its scooters?
- What is Spin doing to reduce the incidence and severity of crashes?
- Bird (Spin's parent company) has the [Safe Start](#) feature that is intended to prevent intoxicated people from using their scooters. Does Spin use this technology? Can we get it for Ann Arbor Spin users?
- Does Spin inform its Michigan riders that they may be cited or arrested for OWI if they use an e-scooter while intoxicated?
- Can Spin use its geofencing technology to prevent riding on very poor pavement, or to slow scooters or warn riders?
- [Miami, FL](#), [Brentwood, UK](#), [Kelowna, British Columbia](#), [Lexington, KY](#), and [Basildon, UK](#) all have city-specific pages about safely riding Spin scooters. Why doesn't Ann Arbor have a page?
- Is there a different email address where I should send future inquiries about how Spin might prevent future crashes involving their scooters?

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Helmet Usage

Background:

Spin and several other scooter providers issued a [joint press release](#) on best practices for regulating e-bike and e-scooter operators. One recommendation is that helmets should be encouraged but not mandatory. As support for this recommendation, the press release cites a [2015 study by Teschke, et al](#) which used aggregate data about bicycle crashes reported to Canadian hospitals to conclude that jurisdictions with mandatory helmet laws did not experience fewer hospitalizations for neck and head injuries for cyclists.

10. Helmets should be encouraged but not mandatory.

a. Scientific research shows no reliable correlation between mandatory helmet laws and improved rider safety. (Teschke et al, 2015)

i. Helmets create a false sense of safety among riders, drivers, and the public. Drivers are more likely to drive closer to riders wearing helmets. (Walker, 2007)

ii. Helmets are ineffective in protecting riders from car crashes – the largest cause of severe injuries and fatalities.

iii. There is safety in numbers. Where bikeshare is introduced, the number of people riding bicycles increases, which is associated with a decrease in the absolute number of bicycle accidents. (Fishman and Schepers, 2018) By contrast, mandatory helmet requirements discourage people from using micromobility, including private bicycles, so safety declines.

iv. Riders are reluctant to use shared helmets -particularly in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

b. Helmet-wearing mandates exacerbate existing social inequalities, leading to lower use of micromobility by underrepresented groups and disproportionate impact of enforcement.

i. Lower-income groups may be unable to purchase their own helmets or have limited access to retail outlets selling helmets, and groups that wear cultural or religious headgear are deterred from using micromobility.

ii. Bike laws, including mandatory helmet requirements, are disproportionately enforced against minority riders. (Wisniewski, 2018; Sanders et al, 2017)

Recommendation 10 from a joint press release from the companies Bird, Lime, Spin and Superhuman. Source: <https://www.spin.app/blog-posts/spin-lime-bird-and-superpedestrian-partner-to-share-best-practices-for-regulating-e-scooters-and-e-bikes-in-north-american-cities>

Helmets are also mentioned in a few places on the Spin website, but many of the links are broken. They were broken when I first browsed the Spin website in December, 2023 and they are still broken as of 4/21/2024. (Pictures below.)

The Spin website and marketing media show all Spin scooter riders wearing helmets. (Pictures below.) Even the person in [this video](#), who appears to give up on waiting for his bus and instead uses a nearby Spin scooter, wears the helmet he finds hooked onto the handlebars of the scooter.

Elsewhere in the joint press release, a study by [Arellano and Fang](#) is cited; it notes that the helmet usage observed in the course of their study was 56.4% for bike riders and 5.5% for scooter riders. My personal hour-long observation of scooter riders at the corner of North University and State St. on December 4, 2023 showed a similar number as the Arellano/Fang study--one out of 13 scooter riders (7.7%) wore a helmet.



Avoid situations that result in accidents, like riding in drivers' blind spots or while intoxicated

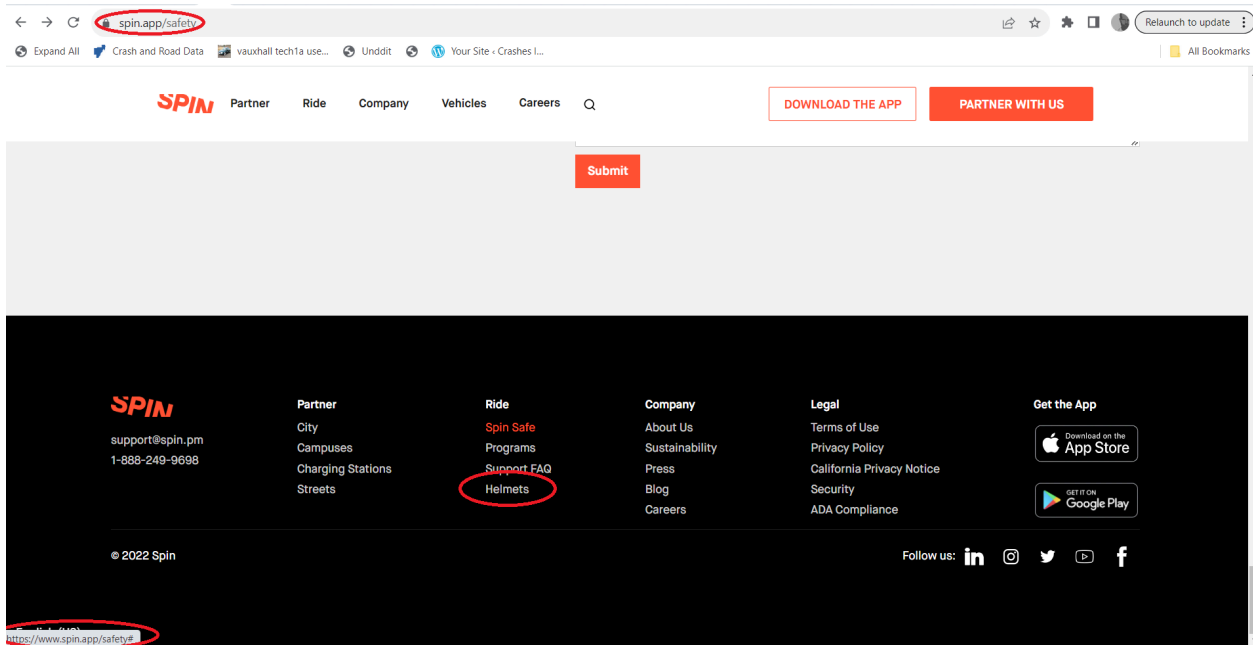
Screenshot taken from a Spin safety video. Source: <https://www.spin.app/safety>



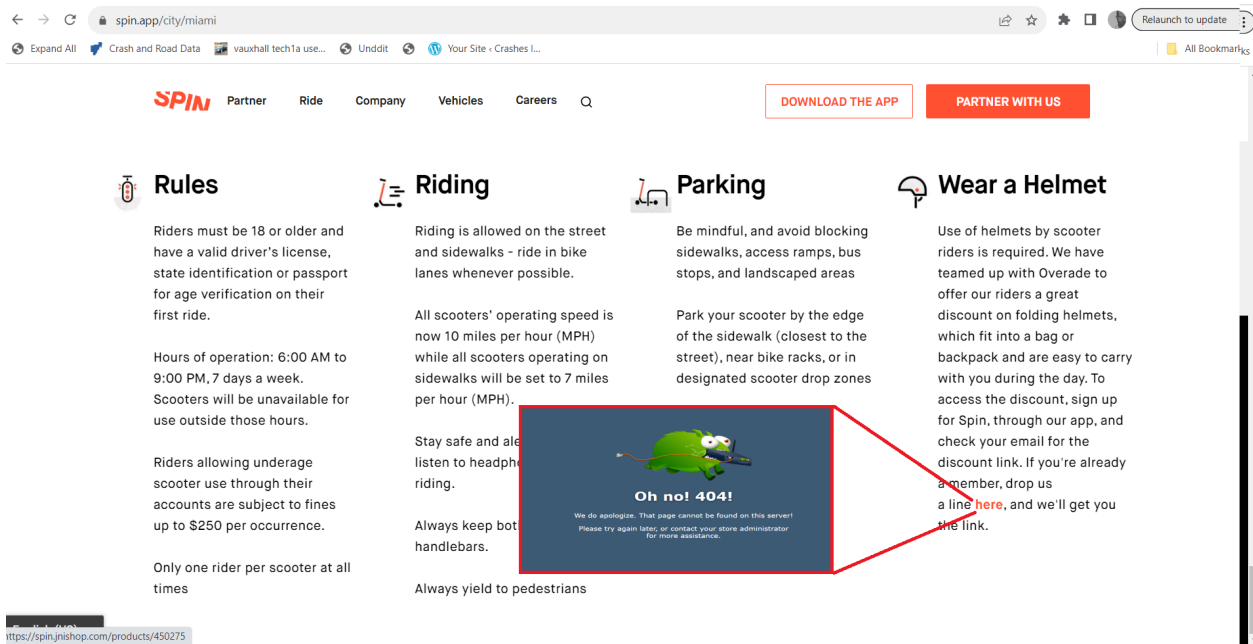
Always wear a helmet



Screenshot taken from a Spin safety video. Source: <https://www.spin.app/safety>



The footer on all of the pages of the Spin website includes a link for “Helmets” but on each of them, the link address points back to the referring page. Source: <https://www.spin.app/safety>.



The Miami page of the Spin website has a link for a deal on a folding helmet. But the link is broken. Source: <https://www.spin.app/city/miami>

Questions:

- Who is Spin expecting to do the encouragement for riders to wear helmets?
- What is Spin doing to encourage more riders to wear helmets? Is Spin tracking the results of their efforts?
- Has Spin done any helmet encouragement activities in other cities that they haven't done in Ann Arbor? If so, what were they? What was the outcome? Is Spin willing to do them in Ann Arbor?
- Why does Spin think that the Teschke study on cyclists in Canada would apply to scooter riders?
- How does Spin expect helmets to fit into the user experience of a scooter rental?
- What does Spin expect scooter riders to do with their helmets before and after a Spin ride?
- Does Spin know how many of their renters, as in the video, opt for a Spin scooter even though they originally planned for another mode, like the bus? What is that percent? Does Spin expect those people to have their helmets available just in case? Does Spin (or anyone) ever leave helmets on scooters for riders to use during their rentals, as is shown in the video?
- Does Spin believe that encouraging users to wear helmets will decrease the number of riders who decide to choose Spin instead of their original transportation plan?
- Why are the links labeled "helmet" on the Spin website all broken? How long have they been broken? When will they be fixed?
- Why does the Miami Spin safety page have a (broken) link to a helmet purchase deal that no other city's page has? When will the link to Miami's helmet purchase plan be fixed?

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Scooter Speed Limits

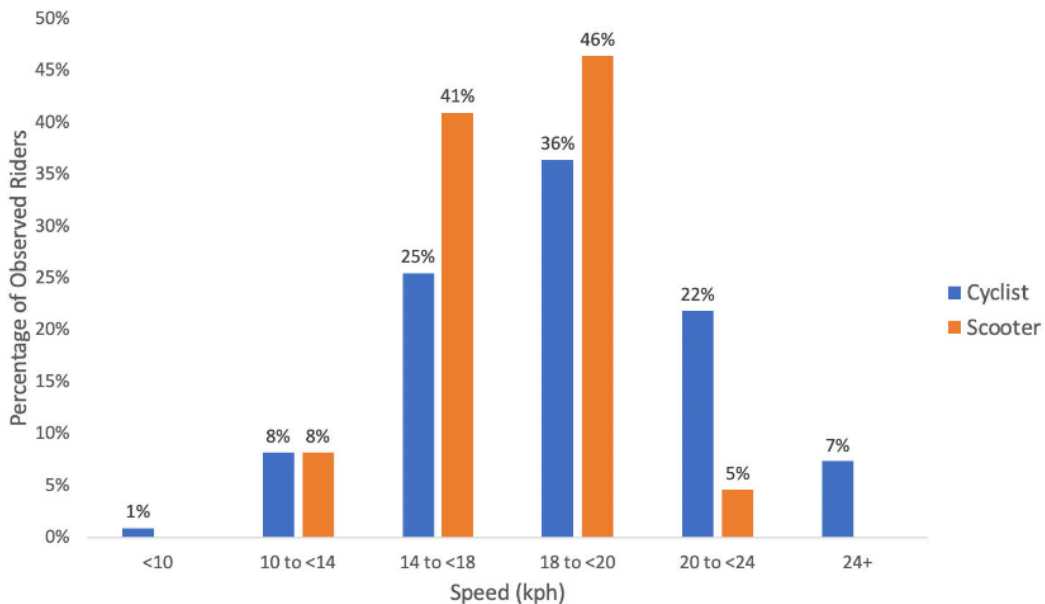
Background:

Recommendation 9 in the [joint press release](#) advocates for a speed limit of 15 mph (25 kph) “to ensure the safety of riders”, citing a [2019 study by Arellano and Fang](#). The Arellano/Fang report shows that all but the fastest 7% of **bike riders** rode SLOWER than 14.4 mph (24 kph), i.e. 93% of bike riders rode slower than 14.4 mph. The report does not even mention, much less support, the assertion that matching the speed of scooter riders with the fastest cyclists around them is the safest thing for anyone.

9. 15 mph speed limit to ensure the safety of riders.

- a. 15 mph vehicle speeds are consistent with other vehicles like bikes or e-bikes, allowing for safer riding that aligns with the pace of traffic. (Arellano and Fang, 2019)
- b. Riders are more likely to ride on sidewalks where speed is capped below 15 mph because they feel unsafe mixing with faster vehicles on the roadway.
- c. Based on our piloting of technology in many cities and data from third parties and cities, automatic speed reductions or throttling speeds on sidewalks is dangerous, as it forces riders onto unsafe streets and does not increase safety for pedestrians.

Recommendation 9 from a joint press release from the companies Bird, Lime, Spin and Superhuman. Source: <https://www.spin.app/blog-posts/spin-lime-bird-and-superpedestrian-partner-to-share-best-practices-for-regulating-e-scooters-and-e-bikes-in-north-american-cities>



Distribution of Bicyclist and E-Scooter Riders Speeds on Street.

Excerpted from the 2019 study by Arellano and Fang. Source:

https://findingspress.org/article/11210-sunday-drivers-or-too-fast-and-too-furious?attachment_id=27733

Questions:

- Why has Spin presented the Arellano/Fang study as supporting scooter speed limits of 15 mph?
- Since the Areallano/Fang study does not support speed limits above 15 mph, does Spin have any other justification or rationale for advocating for speeds limits this high?