

Slow-moving electric vehicles may be allowed on municipal roads

Urban Mobility Vehicles (UMVs) may be coming to municipal roads in the Town of Aurora.

A proposed bylaw is underway in accordance with Ontario's changing rules to meet provincial goals of eco-friendly and affordable transportation options, while keeping safety as a top priority.

The proposal allowing UMVs to be driven on municipal roads is part of a pilot project by the Ministry of Transportation (MTO).

UMVs are broadly defined as small, compact, enclosed, three-wheeled, slow-moving electric vehicles usually built with one seat, costing around \$9,000 and designed to be driven on the side of the road.

They emerged as a promising new form of sustainable transportation that can reduce traffic congestion, improve air quality, and promote healthy lifestyles, the motion report said.

The MTO has also piloted other types of micro mobility vehicles such as cargo e-bikes, electric kick-style scooters, low speed vehicles, golf carts, and large quadricycles, saying that the pilot project ensures the safe integration of a new vehicle.

Mayor Tom Mrakas proposed the motion allowing UMVs to be driven on municipal roads in the Town of Aurora. Ensuring the safety of all road users, including pedestrians, cyclists and other vehicles, the proposed bylaw will include provisions for insurance, licencing and registration of UMVs.

Daniel Lajeunesse from Stronach International spoke about the UMVs' provincial regulations at May 23's General Committee meeting, saying that UMVs are meant to be used on the side of the road and are "extremely safe."

"Just to repeat on the main points of what an urban mobility vehicle is, it is a vehicle that travels no more than 32 kilometers per hour, it is to be used on the side of the road, not paths, not in any other location, but the side of the road. They are meant to be extremely safe," he said.

"That safety is not just about the driver, but it's also for everybody around that vehicle as well. It is 1/4 the size of a regular vehicle, which means you can park four in a regular parking spot. These vehicles are never to be driven anywhere on sidewalks or any of those other concerns that might exist," he said.

Lajeunesse added that UMVs are "the best of both worlds," designed to be used like a bicycle to travel shorter distances even during colder months or when raining, costing around \$9,000.

"So, the vehicle really is meant to be that safe, affordable, reliable, innovative transport. That vehicle will be approximately \$9,000 CAD when it comes to market in a couple of months. And we really hope that Aurora will be the first to put these motions forward. And we are looking forward to leveraging what you do here today to go to other cities throughout the province," he said.

Premier Ford has shown support for the legislation and believes it's the best way to move forward, said Mayor Mrakas.

"They think this is the way of the future in regards to urban mobility vehicles within not just small municipalities, but essentially throughout the GTA. And so, I think that it behoves us to be prepared and have it ready to go so that the moment that the legislation is passed, that we're ready to move forward and move into the future," he said.

Ward 1 Councillor Ron Weese said he was in support of the motion and that the Town should be "front of line" in improving transportation and environment factors for the community.

Future opportunities to collaborate with Stronach International to get information and build engagement will be important for the Town, said Ward 4 Councillor Michael Thompson.

?I think there's an opportunity there to build that kind of partnership and ensure that not only are we doing some things independently but at the same time we're looking for joint opportunities to reach out to the public in a greater way. And so, I just think that that should be part of that engagement process,? he said.

Ward 2 Councillor Rachel Gilliland also expressed support for the motion and added that she hopes to engage the Town's Active Transportation Advisory Safety Committee when working with the public.

Staff will report back to Council within six months of hosting public meetings with a detailed report outlining the implementation plan for the proposed bylaw, and any necessary amendments or adjustments to ensure the safety and effectiveness of UMGs on municipal roads.

By Elisa Nguyen