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Contentious hearing could lead to Segway regulations in Boston

By *adamg* - 3/23/10 - 3:38 pm



Segway menace: Liz Flynn of City Square, Charlestown, gave Council several photos of pedestrians forced into the street by Urban Gliders. Company says it's moving training area to Cambridge.

If it were up to City Councilor Bill Linehan, only Paul Blart would be allowed to ride a Segway in the Boston area.

At a hearing on Segway use in Boston today, the South Boston councilor said Boston is too old and its streets and sidewalks simply too narrow to allow widespread Segway use. He said he would only favor their use in "large malls." He was joined in his concern by the Rose Kennedy Greenway and Faneuil Hall Marketplace, whose representatives call them a menace to pedestrians - and, in the case of the marketplace, even its elevators. Last year, a marketplace official said, a five-year-old was hit by a Segway and had to be taken to the hospital.

After an owner of Boston Gliders, which runs Segway tours, refused to commit to keep his vehicles off the Greenway at a hearing today, Police Superintendent-in-Chief Daniel Linskey said the matter was pretty simple: He will direct police to escort any Segway riders off the Greenway - and possibly issue them trespassing citations. This came after a Greenway official said Boston Gliders tour operators have refused to stop for uniformed Greenway personnel trying to get them out.

Even still, Linskey and other city officials said they would be willing to work with Segway to figure out a way to allow Segways on city streets - but strongly opposed the idea of letting them onto Boston sidewalks, except for use by people with mobility problems like Paul Widmark of Dorchester, paralyzed in a diving accident as a kid, who rode his Segway into the hearing room. He said Segways "really have changed my life," and have allowed him to go places with far greater ease.



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"It staggers me" that Segway hasn't performed federal safety tests or compiled stats on Segway safety, said Boston Transportation Commissioner Tom Tinlin - who once deliberately rammed current City Councilor Sal LaMattina with one of the vehicles.

Matt Dailida, a Segway consultant, blamed all the Segway perception problems in Boston on Boston Gliders, which he said is in no way associated with Segway. "The fact he is the face of Segway in the city of Boston is one we hope to change, starting today." Later, he called Boston Gliders' operation "appalling."

He said Cambridge - home of the state's only authorized Segway tour operator - has regulated Segways since 2000 with no problems, and said Boston had no problems either, until Boston Gliders started up. Dailida said Segway supports [a proposed law](#) that would call for regulation and licensing of Segway operators.

LaMattina said the issue pre-dates Boston Gliders - to a Segway crash in Charlestown last year caused by a distracted Segway rider waving at friends.

Meanwhile, Boston Segway, based in Cambridge, said it is looking at starting its own Segway tour operation in Boston - but only in cooperation with city officials.

Residents of City Square in Charlestown complained about Boston Gliders using their streets and sidewalks for storage and rider training. Liz Flynn said she's particularly concerned about Henley Street. "Henley Street is a one-block street, so people coming whipping around," Flynn said. "Someone is going to get hurt and I fear it's going to be a child."

Boston Glider said it is moving its Charlestown operation to Cambridge - but opening up a bike-tour place at the same location. It said it's being discriminated against - bike and foot-tour operators don't face the same level of scrutiny.

Boston Parks Commissioner Anontonia Pollak said park rangers in downtown parks are getting complaints from pedestrians. "Pedestrians are feeling enormously intimidated by them," especially when they ride in a clump and take over the sidewalks, rather than riding single file, she said.

LaMattina, who called for the hearing, said he's actually ridden a Segway twice: "I personally think that Segways are cool and kind of fun." But, he said, he is concerned about pedestrian safety. He said senior citizens in the North End have told them "they are afraid to walk on the sidewalk, because they're afraid they're going to be hit by a Segway."

Wendy Landman, executive director of [WalkBoston](#) said her group has opposed Segways on Boston sidewalks since 2004, and remains opposed to them as a potential safety issue. Imagine, she said, the Esplanade full of Segways.

Nancy Brennan, executive director of the Rose Kennedy Greenway, which has already banned bike riding on the linear park, said Segways don't belong on the Greenway, either. She said she's personally seen way too many Segway operators who are "very unsteady and very unfamiliar with the vehicles they are operating."

"And they are too quiet," she said. "One cannot hear them coming. People cannot get out of the way fast enough. If they have a dog on an extended leash, it gets very interesting."

Steve Spinetto, commissioner for persons with disabilities, said Segways "are actually an incredible boon for people with disabilities" - if they ride them.. But they're a potential threat to the handicapped who don't ride them because they might move more slowly - or be unable to see or hear them. Spinetto said vehicles that move at 12 mph can cause serious harm to pedestrians. "That's an accident waiting to happen."

Linskey said police are already having enough problems with "a distracted public" consisting of BlackBerry and cell-phone user who are not paying enough attention to their surroundings and getting plowed into by cars. Throwing Segways into the mix could cause even more problems, he

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said, adding, however, that he is confident the city could come up with regulations to allow safe Segway use - by people above a certain age. "We would not allow 14-, 12-, 10-year olds out in traffic to drive a moped," he said.

"We do believe that sidewalks are for pedestrians, Tinlin said, adding that would also include people with mobility issues who need a Segway to get around.

"One thing you don't want to do is have government snuff out all ideas," Tinlin said. He pointed to pedicabs as an example of a novel vehicle the city was willing to allow. "We don't want to be so restrictive that everyone is afraid to come to the city," he said. So there might be a place for Segways - but in the street, not on the sidewalk, he said, and with regulation of such issues as routing, location and helmet use.

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Comments

Not a bad idea

By [SwirlyGrrl](#) - 3/23/10 - 6:39 pm

This removing of motorized vehicles from undersized infrastructure that wasn't built for them? That could catch on!

As for this:

strongly opposed the idea of letting them onto Boston sidewalks, except for use by people with mobility problems like Paul Lidmark of Dorchester

Somebody needs to go read some ADA stuff. Requiring people to "prove" that they have a disability is a big no-no!

[reply](#)

I think you're missing the point, please reread.

By anon (not verified) - 3/23/10 - 6:58 pm

Isn't the point more that large groups of segway riders crowding narrow sidewalks and thus forcing people on foot, in wheelchairs, and what have you, into the street is not an ideal situation in a crowded city? No need to get fired up just because Boston residents are asking that segway tour companies teach their tourist customers to ride through the city with a wee bit more common courtesy to folks on sidewalks! Single file might be a great idea... I think most of us learned that one in kindergarten.

[reply](#)

Special Plates?

By [BlackKat](#) - 3/23/10 - 7:10 pm

That is true about the ADA stuff. I would imagine the only legal situation would be to add a licensing requirement to all Segways the way some cities (thankfully not Boston) do for all bicycles. Then make a handicapped plate version in addition to the normal license plates.

[reply](#)

o rly

By Lanny Budd - 3/24/10 - 9:44 am

"Requiring people to "prove" that they have a disability is a big no-no!"

So all those tickets to people parking in handicapped spaces without a handicapped tag are invalid because the state can't force people to prove they have a disability?

I am as pro cutting edge high tech as anyone, but I think these urban Segways are a bad idea. They are wide, heavy, can go way too fast for a sidewalk, and are mostly driven by beginners who should be walking anyway. We have an obesity epidemic and here comes the modern-day version of those mobile couches humans occupied in Walle? Please.

So, yeah, I think that you can use a Segway - if you have one of those blue handicapped tags on it.

[reply](#)

Basic ADA case law 101

By SwirlyGrrl - 3/24/10 - 10:02 am

It isn't about your opinion or some city politician's grand reactive ideas or mine for that matter. You don't have to have a special clearance to use a wheel chair, or prove disability to use a service dog. This is well established legal precedent. Your inability to discern the rules for mobility aids from motor vehicle regulations is pure ignorance. Segways are a mobility aid, and you don't need to *prove* you need a mobility aid or get to be assigned which mobility aid you get.

Google is your friend Lanny. Look it up for yourself.

[reply](#)

Basic reading 101

By Flack Flackwell (not verified) - 3/24/10 - 10:16 am

Yeah, but Swirly, nobody rides a wheelchair or acquires a seeing-eye dog for fun. That was Lanny's point. And while the bar may be low for getting a handicapped placard for a vehicle-- I believe you simply need to say that you require one-- at least that involves a very basic procedure where someone raises their hand, says they have a need, and that need is accommodated. That's most definitely not being done here, with these Segway tours-- all this talk about how they allow the handicapped to go on sightseeing tours is just asinine-- I'm a flack, and even I'm amazed that people can say that with a straight face.

As for it "not being about opinions, ideas, etc.", you're right, it's not, but maybe it's time you took your own advice. Stop calling people ignorant simply because they disagree with you-- it takes away from argument that might, otherwise, sometimes, have some shred of merit. Not in this case, though-- you're obviously just having a cranky morning and need to take it out on someone.

[reply](#)

Ignorance = lack of knowledge and understanding

By SwirlyGrrl - 3/24/10 - 8:17 pm

I didn't say Lanny was ignorant because Lanny disagreed with me.

I said that Lanny was ignorant because Lanny was wrong according to decades of case law. Not an insult, but a stateful description.

My opinion doesn't matter here. How the ADA has been written and interpreted for nearly 20 years does.

[reply](#)

Aren't allowed to ask for proof, can ask though

By [eeka](#) - 3/24/10 - 10:19 pm

In most matters of public accommodations, it's acceptable to ask someone if something is needed because of a disability, but once that's established, it violates the ADA to ask further questioning. For instance, a shopkeeper with a "no animals" policy can ask if an animal in the store is needed because of a disability. Once the person says "yes," the matter is over. In more long-term situations like employment and housing, someone can be required to bring a letter from a licensed provider stating that the accommodation is needed because of a disability, but can't require that the letter get into the specifics of the disability. Sidewalks would most likely fall under public accommodations, in which case a police officer or other official could ask if it was a mobility device.

I think the service animal situation is a better analogy than the wheelchair one; people have animals for reasons other than as service animals, and it's not unfathomable that someone might want to take their pet into a place of business. But really, there's not an epidemic of people pretending their animals are service animals, and I don't think a whole lot of people even know the laws around service animals and would be confident enough in their knowledge to try to sneak one into a store. There are even signs all over the place saying "no animals allowed except service animals," but few people take advantage of this. Likewise, if Segways are banned except those assisting people with mobility, not a lot of people are going to take advantage of this.

[reply](#)

99 and 44/100%

By [Lanny Budd](#) - 3/24/10 - 1:03 pm

"Your inability to discern the rules for mobility aids from motor vehicle regulations is pure ignorance."

Thanks. It's been awhile since anyone called me pure. And I'm not unable, I am unwilling. The state can declare a Segway a motor vehicle, then bam and poof, the rules change.

[reply](#)

However

By [eeka](#) - 3/24/10 - 10:20 pm

It might violate federal laws for them to do so, just as it would if they declared motorized wheelchairs motor vehicles.

[reply](#)

Concern trolls all around

By [Kaz](#) - 3/23/10 - 8:32 pm

"...I fear for the children..."

"...someone might get hurt..."

"...people seem scared..."

"...what if they're on a cell phone..."

"...they're too quiet and a dog might get spooked..."

Soooooo, basically, NONE of you came prepared with ANY sort of ACTUAL indication that Segways are a hazard to pedestrians. There was ONE (singular, solo, uno, one, 1, less than two...) example where a 5 year old in Fanueil Hall was struck and went to the hospital (no word on if he was *actually* injured). There was also an accident (presumably car) caused by a distracted Segway driver...but no mention of injuries, which suggests there were none to note.

I think cars should be restricted from the North End. They have proven to be far more deadly, take up way too much room considering the narrow roadways, and what if they hit a kid!? I think a 5 year old was hit once by a car in the city!! SEE!?! Also, they're enormously intimidating to pedestrians and "accidents waiting to happen". Let's get on this *immediately*, Mr. Tinlin and LaMattina!

[reply](#)

In all fairness

By [BlackKat](#) - 3/23/10 - 9:44 pm

Well you know I think a some people don't really feel threatened by Segways as much as it is that they think people who use them are lazy and/or nerdy. Which to be fair is mostly the case. And for that reason alone want them out of sight and out of mind.

Remember it is still popular amongst skateboarders to pour abuse on rollerbladers. And bike messengers have been known to heap abuse on "civilian" bike riders as being unsafe simpleton clods. Why should pedestrians not be entitled to a little elitism themselves?

[reply](#)

It's not elitism when the subject is clearly inferior

By anon (not verified) - 3/24/10 - 5:43 pm

It's realism. I think it's about time we started attaching all kinds of despicable behavior to Segway riders: Segway riders are Yankee fans; Segway riders are vegans; Segway riders are global warming deniers; Segway riders kidnapped the Lindbergh baby.

[reply](#)

"cars should be restricted from the North End"

By [Sarcastic Sam](#) - 3/24/10 - 10:57 am

ABSOLUTELY! right on, amen, I support that 100%. Emergency vehicles only, plus deliveries during select hours. That would be fantastic, would be great for that neighborhood. It's also never going to happen in a million years, but a DAMN good idea.

Same for Beacon Hill. Our most historic neighborhoods should be preserved and presented to visitors as closely as they were back in the day...which means no cars whenever possible.

[reply](#)

For that matter, why we don't also mandate that

By [roadman](#) - 3/24/10 - 12:44 pm

people living and walking in these neighborhoods must be dressed in Colonial-era clothing as well? After all, people in the North End didn't wear shirts that said Tommy Hilfinger in 1790.

There may be many good reasons to restrict trucks, cars, and motorized vehicles such as Segways from certain neighborhoods. However, to argue they should be banned because there were no Segways in this neighborhood during the Revolutionary War is just a ridiculous argument.

I'm all for encouraging legitimate historical preservation. But when people start using preservation as a flimsy justification to unduly restrict how people can go about their daily business, perhaps we need to re-evaluate the laws and rules governing the preservation efforts.

[reply](#)

"just a ridiculous argument" that I did not make

By [Sarcastic Sam](#) - 3/24/10 - 4:07 pm

".....to argue they should be banned because there were no Segways in this neighborhood during the Revolutionary War is just a ridiculous argument."

Hey yeah...that IS a ridiculous argument. Good thing I didn't say that at all. I didn't even mention Segways or even acknowledge them in my post. I *did* nudge the thread tangentially away from the original topic, but that's a specialty of mine!

I want the North End AND Beacon Hill to be pedestrian zones, regardless of the Segway, mokay? I think people can better go about their daily businesses in those neighborhoods sans automobiles, with an exception for handicapped accessibility, emergency vehicles, pre-determined delivery times etc. I also said it would never happen, because I know damn well that 99% of the public insists upon the right to drive and double-park their stupid assed cars around the narrow streets in neighborhoods where there's hardly room for pedestrians.

[reply](#)

You stated, and I quote

By [roadman](#) - 3/25/10 - 10:40 am

Our most historic neighborhoods should be preserved and presented to

visitors as closely as they were back in the day...which means no cars whenever possible.

This sounds to me like you believe we should ban cars in certain neighborhoods just because they are considered to be historic.

[reply](#)

Not "Just Because"but....and...

By [Sarcastic Sam](#) - 3/25/10 - 1:28 pm

Cars should be banned (or severely restricted) from those areas Not JUST because they are historic. And certainly not because of the Segway, as you originally implied was my argument. I've felt this way long before those things were invented.

But sure, that's part of the reason why. Like many historical areas, the NE and Beacon Hill have high density of buildings, lots of foot traffic, but narrow streets and narrow sidewalks. The attractiveness of those neighborhoods, in my unpopular opinion, would be enhanced if cars were not snaking through the area and lined up on each curb.

[reply](#)

Yes, you point out several good reasons that can easily

By [roadman](#) - 3/25/10 - 3:13 pm

stand on their own merit for considering neighborhood restrictions or prohibitions on cars and trucks. However, whether an area is considered to be "historic" or not has absolutely nothing to do with any of the whole list of legitimate and practical reasons to consider restricting vehicular traffic from any given area. To interject a neighborhood's supposed historical past into the argument, therefore, creates an inappropriate bias because it's so subjective.

And yes, Beacon Hill and the North End are clearly long established neighborhoods with lots of period structures. However, in general the term "historic" is vastly overused and mis-applied. Such as invoking it as a means to justify an action that, no matter how well intentioned, severely restricts how people conduct business in a community, which the type of ban you suggest would do (and no, I'm not saying we shouldn't consider such a suggestion, I just don't think it's a practical solution).

As one of my best friends, who has a Masters in History, once said to me:

Some old things are just old things.

[reply](#)

Not out to recreate.....history

By [Sarcastic Sam](#) - 3/25/10 - 4:35 pm

Yeah, my thinking is not so much re-creating what the area looked like x-100 years ago, although to send the area's appearance somewhat in

that direction is a good thing. To go all Plimouth Plantation on the north end is impractical and even silly--I'm not THAT much of a history buff. But a pedestrian zone, even if it's only on Hanover Street, would be a much more pleasant experience, I think.

We had a golden opportunity to make the Greenway more pedestrian friendly and I was pissed off to learn that they were moving all that car traffic underground only to allow, what is it... 6-8 lanes of ADDITIONAL car traffic along Atlantic Avenue? I will admit that Atlantic Avenue today appears better than I'd expected, but it could have been much better.

[reply](#)

"actually injured"?

By Ambulance chaser (not verified) - 3/24/10 - 2:14 pm

So... you're saying that the kid was faking it for the insurance money? Personally, whenever I witness a small child fling themselves to the ground after being struck by a motor vehicle, I just tell them to get up, stop crying, and take a lap around the field.

Seriously, I've never met anyone whose entire intellectual output was either profound and deep or just batshit crazy-- no half measures for you. Bravo, ya crazy bastid.

[reply](#)

The kid? No.

By Kaz - 3/24/10 - 5:23 pm

But I doubt mom thanked the Segway driver for teaching her kid a lesson in looking what he was running out in front of. There are people who ride ambulances to get their prescriptions filled. I'm not saying the 5-year old was a script junkie, either. But you don't actually HAVE to be dying or even injured slightly to ride in an ambulance. If you call them, they will come. If they come, you can demand they get you to the ER for medical treatment. It's their prerogative at that point, but the kid might have had a bump on his head...so they wanted to get someone to look at it. It probably turned out to be just a bump. Oh no!

[reply](#)

Why are you so convinced that the kid was at fault?

By Ambulance chaser (not verified) - 3/24/10 - 5:37 pm

Is it because you were abused as a kid? I can't say that I'd blame them-- I'm sure you were a horrible child-- but if so, your stance is a bit ironic... but anyway, I think the typical, average person, five years old or otherwise, can have a reasonable expectation of not getting plowed into by someone on a motor vehicle while they're in a car-free area. And, generally speaking, if an adult is operating a motor vehicle or doing anything else around five-year-olds, the burden of responsibility falls on... wait for it... the adult. The kid was FIVE, for fuck's sake-- the standard where I grew up was that up to a certain age, kids couldn't be expected to get out of the way all that quickly.

[reply](#)

Weird

By [Kaz](#) - 3/25/10 - 12:36 am

You have a real predilection for wanting to talk about 5 year olds. You should get that checked out. I'm pretty sure I was just talking about how the parent of the 5 year old is probably to blame. You know...the adult.

You chase ambulances...do you often catch them? In the teeth? It would explain a lot.

[reply](#)

Photo doesn't show any pedestrians forced into the street

By [Ron Newman](#) - 3/23/10 - 9:15 pm

Looks to me like the Segways are stationary and that there is plenty of empty space between them.

[reply](#)

Look just to the right at the top

By [adamg](#) - 3/23/10 - 9:18 pm

See the lady in the street?

[reply](#)

Isn't she also riding a Segway?

By [Ron Newman](#) - 3/23/10 - 9:28 pm

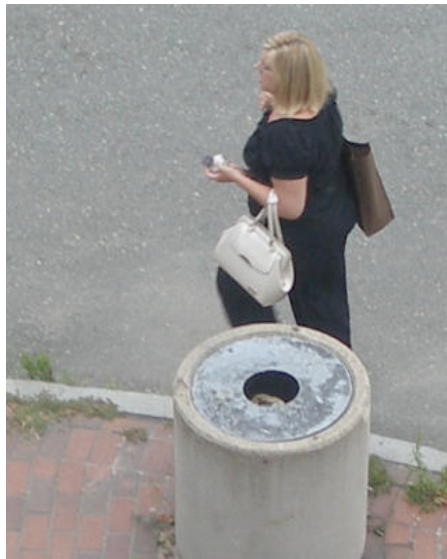
Her hands are in a position that looks similar to that of the Segway riders. I can't tell for sure because the trash barrel blocks view of her legs and feet. If she's not on a Segway, then she appears to be a pedestrian leaving the crosswalk and about to step up onto the sidewalk.

[reply](#)

No, not on Segway

By [adamg](#) - 3/23/10 - 9:32 pm

Here's a less shrunken image, showing just her:



[reply](#)

Oh noes!

By [Kaz](#) - 3/24/10 - 12:29 am

Look at her hiding behind that trash barrel in case one of those "shaky" Segway riders comes "racing around the corner" and plows her over!

I bet she cries in a heap in the corner of her apartment whenever she thinks she hears a Segway: The Silent Killer creeping up behind her in the bedroom.

[reply](#)

Is that

By Big Baby Jesus (not verified) - 3/24/10 - 3:52 pm

Michele McPhee?

[reply](#)

Wow

By [SwirlyGrrl](#) - 3/23/10 - 9:30 pm

So I guess there must be thousands of invisible segways clogging the sidewalks in the financial district. How else to explain so many wool-coated ramblers wandering around the asphalt when there are sidewalks and crosswalks and lights to guide them otherwise!

[reply](#)

You know, that looks like

By [dvdoff](#) - 3/23/10 - 10:51 pm

a shot from the mall in the original "Dawn of the Dead"

[reply](#)

moving to cambridge?

By [Brett](#) - 3/23/10 - 11:58 pm

Company says it's moving training area to Cambridge.

Ooooooooooh, looooooooooolz. That'll end well. Also, wtf? They're going to cart people to Cambridge, then drive them back?

The People's Republic of Cambridge is blowing a gasket already and doesn't know why...

[reply](#)

Do Segways scare chickens?

By [SwirlyGrrl](#) - 3/24/10 - 9:04 am

Will the chickens cross the road irresponsibly as a result?

What about Henways?

[reply](#)

I'll do it

By [Michael](#) - 3/24/10 - 9:05 am

Hey, Swirly, what's a henway? (And is it related to a Grecian urn?)

[reply](#)

What's a Henway?

By [SwirlyGrrl](#) - 3/24/10 - 9:11 am

About 3-4 lbs.

[reply](#)

Segways...

By [Mary \(not verified\)](#) - 3/24/10 - 9:27 am

Segways are for nerds.

[reply](#)

Not sure about other

By [anon \(not verified\)](#) - 3/24/10 - 9:51 am

Not sure about other companies, like Geico, but Progressive Segway HT insurance is offered in

all states except:

- * Massachusetts
- * Washington, D.C.

Wonder if there was a discussion on how that impacts our policies...same as the bike messengers...

Just saying :-)

[reply](#)

Umm...

By WhoDat? (not verified) - 3/24/10 - 12:42 pm

This is all well and good, but the folks behind the Segway weighed in on this weeks ago. The concept works in places like Chicago, which has the thoroughfares to accommodate such tours, but even [Segway](#) admits Boston is problematic at best -- especially in the way Boston Gliders is approaching the market.

[reply](#)

No driving on the median strip!

By Arborway - 3/24/10 - 12:52 pm

Keep Segways off the Rose Kennedy Greenway!

[reply](#)

Society for the Ethical Treatment of Lazy Segway Riders

By anon (not verified) - 3/24/10 - 1:10 pm

This faux outrage over the supposed trampling of rights of segway riders is absurd! Aren't there more worthy causes to take on? How about advocating for the rights of the homeless or battered women for example? It's a big world out there, break out of your small bubble and experience it!

[reply](#)

Chimpanzee riding on a Segway

By JohnAKeith - 3/27/10 - 12:24 pm

This is what the internet was made for:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xp9Gm-aRe5A>

[reply](#)

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