

Between renting and buying, Unagi offers personal scooters with a subscription

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Credit: CC0 Public Domain

A small California startup says it might have the answer to getting scooters into more hands for contact-free transportation: a subscription plan.

Unagi will let you take home a \$1,000 [electric scooter](#) you can fold up and use for short transportation around town for \$39 monthly, or you can buy one for a grand. The [subscription service](#) is launching in Los Angeles and New York, then Unagi plans to expand to other cities.

Co-founder David Hyman says his customers didn't want to rent the type of scooters scattered around urban streets from Bird, Lime and Uber because of concerns over germs left behind. They wanted ownership, but many weren't open to plucking down \$1,000.

So Hyman came up with Unagi All-Access. During COVID-19, he went from selling "hundreds" of scooters monthly to "thousands," but he still saw a need to get even more out there.

"The normal use case with our [scooter](#) is that you take it everywhere you go," he says. "We're designed for portability."

His scooters can be packed up and carried inside. The idea for the company came when Hyman rented a short-term scooter in Berkeley to go to Whole Foods Market.

"I had just bought an expensive pint of ice cream, and when I couldn't find another scooter, I ended up walking home with melted ice cream," Hyman says. "I thought why don't I just own one of these things, not to mention the urban blight" of all those e-scooters taking up valuable space on city sidewalks.

That's the business model for the rental scooters. You pick it up on an urban street and drop it off, then someone else rents it.

Though scooter sales have been respectable in the two years Hyman has had Unagi, he says he wanted to reach a wider audience and thought subscriptions would help achieve the goal.

Hyman says the \$39.99 monthly rate works out to an average \$1.40 daily price, and that's way cheaper than the average \$5 Lime or Bird ride, or the \$5.50 round-trip charge for the New York subway.

The pandemic has caused a shift in people's perception of public transportation, raising fears of being in a crowded space. "There's been this kind of seismic shift towards personal transportation," Hyman says.

A street scooter rental is "grossly inferior," he says, in that the batteries are often weak, "not to mention the issues with sharing. When it's your scooter, it's yours, and your germs and not somebody else's. It's no different than owning a bicycle, and you get a little bit of exercise."

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