

## **Inquiry into e-mobility safety and use in Queensland**

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I am a regular walker, cyclist and car driver in the Brisbane CBD and inner suburbs, and less regularly in the outer suburbs. I'm also a very occasional user of rental e-scooters. Please find my thoughts below on some of the enquiry terms of reference.

***1. Benefits of e-mobility (including both Personal Mobility Devices (PMDs), such as e-scooters and e-skateboards, as well as e-bikes) for Queensland;***

I believe e-bikes are a good alternative for people who, for whatever reason, don't ride non-electric bikes. They follow the same well-established rules as other bicycles, they can be ridden legally on most roads, and the locations where they are used are the same as for other bicycles. Like ordinary bicycles, the use of e-bikes can help to reduce car traffic and in theory provide the user some health benefits from an active transport choice, ie by pedalling (although often high-powered e-bikes do not require any pedalling and hence don't provide this benefit).

On the other hand I struggle to see how e-scooters provide much benefit to anybody except for the companies that sell or rent them or the councils that take income from those companies. The owners tend to use them as an alternative to walking or cycling but I don't believe the use of e-scooters has much impact on getting people out of cars and it has little impact on improving health through exercise. There are numerous negative impacts of e-scooters – chiefly regarding safety, amenity and waste. In terms of benefit to the community, I believe the use of e-scooters in Brisbane has an overall negative impact, though in a large part this is due to the lack of suitable active transport routes/infrastructure where they are used.

***2. Safety issues associated with e-mobility use, including increasing crashes, injuries, fatalities, and community concerns;***

Rental scooters are regularly placed by company staff at key locations or intersections where pedestrians and active transport users pass or congregate, and they regularly block up these spaces and make them dangerous and more difficult to navigate for everybody. One example of this is at the bottom of the Goodwill Bridge next to QUT – the various rental scooter companies line up tens of scooters around the sides of this intersection every weekday morning and afternoon, and these parked scooters narrow the intersection significantly and get in the way of everybody passing through. It gets even worse at busy times when people are trying to get on and off these scooters and invariably stand in the way of the passing people, bikes and scooters while attending to the rental of the scooter. The same happens at other areas of high pedestrian and cyclist activity around the CBD, including the South Bank side of the Goodwill Bridge, next to Howard Smith Wharves and on the CBD side of the Kangaroo Point green bridge. This situation is like allowing cars to park in the busiest traffic intersections – something that would never be allowed on the roads but for some reason is allowed in pedestrian areas.

Rental scooters, and many private scooters, travel faster than the average pedal powered cyclist. Riders of rental scooters are often inexperienced and unpredictable. Although Brisbane City Council specifies that the maximum e-scooter speed limit is 25 km/h on separated paths and 12 km/h on footpaths, from what I can see day-to-day, every rental scooter now goes faster than 25 km/h at all times and I would guess that the maximum speed has been increased by the rental scooter companies at some point since they were first introduced. Given the lack of separated infrastructure for cycling/scooters and pedestrians, fast-moving scooters invariably are a menace to pedestrians.

Most of Brisbane's footpaths are not even wide enough for two people to walk past each other in different directions, made worse by bus stops, rubbish bins, cars parked in driveways across the footpath, commercial business A-frame advertising signs, restaurant and cafe chairs and tables, etc, all taking up footpath space. On top of all that, there are now scooter riders on the footpaths, moving much faster than pedestrians along these paths, and parked rental scooters are often left in the middle of the paths. Compared to any pedestrian a scooter with or without its rider is a heavy vehicle and pedestrians must get out of the way. Unfortunately there is so little space on the footpaths that there is not much room for pedestrians to get out of the way.

Although of course there are some careful and responsible scooter users, most of the time I believe scooters are, at best, an annoyance to the community and, at worst, dangerous. For people who are not young and mobile, I imagine that the presence of scooters on footpaths (whether in motion or parked) is a deterrent from walking and might push these people to car transport.

Allowing scooters on more roads would be safer for pedestrians but Brisbane transport planning and transport routes are chiefly about private cars at the expense of active transport of any kind, and being a road user on any kind of active transport vehicle is dangerous and unpleasant. The focus of transport in the CBD and inner suburbs should be to encourage active transport, by prioritising active transport over driving of private cars and over parking of private cars. This would encourage people to use more active transport, including e-bikes and e-scooters, rather than driving, and it would make the use of e-scooters more acceptable to the community if there were separated paths or lanes for fast-moving active transport vehicles like bikes, e-bikes and e-scooters, so that they did not use or block the limited pedestrian facilities.

I am aware that medical professionals generally lament the high rate of crashes and injuries from e-scooters but I think the committee should be careful to note that the use of another "acceptable" form of transport, ie cars, also leads to many crashes and injuries and vast sums of public money are spent on making roads safer for cars. I think the problem is more about the lack of suitable infrastructure and routes for active transport rather than the fact that people are using e-scooters.

***3. Issues associated with e-mobility ownership, such as risk of fire, storage and disposal of lithium batteries used in emobility, and any consideration of mitigants or controls;***

I don't know how long e-mobility batteries are likely to last, but I know that rental scooters are regularly thrown out and replaced with new ones, so I expect that waste from e-scooters, including their batteries, could be a significant issue. However Australia has a consumption and waste problem in general and it's not limited to e-scooters. One way of improving that could be to legislate that product manufacturers are required to take back their products at end-of-life and deal with the waste themselves.

Other waste issues include the large number of rental scooter helmets left lying all over the place that are likely disposed of in landfill.

***4. Suitability of current regulatory frameworks for PMDs and ebikes, informed by approaches in Australia and internationally;***

I'd suggest that looking at how other countries deal with regulation, waste, and road rules for e-mobility would be a really good idea. In particular I think it would be worth looking at countries or cities where active transport is encouraged and prioritised, such as in different cities in the Netherlands and Scandinavia.

***5. Effectiveness of current enforcement approaches and powers to address dangerous riding behaviours and the use of illegal devices;***

I think current enforcement is quite haphazard, if it exists at all. There are many high-powered scooters (and some high-powered e-bikes) all around the city every day, using the bike paths and footpaths and parking in office buildings. They zoom along the various footpaths and bike paths, some at speeds of over 60km/h. Apart from the users themselves, surely there should be some consequences for companies that sell these scooters?

Rental scooters are regularly seen carrying more than one person and users rarely wear helmets. Both are technically illegal but I suggest it's not a valuable use of police time to enforce such rules, and if rules aren't being enforced then maybe the presence of these rules should be questioned.

Overall, the problem with enforcement is that it treats symptoms rather than the problem. The problem is that our streets are choked with cars and that walking is generally unpleasant due to the priority for cars and the lack of good pedestrian infrastructure. That's because Brisbane's transport planning continues to prioritise the use of private cars and car parking over any other form of transport (public transport or active transport). If there was a focus on making the city safe and useable for active transport, then there would be space made for pedestrians and space made for e-

transport options and scooters would have somewhere else to be other than on footpaths made for pedestrians. And rental scooters would have somewhere else to park other than on footpaths made for pedestrians.

### ***7. Communication and education about device requirements, rules, and consequences for unsafe use; and***

I think policing of rules is not the answer – the bigger problem is that the city planning is focused almost exclusively on private cars and car parking and that active transport infrastructure is inadequate. This is the bigger thing that needs to change.

Our entire transport system favours cars. At every intersection, traffic lights favour cars. If you're not in a car, you need to push a button and generally wait one full traffic light cycle to cross almost every road. Cars only wait half a cycle. If a pedestrian needs to cross an intersection in two directions, they generally must wait more cycles. A surprising number of intersections don't even allow pedestrian or active transport users to cross on every side, adding to the time it takes to cross an intersection if you're not a road user. When you can cross, you often have turning drivers aggressively wanting you to hurry up and get out of their way. Pedestrians experience this every time and in every direction that they cross an intersection. Trees are often removed to widen roads and, as private property is developed, fewer trees are shading footpaths, with the result that footpaths are often hot and unpleasant. It's not uncommon for stormwater pipes from private inner-suburban properties to discharge onto the footpath, and bad drainage on roads means quite a number of locations where passing cars, buses and trucks spray water on pedestrians using the adjacent footpaths when there is rain. Bridges for active transport users are mostly not covered and those that are have grossly inadequate coverings, so they're hot in the sun and wet in the rain. Car parking has priority everywhere and there are quite a few locations where parked cars block access to footpaths (one example is the NW corner of the Supreme and District Court in the Brisbane CBD, where the footpath is actually a car park). Footpaths are not as well maintained as roadways, so they are often uneven. Users of footpaths have to go around bus stops, rubbish bins, cars parked in driveways across the footpath, commercial business A-frame advertising signs, restaurant and cafe chairs and tables, and parked e-scooters left on the footpath. Footpaths are closed whenever there is an adjacent construction project...

In short, being an active transport user, particularly a pedestrian, really sucks in this city, and with that in mind it's not surprising that people are either renting or buying (often high-powered) e-scooters which shorten commuting time and allow some shortcuts to get above the unpleasantness that being a pedestrian entails. Most problems with e-scooters could be solved by Brisbane and other Qld cities first looking at the entire transport picture and improving the alternatives to private car use. By keeping the priority and focus and spending on private car use with almost zero focus on active transport, it's no surprise that active transport vehicles have more and more conflict with pedestrians, safety, regulations and enforcement.