

Inquiry into e-mobility safety and use in Queensland

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Thank you for the opportunity to address these new vehicles. Young people are ill-prepared to operate these technologies without training and regulation. Judging from my experience here in Noosa, immature, irresponsible driving is going to cause some serious injuries and perhaps even some deaths. Some suggestions for regulating these vehicles will be mentioned.

Differentiation of types

There are quite different characteristics of these vehicles and they need to be treated individually.

1. E-bike: The safest type is the “pedal-assist” bicycle, which requires the rider to operate the vehicle like a bicycle. It has a traditional frame and is not very amenable to additional riders. It fits generally into the existing bicycle culture.
2. E-bike: The “fat tire bike” is not really a bicycle at all. The motor can power the vehicle without pedal assistance. Its maximum speeds are higher, given that simply claiming “for off-road use” can get the governor raised to 55kmph. These are in my view actually lightweight motorcycles, with lights and heavier brake systems. The pedals are a rarely used appendage.
3. E-scooter: These designs – powered skateboards – are dangerous. They have weak stopping power due to their light weight and usually minimal braking systems. Additionally, the posture of these vehicles leaves the rider quite exposed in a collision, and the limited maneuverability leaves little room for avoidance in a traffic crisis.
4. E-motorbikes: Actually, in my eye these are simply *motorcycles* powered by electricity and are currently covered by normal licensing and road rules. Other electric vehicles should have portions of these types of regulation, depending on the type, 1-3.

Riders and their behavior

Type 1 attracts bicyclists, and they need the least regulation. There are few times I’ve seen this type of commuter acting irresponsibly. Speeds are low; consideration for pedestrians, crosswalks and signage are normal.

Type 2: Fat tire bikes are a scourge. Some riders are adults, but many are underage, sometimes lack helmets, have one or even two passengers, frequently speed and treat paths and roadways like off-road courses. It is rare to ever see pedals used. Youngsters ride them like unicycles and perform stunts that shouldn’t be done on public roadways. On footpaths they threaten and frighten pedestrians, cut corners, cross grass, jump curbs and weave through traffic, at times crossing roadways with little attention to traffic and lots of abandon.

Type 3: They are sometimes seen on streets, in bike lanes. The real danger comes when a large adult is zooming along the footpath at the riverfront park, weaving in and out of strolling people and animals. I’ve seen emergency situations where the rider jumps off and the e-scooter sails on down the path. Animals can be at particular risk.

Suggestions

For all riders, helmets should be mandatory.

E-bike type 1: I would suggest registration of the vehicle be mandatory for a small fee, with a numbered sticker issued that must be visible on the vehicle. This would also help deal with theft.

E-bike type 2: As these are simply super lightweight motorcycles, they should be registered, display license plates and require liability insurance. Riders should pass a written test and procure a limited license (say ages 12-16) that authorizes them to ride only these vehicles. For underage riders, a penalty should apply to parents who allow unlicensed use or when the cycles are set for a 55kmph maximum but are discovered riding on public streets.

E-scooter: Speed settings should be slowed down significantly, to 10-15kmph. They should be nothing more than an enhanced way of walking. At lower speeds racing and irresponsible operation would be impossible, and injuries would be reduced significantly. Liability insurance should be considered.

E-motorbikes: As I have characterized them, they are motorcycles, just like ICE vehicles. Normal current road rules should apply.

Thank you.

Regards.

Thomas Modica

