

Inquiry into e-mobility safety and use in Queensland

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Parliamentary committee members thank you for allowing me as an individual to make these thoughts and observations to you. Road safety has been with me since my brother never came home 61 years ago.

Introduction

The e-vehicle is here and like the first motor car it was despised and no good would come of it and look how far that has come. The combustion engine is making way for the electric vehicle world. As the use of personal e-vehicles increases and the world grapples with the fossil fuel crises we see parts of our society except the e-revolution and make use of its potential while others only see the worst of it's entry into their world. What we see today is a primitive version of what's to come and we see it's use abused by some but there are many who abide by the rule as they see them or taught them. I have extreme concerns for the safety of users of all ages on electric scooters, e-bikes and e-motorbikes that are used on public footpaths and roads by those who have little understanding or respect for the road rules.

1. On public footpaths

These vehicles are heavy, fast, and quiet making them a danger to pedestrians, particularly those who are young, elderly, or have reduced mobility, who may be unable to get out of the way of these vehicles and more susceptible to a collision. The size of the wheels in the case of the e-scooters make them extremely unstable over rough surfaces and if they hit a sharp vertical rise then the scooter may become uncontrollable and the user be thrown over the front of the vehicle and possible sustain critical head injuries as the distance from head to surface contact is very short and the shock absorbers of the human body (the hands, arm, shoulder joints and muscles are primarily involved in balance and handle bar control) being preoccupied and are slow at extending to protect the head.

2. On the roads

Why do e-scooters prefer to use the road? Primarily because the road surface is safer. Footpaths and dual purpose carriageway have the e-scooter user (depending on other traffic) constantly having to vary speed and direction as on the road they can more quickly reach their destination. I would suggest that e-scooter users are destination focused therefore speed is of the essence. Other e-vehicles are primarily just enjoying the outdoor experience. I have been passed by e-scooters and e-motorbikes travelling faster than the posted speed limit that my car was travelling and this has included lane splitting. I have also experienced youths riding these vehicles through traffic, doing wheelies and generally disregarding the road rules including against marked traffic flow directions. On one way traffic situations where the general traffic is flowing the way it supposed to and then you see an e-scooter or e-bike travelling at speed against the traffic flow. If at a T intersection and you wish to join that flow you would usually have a cursory look in the direction of the traffic that has passed you, not any more when we have e-riders go against the legal flow of that carriageway. The potential for conflict is great and the car driver has to be super vigilant and with a good scanning technique to provide a good separation distance making allowances for possible unpredictable or involuntary movement into the e-vehicles path. I have been and witnessed others where the driver had to place their vehicle into a possible conflict zone to avoid the e-Vehicle colliding with the car. A female with a baby in a sling on the road and neither wearing head protection.

3. Advertising

Rarely reinforces the current rules (nor do they have to) about use of these vehicles and in some cases actively flouts the regulations. I regularly see underage children riding and often with a mate on board and both with out helmets, people without helmets and with helmets not done up and worn incorrectly (at the back of their head for instance).

4. Helmets

When helmets are worn they are usually purchased by a parent with the end user inputting on preferences. This usually means the form over function. Bicycle helmets lend themselves to abuse of use and therefore almost always worn incorrectly. We must convince the purchaser of the helmet that a brain injury could lead to many years of self guilt and heartache. To overcome this the helmet should have a chin guard that obstructs the wearers vision if it is worn incorrectly. This then serves two purposes, firstly in protecting the front of the brain and then superficial damage to the face.

5. Import regulation

Need to address the import specification of these electric vehicles. The importation of grey e-vehicles needs to be actively addressed through tougher penalties.

6. Enforcement of Rules

While I sympathise with our police service and the incredible work load they have every day it would be nice if an education program could be used in schools that addressed the results inappropriate use of e-vehicles can cause and the consequences of that inappropriate use. We skirt the real issues because it makes some people feel uneasy. I used to be pretty senior in motorcycle rider training in Tasmania and New South Wales and found teenagers and others very responsive to the truth of crashes. Issues like why and how the two wheeled user can loose control of an e-scooter. An e-trike has different stability issues in the form of wheel triangulation. Others issues to be addressed are “fight or flight” and its ramification when the brain is instantly confronted with an unplanned event and how the amount of caster dictates the handling of a two wheeled vehicle

7. Summary

While many of us see the e-revolution as an unnecessary intrusion into our lives and in many ways has forced change in our driving habits it is the second generation that have their introduction into the e-revolution at an early age will be better equipped with the tools to deal with this new transport option. There are many who can now ditch the second car, get a little fresh air while travelling to and from work and arrive at either destination feeling less stressed. Lets get the legislation right, the import requirements right, the early education right and I am sure we will see a safer and more healthy generation ahead of us. We are the first generation of the e-generation and we will make many mistakes, mistakes that were made when our world transitioned from horse and cart to the automobile. I am a strong believer in pain being a very good educator, its a pity that some people die in that education process. I support the e-revolution however I hate to see the carnage it sometimes generates, this is our collective chance to make the transition a safe and enjoyable experience. I hope you succeed in your process to make this transition.