


Inquiry into e-mobility safety and use in Queensland

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I am a bicycle commuter who commutes to the north of Brisbane along the North Brisbane Bikeway and along Kedron Brook bike path several times a week and have been doing so for many years. I have watched the rise of electric mobility to the point now where electric devices are approaching half of the traffic on our bike paths. I believe the legal operation of these devices is to be encouraged, but the majority are being operated illegally and often at speeds significantly higher than the legal 25kph. I'm sad that our bikeways which used to be a safe refuge from high-speed traffic are now being lost to electric vehicles which approach vehicular speeds. As someone who's children used to use these facilities to ride to school this is also of great concern. We're losing our safe spaces.

I see the issues as complex and it's common for the media and the public to class all electric mobility into the same category. Which is incorrect.

Electric Bikes.

Legal electric bikes which comply with the relevant standards are to be applauded. They provide a class of bike which has many advantages and has encouraged many people to get riding again. However, there are many "electric bikes" which are just electric motorbikes, often recognisable by a complete lack of pedals and capable of motorbike speeds. I have even seen school kids riding these to schools along Kedron Brook. There are also kits to adapt conventional pushbikes. Typically, they have large electric motors build into wheels and large batteries strapped to the bike frames. Sometimes they even have pedal delete kits which remove the pedals and put a footrest in place. On top of these types of electric vehicles there is also significant numbers of legal electric bikes having the speed limiters removed which also aren't helping the problem.

Privately owned Electric Scooters/PMD.

This class of vehicle seems to be almost ubiquitously operated illegally. Apart from the areas around the CBD where there is occasionally enforcement, it would appear people see them as just electric motorbikes for the bike path and travel significantly faster than the bike traffic. Just like on the roads, where traffic speeds vary significantly safety suffers. Having this class of vehicle travelling at often double bike speed is not making our environment safer.

Hire scooters

This class of electric mobility seems to offer many advantages for the city which are positives. However, users leave scooters all over bike paths and footpaths across the city and surrounds. These are hazardous to people choosing to walk or ride around our public areas. I note that in other jurisdictions the licence given to these hire operators has stipulated a condition that they must be parked in designated areas. Users suffer penalties if they are not put in designated areas and from what I've seen in places like Perth it seemed to work. In my opinion – unless the councils licencing these devices are willing to impose this condition on the operators then I don't think their advantages are worth the loss of amenity of our public spaces to the public.

What I think would help.

Ban the sale of illegal devices, devices which make legal bikes illegal, or devices which easily have their limiters bypassed.

Many electric mobility devices are being sold on the basis that they are only for use on private property. In some cases, they are sold on the basis that they have “street mode” and “off road mode”. People are happily buying these devices from local distributors and from interstate and overseas and taking to our paths knowing there is little or no chance of seeing consequences. People seem to be buying what could be considered comically illegal devices with no regard for the law and taking to our paths. People are also modifying legal bikes by following easily findable tutorials on the web, and manufacturers are selling devices whose protections are easily bypassed.

If the state could encourage the federal government to restrict the sale and possession of devices that are either illegal, or devices that can easily be made illegal then I think the state would need to generate a lot less enforcement effort. We have a situation now where for every person who has enforcement for an illegal device, many more are arriving in the mail.

Enforcement action.

It is my belief that the state has worked reasonably well to develop legislation to control the use of PMD's. While it could be argued that there could be some things that can be tweaked to make the legislation better, I would argue that the biggest issue I see is a lack of enforcement. As mentioned, I've only seen token enforcement “blitzes” in and around the city. I've seen that they change the behaviours around the areas where there was enforcement for a little while, but that behaviour reverts after a little while to “wild west” again where anything goes. Which is like the outer urban areas where enforcement is all but non-existent.

Education.

I believe there needs to be clear communication of the rules for these devices and what are legal devices. Currently parents are buying legal PMD's for kids who are not old enough to legally operate them. And in some cases, parents are buying or allowing children to buy illegal electric devices for their kids. People need to be made aware that this is not legal and not wise.

Force hire companies and councils to provide dedicated parking for hire PMD

Please make our paths and shared areas again safe from hire PMD strewn everywhere! It can be done – we must make it a condition of operation.

Summary.

If the committee takes anything from this rambling submission, I would like it to be the following. We don't need additional rules and restrictions – we just need the existing rules enforced. It would make this a lot easier for everyone if the federal government would ban the sale of devices which cannot be legally used in public. And please force hire companies to make users put hire scooters and e-bikes in designated parking areas.