

Inquiry into e-mobility safety and use in Queensland

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20 June 2025

Mr Jim McDonald MP
Chair
State Development, Infrastructure and Works Committee
Parliament House
Cnr of George and Alice Streets
Brisbane QLD 4000

Dear Mr McDonald,

Inquiry into e-mobility safety and use in Queensland

I am writing to provide input into the Parliamentary Inquiry into e-mobility safety and use in Queensland (the Inquiry). I am the Regulator and Chief Executive of the Office of the National Rail Safety Regulator (ONRSR). ONRSR is an independent body corporate established under the *Rail Safety National Law (South Australia) Act 2012* (RSNL) to enforce safe railway operations and promote the improvement of rail safety nationally.

In response to advice on a growing number of incidents in Australia and overseas, ONRSR recently identified e-mobility device fires as an emerging safety risk for passenger rail and tram operations.

ONRSR appreciates that e-mobility devices may offer a convenient, environmentally friendly and affordable means of mobility, and that the popularity of these devices in Australia is growing. However, e-mobility devices pose safety risks, including risks to rail safety due to the potential of fire caused by the lithium-ion batteries. I understand that lithium-ion batteries are more volatile than traditional batteries as they are energy-dense and contain materials that are highly flammable.

Under the RSNL rail transport operators are required to eliminate or minimise risks to 'safety so far as is reasonably practicable' (SFAIRP). What is SFAIRP will likely change as rail transport operators and ONRSR collectively become more aware of the nature of the risk associated with e-mobility devices.

ONRSR expects any rail transport operator who transports e-mobility devices on their services to have a documented risk assessment, including consideration of any risk controls to be implemented. In undertaking this risk assessment rail transport operators should consider if there are charging facilities available on trains, whether staff have been trained appropriately to respond to a fire involving an e-mobility device and update their emergency management plans.

I note that some international jurisdictions have banned the carriage of certain e-mobility devices on trains, for example:

United Kingdom

In December 2021, Transport for London banned e-scooters and e-unicycles from its network due to the risk of fire.

In June 2023, most other train operators banned the transport of e-scooters, e-unicycles, e-skateboards and hoverboards. However, electric mobility scooters, electric wheelchairs and e-bikes are still permitted as there are legal minimum standards regulating their design and construction.

Germany

Since 1 May 2024, e-micromobility devices are banned on Berlin's BVG services. Bans are also in place in Hamburg, Düsseldorf and Munich. These bans have cited insufficient norms and safety standards for the lithium-ion batteries used in these devices.

Electric wheelchairs and four-wheeled electric vehicles for people with reduced mobility were excluded from the ban as their batteries meet higher safety requirements.

I support the Minister for Transport and Main Roads' advocacy for strengthened importation requirements for these devices to reduce illegal and unsafe devices being imported into Australia. Over time such requirements could reduce the risks these devices pose to rail safety.

Yours sincerely

A solid black rectangular box used to redact the signature of Dr Natalie E Pelham.

Dr Natalie E Pelham
Chief Executive and Regulator
Office of the National Rail Safety Regulator