

**Submission
No 97**

INQUIRY INTO USE OF E-SCOOTERS, E-BIKES AND RELATED MOBILITY OPTIONS

Organisation: City of Newcastle

Date Received: 6 August 2024

Planning and Environment.
Phone:



5 August 2024

The Hon. Cate Faehrmann MLC
Committee Chair
Portfolio Committee No. 6 - Transport and the Arts

SUBMISSION TO PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY INTO USE OF E-BIKES AND OTHER RELATED MOBILITY OPTIONS

City of Newcastle (CN) appreciates the opportunity to make a submission to the Parliamentary inquiry into the use of e-scooters, e-bikes and related mobility options. CN welcomes that this topic is being considered by the NSW Parliament, noting that there is currently a disjuncture between the legality, infrastructure, and social norms related to e-scooters, e-bikes and related mobility options.

While Newcastle has had a similar uptake of private e-scooters as many other local government areas (LGA), as well as various other electrified mobility devices, the uptake of e-bikes has been noticeably high within the Newcastle LGA. Predominantly our experience has been in relation e-bikes, and therefore our submission will focus on these, given that other devices are often used in a similar fashion by the community.

GENERAL

- CN actively supports effective active transport as part of its community strategic plan [Newcastle 2040](#). This requires improved access to a range of transport options, including e-micromobility, while considering overall safety and comfort of the community.
- In 2021 CN adopted a cycling plan [On Our Bikes](#) that supports a safe and connected active transport network in Newcastle and promotes modal shift to active and public transport. The support of all active transport options, including e-micromobility, is in alignment with this stated objective.
- CN recognises the potential that e-micromobility has to increase the independence and participation of people, who had either been car-dependent or were not moving as freely and actively in their community prior to the availability of these options.
- CN recognises the benefit of supporting e-micromobility to provide greater transport options for the 'first and last mile' of trips. E-micromobility will also benefit future growth and viability of Newcastle's commercial centres, allowing for an improved focus on creating great public spaces in accordance with the Transport for NSW (TfNSW) Road User Space Allocation Policy.
- CN has conducted reviews and initial planning works in support of shared schemes for e-micromobility options. It is expected that investigations will continue in collaboration with commercial providers and TfNSW through 2024.

E-BIKE USE IN NEWCASTLE

It has been evident that young people in Newcastle have been enthusiastic adopters of the currently higher-power fat e-bikes. Newcastle has experienced both positive and negative aspects of the influx of such bikes onto our streets and other public spaces:

- Increase in children riding, and diversity in ridership, including a large proportion of females riding these e-bikes.

- Use of these e-bikes for a diverse range of activities, including riding to school, riding to sport activities, and riding to the beach (including with surfboard racks).
- Schools and other destinations increasing their provision for bikes, including introduction of secure bike parking and better access for bikes.
- Some positive responses from parents, noting increased independence, freedom, and personal safety associated with e-bikes.
- Broader community adoption of e-bikes, with appreciation of ability to carry passengers and to tackle hilly terrains with reduced effort.
- Increase in complaints from the community about inappropriate use of e-bikes, particularly in popular shared spaces and along footpaths.
- Calls for training for young people and students using e-bikes in the community.
- Worry about theft of e-bikes, noting they are at a higher price point than most bikes young people would previously have owned/used.
- Concerns about the speed of e-bikes, given the capability of commercially available bikes to travel well above the 25 km/h legal limit. This has also been consistently reported from the community as occurring in a range of places in the LGA.
- The increase in e-bike use has also raised awareness amongst young people (and other new riders) of the difficulties of riding in some areas of the Newcastle LGA. This has been attributed to the lack of dedicated cycle infrastructure, minimal quiet roads for cycling, and the dangerous driving that can occur on the road network. There may be potential to harness these new perspectives and new relationships in working on improving the overall safety of our roads - both through improving road environments but also addressing driver behaviour.

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Based on the current infrastructure (non-separated cycling spaces), legal frameworks (issue with supply and use of illegal e-micromobility devices), and social norms (increase uptake and acceptance of e-bikes in the community) we have identified several challenges and opportunities to ensure the use of these e-bikes can be optimised for the best outcomes for our community:

- Ongoing dedication of state resources and budget to be spent on improving active transport infrastructure to allow for this transition, including provision of separated high speed environments, shared prioritised crossings, and innovation in shared environments to ensure slow speeds and a culture of care. This will require review and updating of key technical directions and guidelines to improve the integration of wheeled active transport and allow improved prioritisation of active transport modes.
- Greater support for NSW Police to provide resourcing to actively and visibly work within key locations to enforce current rules and regulations. In particular the use of helmets and the speed of e-micromobility devices, which is key to maintain public safety in shared spaces and popular areas. Enforcement should support the transition towards more appropriate use of e-bikes and other related options, through the support of riders that are acting within the requirements of current laws.
- It is important that we consider the interaction between e-micromobility and public transport - whether and how we allow and facilitate bikes and e-micromobility devices on trains, trams, ferries and buses - noting currently bikes cannot be taken on buses in NSW, nor on trams in Newcastle. It's essential to appreciate the importance of multi-modal transport in regional cities such as Newcastle with a dispersed population.
- The specification of legal e-bikes should be reviewed - based on analysis of what is being provided by the market and the greater range of usage information available globally. This should also include review of power and speed restrictions, as well as greater clarity and enforcement around the sale and availability of illegal e-bikes within the community.

- Potential consideration of a new class of vehicles could be introduced and defined to allow greater access to e-micromobility options for the community, with appropriate review of areas of use and impact of all other aspects of the transport spectrum.
- Inclusion of appropriate training for cycling more broadly into the education curriculum to equip children with an understanding of negotiating our roads safely and with respect to other users.
- Messaging should be developed through diverse channels and with the input of e-bike riders, including young people. Giving young people a sense of ownership of some of the content and creativity in the messaging will not only improve the relevance of the messages, but also improve distribution and acceptance.

COLLABORATION OPPORTUNITIES

CN would be happy to work with the NSW State Government in transitioning towards appropriate frameworks and infrastructure for e-bikes to be used in our city noting:

- Newcastle (with the potential inclusion of adjacent LGAs) is a separate city, where boundaries can be defined more easily than places in Sydney, but we face the similar challenges.
- Options for the installation and testing of new and updated infrastructure outcomes, including integration with light rail, highly popular shared spaces, and a usage base across a diverse range of users and ages.

Should you have any further questions regarding this submission, please feel free to contact

Yours faithfully

David Clarke
ACTING CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER