

**Submission
No 156**

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

Organisation: Newtown Climate

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Newtown Climate Inc. Submission

NSW Legislative Council inquiry into e-scooters, e-bikes and micromobility - August 2024

Newtown Climate is an incorporated community climate organisation based in Newtown in Sydney's Inner West. Our vision is for Newtown to become Australia's first inner-city zero emissions community, through a transition that is fast, fair and fun.

Our local community is at the forefront of adoption of e-scooters, e-bikes and related mobility options. Our location, about 5 km from the Sydney CBD and at the border of the City of Sydney and Inner West LGAs, means that Newtown residents choosing to travel by these modes experience fewer barriers than in other parts of Sydney.

We take a keen interest in active transport, including electric micromobility, for two key reasons:

1. active transport is an accessible, affordable, healthy and enjoyable form transport that, if taken up widely, can immediately reduce air and climate pollution
2. our members, supporters and local community have demonstrated a strong desire for safer and more convenient active transport infrastructure, and more supportive government policies, to make active transport a feasible option for more people and more trips

In our community surveys of 2022 and 2023 residents chose increasing active transport as the most important strategy for reducing greenhouse gas emissions from transport, ahead of public transport and the electrification of private vehicles.

We thank you for the opportunity to provide input into this inquiry, and would welcome the chance to expand on this submission at the forthcoming hearing. This submission is informed by the experience of our members and supporters, as well as constant engagement with our local community, and structured in line with the inquiry's terms of reference.

(a) the current and anticipated role of all three levels of government in enabling and encouraging safe electrified active transport options

Each of the three levels of government should be doing much more to enable and encourage safe electrified active transport options. Key improvements include:

- at all levels of government:
 - a cultural shift to considering active transport, including e-bikes, e-scooters and electric micromobility, as legitimate forms of transport with significant benefits for users and for the broader community
 - a major increase in funding for active transport infrastructure, to bring Australia [into line with Ireland and the UK](#) and closer to the UN recommendation that [20 per cent of transport infrastructure funding be allocated to active transport](#) (in NSW this figure is less than half a per cent)
 - the adoption of evidence-based approaches to transport planning and road space allocation, informed by successful overseas examples and not limited to minor tweaks to existing car-dominated infrastructure
 - incorporation of new and/or improved active transport infrastructure as an integral part of any transport infrastructure projects

- at a **state government** level:
 - accelerated roll-out of the [Greater Sydney strategic cycleway corridors](#) to provide safe and well-connected routes across Sydney for people who wish to travel by bike, e-bike, e-scooter or other forms of micromobility
 - incorporation of shared e-bikes into the Opal ticketing network, including daily and weekly fare caps and discounts when transferring between modes
 - provision of dedicated parking for shared e-bikes in busy areas like the Sydney CBD
 - provision of improved, secure and easy to use parking for bikes, e-bikes, e-scooters and other forms of micromobility at all train stations
 - a state-wide program to make every primary and secondary school safe for bikes, e-bikes, e-scooters and other forms of micromobility, including:
 - separated infrastructure around schools to reduce conflict between pedestrians, active transport users and motorists
 - reduced speed limits around schools (e.g. 10 km/h shared zones in all drop-off areas)
 - education for students about riding safely
 - secure parking for bikes, e-bikes, e-scooters and other forms of micromobility
 - ensuring that all active transport infrastructure projects are based on the NSW Government's [Cycleway Design Toolbox](#), including training and empowering practitioners to use the full suite of solutions contained in the toolbox
 - a review of [disproportionate fines for active transport offences](#) and of policing practices which [target active transport users](#) while [rarely enforcing safe passing distances](#).
- at a **federal government** level:
 - the inclusion of clear targets for a mode shift to active transport, including bikes, e-bikes, e-scooters and other forms of micromobility in the upcoming [Transport and Infrastructure Net Zero Roadmap and Action Plan](#)
 - adequate funding for strategic active transport infrastructure, to be delivered in partnership with state and local governments, to achieve mode shift targets set in the upcoming Transport and Infrastructure Net Zero Roadmap and Action Plan
 - consideration of tax discounts or other incentives for bikes, e-bikes, e-scooters and other forms of micromobility for personal and business use, similar to those currently provided for electric vehicles and for light commercial vehicles
- at a **local government** level:
 - accelerated roll-out of safe active transport infrastructure, including key routes across LGA and connecting popular destinations like shopping precincts and transport hubs
 - acceleration of efforts to fix [known blackspots and hazards](#) that prevent people from safely using bikes, e-bikes, e-scooters and other forms of micromobility
 - an increase in secure parking for bikes, e-bikes, e-scooters and other forms of micromobility, with a focus on popular destinations like shopping precincts
 - provision of dedicated parking for shared e-bikes where relevant

(b) opportunities to reform regulatory frameworks to achieve better and safe outcomes for riders and the community

Key improvements that could be made to existing regulations include:

- legalising and introducing standards for e-scooters, hoverboards and other forms of electric micromobility, based on similar principles to those used for e-bikes
- introducing minimum quality and safety standards for imported e-bikes, e-scooters and other forms of micromobility, including for batteries and chargers

- increasing legal speeds for e-bikes and e-scooters to 30 km/h, to reduce the speed differential between these forms of transport and motor vehicles on local streets
- decreasing speed limits for local streets to 30 km/h, in line with international best practice, again to reduce the speed differential between different forms of transport
- decreasing default speed limits for all back lanes to 10 km/h, to instantly create a network of safe streets for bikes, e-bikes, e-scooters and other forms of micromobility

(c) local council, industry and stakeholder perspectives on the utilisation and impact of e-mobility devices in the community

Our organisation represents residents of Newtown and surrounding suburbs who are concerned about climate change but excited about the opportunity for a fast, fair and fun local transition to zero emissions. In our view, e-mobility devices present a rare opportunity to reduce air and climate pollution from transport while reducing traffic congestion and improving mobility, health and quality of life for many people. Our community has enthusiastically embraced these devices and they have quickly become a normal part of the transport mix in our local area.

While we are generally positive, there are some emerging issues that require government attention. Many of these are set out elsewhere in this submission. Some overarching issues include:

- **Safety:** safety issues with e-mobility devices arise primarily when users of e-bikes, e-scooters and other forms of electric micromobility are forced to compete for road space with either larger and faster motor vehicles or pedestrians. The majority of safety issues are eliminated, or at the very least greatly reduced, by the provision of safe separated bike lanes. Providing safe separated bike lanes on key routes across Sydney would greatly improve safety but is likely to require a cultural shift at all levels of government (notwithstanding some isolated pockets of excellence e.g. the City of Sydney) and significant additional funding.
- **Fire risk:** we are aware of occasional reports of serious fires caused by malfunctioning lithium-ion batteries and/or chargers. The government should consider introducing minimum safety standards, and routinely testing products imported into Australia, to reduce this risk and ensure that consumers can be confident that the products they are buying and using are safe.
- **Shared e-bikes:** several companies currently operate shared e-bikes in inner Sydney. To date government has applied a light-touch approach to regulating or stewarding the roll-out of these shared e-bikes, mainly focusing (with limited success) on reducing street clutter. We would like to see government take a more active role in managing shared e-bikes to ensure their potential as a form of shared, fun, healthy and affordable transport is realised. This could include incorporating shared e-bikes into the Opal card scheme (including daily and weekly travel caps and discounts when transferring between modes), providing dedicated parking bays in busy areas, and working with e-bike companies to improve the customer experience.

(d) opportunities to improve mobility, the customer experience, safety for users and the community

Our responses to terms of reference (a), (b) and (c) above set out several opportunities for governments to improve mobility, the customer experience and safety for users and the community.

In our experience, the primary issue limiting mobility, contributing to poor customer experiences, putting lives at risk and preventing the broad uptake of bikes, e-bikes, e-scooters and other forms of micromobility is the lack of safe active transport infrastructure across most of Sydney. Our view is informed by Newtown's position at the border of the City of Sydney LGA, which has very good active transport infrastructure, and the Inner West LGA, where active transport infrastructure is poor.

Over the past decade our local area has experienced a significant increase in active transport, including electric micromobility which has gone hand-in-hand with improvements in mobility, customer experiences and (to a lesser extent) safety. Active transport is now a very popular way to get around in our local community, and it is now common to see local residents using e-bikes to run errands, carry large loads, deliver food or groceries, get to school, drop children at school or daycare, or take dogs to the park. Key factors which have contributed to these changes include:

- The roll-out by the City of Sydney of a network of safe, separated and well connected bike paths connecting key destinations
- The use of modal filters, traffic calming and lower speed limits on local streets and back lanes to reduce vehicle traffic and make more streets safe for active transport
- The use of pop-up bike paths to rapidly expand the bike network during the COVID-19 pandemic, and subsequent moves to make these pop-up bike paths permanent
- Improved pedestrian crossing designs incorporating safe crossing points for bikes and other forms of micromobility
- The increased availability and popularity of e-bikes, including cargo bikes and box bikes, and other electric micromobility solutions like e-scooters, hoverboards and electric skateboards

Despite these improvements, we regularly hear from local residents that they are much more comfortable riding east from Newtown, via the City of Sydney's network of separated cycleways, than riding further west into the Inner West LGA. For example, the very popular separated cycleway which connects Newtown to Darlington and Redfern (and in turn to the CBD) via Wilson St ends abruptly at the border of the City of Sydney and Inner West LGAs, with no safe option to continue across King St and into the Inner West LGA. Greater Sydney's cycleway network is characterised by hundreds of [known blackspots and hazards](#), many of which could be easily solved with the requisite political will and funding.

(e) the potential benefits and risks of existing regulatory and policy settings, including the Roads Act 1993, Road Rules and Road User Space Allocation Policy and other related legislation

While we do not have detailed expertise in planning or in the policies listed above, we are familiar with their practical application and outcomes through our experience as a local community group that routinely advocates for safer active transport infrastructure as part of our goal of ensuring a fast, fair and fun transition to a zero-emissions community. In our experience, the unwillingness of state or local governments (outside the City of Sydney) to reallocate road space away from private motor vehicles and private vehicle parking, regardless of what is set out in their formal policies, is a key factor preventing the provision of safe active transport infrastructure.

The current allocation of road space in Sydney appears, with very limited exception, to prioritise private motor vehicles and private vehicle parking over all other uses. We routinely make submissions into state and local government consultation processes supporting safe separated active transport infrastructure only to be informed that there is no scope to change the existing allocation of road space. Where a decision is taken to adjust the allocation of road space, e.g. by installing a bike lane, this involves lengthy bureaucratic processes during which the safety of active transport users and would-be active transport users is not always prioritised over local opposition and NIMBYism.

These processes could potentially be improved by a joined up and accelerated planning process for strategic cycleways. Under the current model, state and local governments often consult on proposed cycleways as short as one block, making it hard for potential users to see the benefits but easy for local residents to see how they may be affected (e.g. by losing the most convenient parking spaces). We have seen this lead to poor outcomes as planning decisions are made in isolation and disconnected from overarching strategic imperatives.

A key change we would support is the widespread use of pop-up cycleways to trial new active transport routes across Sydney, with a focus on completing the strategic cycleway corridors as quickly as possible. Pop-up cycleways were deployed within the City of Sydney during the COVID-19 pandemic and have been a key part of successful strategies to facilitate increased active transport in cities including Paris and London.

(f) the extent that e-mobility devices have positive community benefits such as encouraging mode shift, relieving congestion, addressing social disadvantage and tourism

The recent uptake of e-mobility devices has had significant positive benefits for our local community. We regularly hear from residents who have become converts to e-mobility after renting, borrowing or buying their first e-bike or e-scooter, or after signing up for a shared e-bike subscription. Importantly, the advent of e-mobility devices has increased the share of the population who are able to get around using active transport, and expanded the use case for active transport to include functions like delivering food, transporting heavy goods, shopping, and transporting kids and dogs. Anecdotal evidence from within our community concords with international evidence that increased uptake of active transport, facilitated by e-mobility, has improved health and wellbeing for e-mobility users while also helping to reduce congestion on local streets and public transport.

(g) opportunities across government to improve outcomes in regard to e-scooters, e-bikes, and related mobility options

Please see our responses to terms of reference (a) through (e) above

(h) best practice in other Australian and international jurisdictions

In our experience the City of Sydney is an example of leading practice within NSW. Internationally we are aware of cities including London, Paris, Barcelona and Ghent which have adopted policies to facilitate and encourage a mode shift to active transport, including e-mobility. We urge the committee to look to these examples, and to the earlier and more famous example of Amsterdam. While it is sometimes claimed that Sydney is too hilly to have a cycling culture, the advent of e-mobility means this should no longer be considered a barrier.

(i) the economic analysis of e-mobility contribution to safe transport at night for shift workers and women, to mode shift and to first and last mile transport

We would support the NSW Government undertaking comprehensive cost-benefit analysis of any proposed active transport projects, including considering potential benefits for shift workers and women. We are not aware of this being conducted to date. Benefits to be considered in any cost-benefit analysis should include also include physical health, mental health and wellbeing, reduced travel time, reduced congestion for motorists and reduced air and climate pollution.

We are aware that NSW Health has [explored potential approaches to modelling the health benefits of active transport for use in infrastructure planning](#), and would support these being more widely used to guide government decision making.

(j) any other related matters.

Most people who use e-bikes, e-scooters and other forms of micromobility also get around in other ways. In our community most residents use a mix of active, public and private transport to get around, depending on factors like length and purpose of trip, availability and frequency of public transport, quality of active transport infrastructure, and weather. Importantly, many people who currently travel primarily by private car would be more likely to use other modes if these were made safer and more convenient. Assuming that people only travel via one mode – as the consultation survey for this inquiry does – will limit the committee’s ability to understand complex and nuanced travel patterns and desires.

In our view, governments should be aiming to achieve a situation where people can choose between a wide range of transport options for each trip, depending on their needs and preferences, rather than the current situation in which cars are the only feasible option for most trips.

We thank the committee for undertaking this inquiry and for the opportunity to provide this feedback.