

**Submission
No 160**

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

Name: Kobi Shetty
Date Received: 18 August 2024



KOBI SHETTY MP

MEMBER FOR BALMAIN

201-205 Glebe Point Rd, Glebe NSW 2037
02 9660 7586
balmain@parliament.nsw.gov.au



Submission to Portfolio Committee No. 6, inquiry into the use of e-scooters, e-bikes and related mobility options

Sunday, 18 August 2024

Cate Faehrmann, Chair
Portfolio Committee No. 6 – Transport and the Arts
Parliament of NSW

Dear Ms Faehrmann,

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to the Transport and the Arts Committee inquiry into the use of e-scooters, e-bikes and related mobility options.

I make this contribution in my capacity as the NSW Greens spokesperson on Shared Streets and Active Transport, and as the Member for Balmain. My electorate takes in several inner-city suburbs where shared e-bike schemes have recently been re-established, and I frequently receive feedback from constituents regarding their experience of these schemes.

E-bikes are an important tool in reducing our reliance on cars for transport, particularly on short and local trips. They will be critical in our efforts to reduce transport emissions as we tackle climate change. While they have a vital role to play, many people raise valid safety concerns about e-bikes from a pedestrian safety perspective. I often hear concerns about their use on footpaths, and questions about how they can be stored safely so pedestrian access isn't blocked.

Our state regulations have failed to keep pace with the rapid uptake of e-bikes as an alternative mode of transport for short and local trips. They have actively prevented the uptake of e-scooters as part of a holistic and integrated transport system,

allowing people to mode-shift between public and active transport on longer trips including commutes. It is important that this committee's inquiry into the future of e-bikes, e-scooters and related mobility options in NSW looks at how they can be used to increase active transport uptake, while keeping everyone safe.

Benefits of e-bikes

The benefits of e-bikes are considerable. There are of course personal benefits to those who use them, such as improved physical and mental health outcomes, and greater autonomy and independence, especially for children and young people. There are social benefits in increasing the use of e-bikes, such as less traffic and congestion and reduced strain on local parking. Reducing the dominance of local travel by car will open up local streets to more pedestrian activity, creating economic opportunities and benefits for local businesses along our high streets. And there are critical environmental and public health benefits in lower emissions and cleaner air.

The advent of e-bikes in a city like Sydney, with its often rugged and hilly terrain, is a game changer. We must get our policies and priorities right, with the aim of making cycling the transport mode of choice for short and local trips.

The integration of cargo-bikes into the hire/share e-bike system as a key mode of carrying must also be pursued. Powered cargo bikes enable people to carry much heavier loads and should be seen as genuine alternative to a second car for families. Indeed, there are many families and individuals in my electorate getting by quite happily without owning a car at all, relying exclusively on the use of cargo bikes and public transport. My family owns an electric cargo bike, and we are able to carry several children- including older children, a large load of shopping and our family dog. Without it we would be considering a second car.

Storage and upkeep

Our current approach to e-bikes, and hire/share schemes in particular is poorly regulated. In many respects it is not working well. Some of the most common feedback I receive relates to the lack of storage for e-bikes from commercial share/hire schemes, resulting in bikes being left in inappropriate places and creating obstacles and hazards for pedestrians. There is also a high likelihood of bikes becoming vandalised and damaged, which reduces pedestrian amenity in the public domain, and erodes public confidence in these schemes.

Simple changes to rules around how and where hire/share schemes may store their bikes will dramatically improve the public's perception of such schemes. It is important that we avoid taking away public space that has been designated for pedestrian use to accommodate the storage of bikes and scooters. In other jurisdictions successful schemes have re-purposed designated road space for e-bike

parking, docking or storage. This could be achieved quite easily with the recalibration of small numbers of on-street parking spaces or excess roadway in places where there is a desire to store multiple e-bikes or scooters, for example close to public transport hubs.

It is critical that a cohesive approach to this is taken up by the state government, with our rules and regulations requiring consistency across local government areas and regional boundaries. Whatever action we take needs to be driven by the single objective to encourage the uptake of e-bike and e-scooter use across boundaries. We must avoid adding complexity and discouraging their use.

Enforcement of road rules

I also receive lots of feedback from constituents who are concerned about the dangers posed to pedestrians when e-bike riders do not adhere to road rules, and take up space on footpaths and other pedestrian infrastructure while riding at inappropriate speeds.

I am sympathetic to the needs of riders to have safe and accessible places to cycle, however, this should not come at the expense of more vulnerable road users. Our current road rules must be re-aligned to prevent clashes between cyclists and pedestrians, but in the meantime our existing rules need to be properly enforced. We must address the needs of pedestrians by keeping cyclists away from footpaths, and we must make sure people driving cars and trucks on our roads are mindful and respectful of cyclists. Enforcement strategies must include issuing and pursuing penalties when drivers pass too close to cyclists on the road. Cyclists should be expected to remain clear of footpaths and other pedestrian infrastructure, unless specifically designated as a shared path for both pedestrians and cyclists.

Integrated cycleway network

If we are serious about encouraging the use of e-bikes, e-scooters and other related mobility options, and keeping riders off footpaths as we do, we must address the lack of a safe, separated and integrated cycleway network across Sydney and other major urban centres. Annual budgets for Active Transport must be increased significantly, bearing in mind that the UN has advocated for these to reflect at least 20% of broader transport budgets. The state government needs to address this as a matter of urgency in the interests of both pedestrians and cyclists' safety.

The 2023 infrastructure budget included some \$73.2 billion for transport, but only \$92 million of this was set aside for active transport. That's around \$3 per person for the year. At the current rate of funding, it will take New South Wales 320 years to build a connected transport network.

Scarcity of funding for walking and cycling infrastructure means work cannot be planned and implemented strategically. Transport departments do not develop new expertise and are discouraged from making recommendations that are outside of the status quo.

It is useful to compare our own funding environment to that of other jurisdictions. For example, we spend about the same amount on transport as they do in UK, but we have about one-eighth of the population. Other countries spend less per-capita and get much better outcomes.

Integrated transport system

Where cycleway projects are funded, we often end up with over-engineered bicycle superhighways rather than simple improvements to local infrastructure. There are already extensive networks of local streets and roadways across New South Wales that could be better utilised as infrastructure for e-bike, e-scooters and related mobility options. To achieve this, our transport policies and priorities will require some recalibration.

Reducing speed limits, introducing traffic calming measures and encouraging shared streets for local traffic on our existing road networks should be our first priority. Our primary approach to transport infrastructure design should be to ask – how do we make walking or cycling the easiest option for short trips? How do we encourage people who aren't currently thinking about cycling onto an e-bike?

Reducing speed limits on residential streets will encourage more cyclists onto the roads, rather than taking to footpaths and raising concerns for pedestrians. It will be valuable for the committee to explore the Welsh experience of introducing default speed limits on residential streets to 20mph, and the emerging benefits of this policy which includes greater social cohesion and connectedness as well as a reduction in road crashes and the resulting casualties and fatalities.

The importance of e-bikes, e-scooters and other related mobility options integrating well with public transport must also be considered. This would include ensuring abundant storage is available for shared e-bikes as well as private e-bike lockers at public transport hubs, and providing for the carriage of e-bikes, e-scooters and other related mobility options on trains and buses. These measures would facilitate easy interchange between active and public transport options and encourage the use of e-bikes for first and last mile trips.

Battery safety

I often hear concerns about the safety and ethics of lithium batteries. It will be valuable for the committee to consider how to ensure battery use in e-bikes is safe and free from harm. This could include a strong emphasis on component recycling

to reduce the ongoing need for lithium mining, and to ensure lithium batteries are diverted from landfill. It would also include a regulatory scheme that highlights the importance of battery care and safe charging procedures.

Delivery riders

Sometimes feedback from my community is focused on the challenges that delivery riders pose to pedestrians. It is evident that gig economy riders are making a piecemeal income and are under extreme pressure to find the fastest and most direct routes. They often ride through pedestrian thoroughfares at inappropriate speeds, causing alarm and risk of collision with more vulnerable road users.

At the same time, their prevalence means that food and parcel deliveries are no longer reliant on the use of cars. It is far preferable to have deliveries carried out on e-bikes, and we must find a careful balance between improving rider conduct and maintaining the shift away from cars as local and short-trip delivery vehicles.

Delivery riders often work in dark and dangerous conditions, and we have a responsibility to keep them safe. We must not abrogate employers' responsibilities or allow them to neglect their duties of care, but we must ensure there are clear rules that are easy for both riders and pedestrians to follow. Riders should be appropriately trained and resourced for the job they are being hired to do.

Thank you again for the opportunity to contribute to the Committee's inquiry into the use of e-bikes, e-scooters and related mobility options. Should you wish to discuss the matters raised here in any further detail please do not hesitate to contact my office on (02) 9660 7586 or Balmain@parliament.nsw.gov.au.

Yours sincerely,

Kobi Shetty MP
Member for Balmain