

**Submission
No 162**

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

Organisation: Lake Macquarie City Council - HRMC, NSW

Date Received: 15 August 2024



15 August 2024

The Hon Cate Faehrmann MLC
Chair of Portfolio Committee No.6 - Transport and the Arts
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
Sydney NSW 2000

Dear Ms Faehrmann,

Subject: Lake Macquarie City Council staff submission on the inquiry into use of e-scooters, e-bikes and related mobility options

Lake Macquarie City Council (Council) staff appreciate the opportunity to provide input into the Upper House inquiry into the use of e-scooters, e-bikes and related mobility options.

A summary of requests and recommendations from Council staff is as follows:

Infrastructure and safety funding: We request increased and continued financial support from the NSW Government to develop safe infrastructure for the growing use of electric micromobility devices. Our current infrastructure was not designed or built to accommodate the higher speeds and increasing usage. Due to the historic development of Lake Macquarie, the city has 1450km of roads but only 470km of footpath and 105km of shared path.

Speed limit reduction on local streets: We request that the NSW Government consider reducing the sign-posted speed limit on selected local streets in keeping with the latest road safety research and guidance.

Device uptake and regulation: It is our view that new forms of e-mobility will be difficult to prohibit or regulate due to community desires to access the benefits of these technologies (convenience, affordability, environmental). Children under 10 years are the largest cycling cohort in our city and are increasingly using e-bikes and e-scooters. The NSW Government must lead targeted road safety education campaigns and consider enforcement implications.

Shared e-mobility schemes: We highlight the challenges faced in implementing shared e-scooter and e-bike schemes, such as restrictive speed limits and limited operational areas. These schemes are unlikely to be viable in low-density areas for the foreseeable future; however, we are seeing a significant growth in privately owned e-bikes, e-scooters and other devices.

Our Ref:

Your Ref:

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Box 1906 HRMC NSW 2310

ABN: 81 055 027 868



Enhanced data sharing and best practices: We request improved data sharing on e-mobility usage and device-specific crash statistics to better inform infrastructure planning and safety measures.

Should you require further information or wish to follow up on any matters in this submission, please contact Council's Director Service Delivery

Yours sincerely

Chief Executive Officer

Lake Macquarie City Council staff submission on the inquiry into use of e-scooters, e-bikes and related mobility options

About Lake Macquarie

Lake Macquarie City Council governs a significant urban area in NSW, known for its extensive waterfront and picturesque landscapes. The city is home to around 220,000 residents, with a projected population growth to 235,000 by 2030. This rapid growth has positioned Lake Macquarie as one of the top local government areas (LGAs) nationally in terms of population inflow.¹

Geographically, Lake Macquarie City spans a vast area with diverse environments, including multiple urban centres, suburban neighbourhoods and natural reserves. The city's planning and infrastructure strategies aim to balance development with the preservation of its natural environment. The low population density and distribution of settlements around Lake Macquarie necessitate a combination of efficient transport corridors for longer distance travel and safe local streets and infrastructure for access to local destinations such as shops and schools.

Our strategy

Council has adopted the Walking, Cycling and Better Streets Strategy, a comprehensive plan aimed at improving active transport options and micromobility throughout the city. The strategy outlines a vision for a Principal Bicycle Network that connects major centres within Lake Macquarie and extends to nearby Newcastle and the Central Coast. The Principal Bicycle Network will predominantly comprise of shared paths for use by pedestrians, cyclists and other forms of micromobility. Where space permits, we will look to separate pedestrians and cyclists/users of micromobility to reduce the risk of collisions.

The strategy also defines Principal Pedestrian Networks around urban centres, wider footpaths, infrastructure to support active travel to schools, traffic management on local streets, and bus stop upgrades as critical to accommodating a growing demand for walking, cycling and other forms of micromobility.

¹ Regional Australia Institute, Big Movers 2023: Regional Renaissance: A Rise in Migration to Regional Australia.

Riding activity

Council participates in the National Cycling Participation Survey every two years.

It is estimated that 1.4 per cent of the Lake Macquarie population ride an electrically assisted rideable device such as an e-scooter, e-skateboard, or Segway in a typical week. Males appear to be more likely to use rideable e-mobility than females (2.1 per cent compared to 0.7 per cent, respectively).

It is estimated that 16.4 per cent of residents ride a bicycle in a typical week. More than one third had done so in the past year in 2022.

The highest cycling participation rate is among children aged under 10. These statistics do not account for recently observed activity of up to three children riding a single electric bike, aided by new bike designs that accommodate multiple riders.

Of the people who cycled in Lake Macquarie in 2022, in the month prior to the survey, 92 per cent cycled for recreation and 24.7 per cent cycled for transport, to work, education, train stations, shops or to visit family/friends.

The safety challenge

The key challenge for Council is funding the provision of safe infrastructure to keep pace with the growth in electric micromobility. New forms of mobility enable more users, including children, to reach higher speeds. Our road network has not been designed to accommodate this activity and needs to share use with increasingly large private vehicles.

Only 29 per cent of community members agree with the statement 'my local area has safe and accessible cycling tracks/shared pathways'.²

Already, Council is aware of collisions between cars and people on electric bikes and scooters, including children.

Continued financial support from the NSW Government is critical to improving local infrastructure. Transport for NSW provides grant funding for walking and cycling infrastructure under its Get NSW Active and Road Safety programs. Until recently, it also provided funding for local traffic management interventions to create streets as part of designated High Pedestrian Activity Areas.

As the pace of improving infrastructure is constrained by resources, there is an immediate need for the NSW Government to implement the latest research on road design and road safety and consider reducing the sign-posted speed limit for selected local streets to 40km/h. Council does not have the authority to reduce speed limits.

² Lake Macquarie City Council, 2020, Lake Macquarie Environmental Attitudes Report, Jetty Research

Figure 1 from Austroads research, *Prioritising Active Transport*, helps illustrate the role and timing of policy change and vehicle speed management.



Figure 1: Interventions to facilitate active transport (and micromobility) (Source: Austroads, 2024, Research Report AP-R711-24, *Prioritising Active Transport*).

Shared scheme e-mobility trials in Lake Macquarie

Lake Macquarie was an early participant in the NSW Government's Shared E-scooter Trial Program. Shared e-mobility schemes differ to private ownership as they require users to temporarily licence a bicycle or scooter, typically for a single trip.

Lake Macquarie's economic development organisation, Dantia, managed an e-mobility trial in Lake Macquarie, with Beam as the operator. The trial commenced with e-bikes in June 2022, followed by e-scooters when the Transport for NSW (TfNSW) trials launched in December 2022.

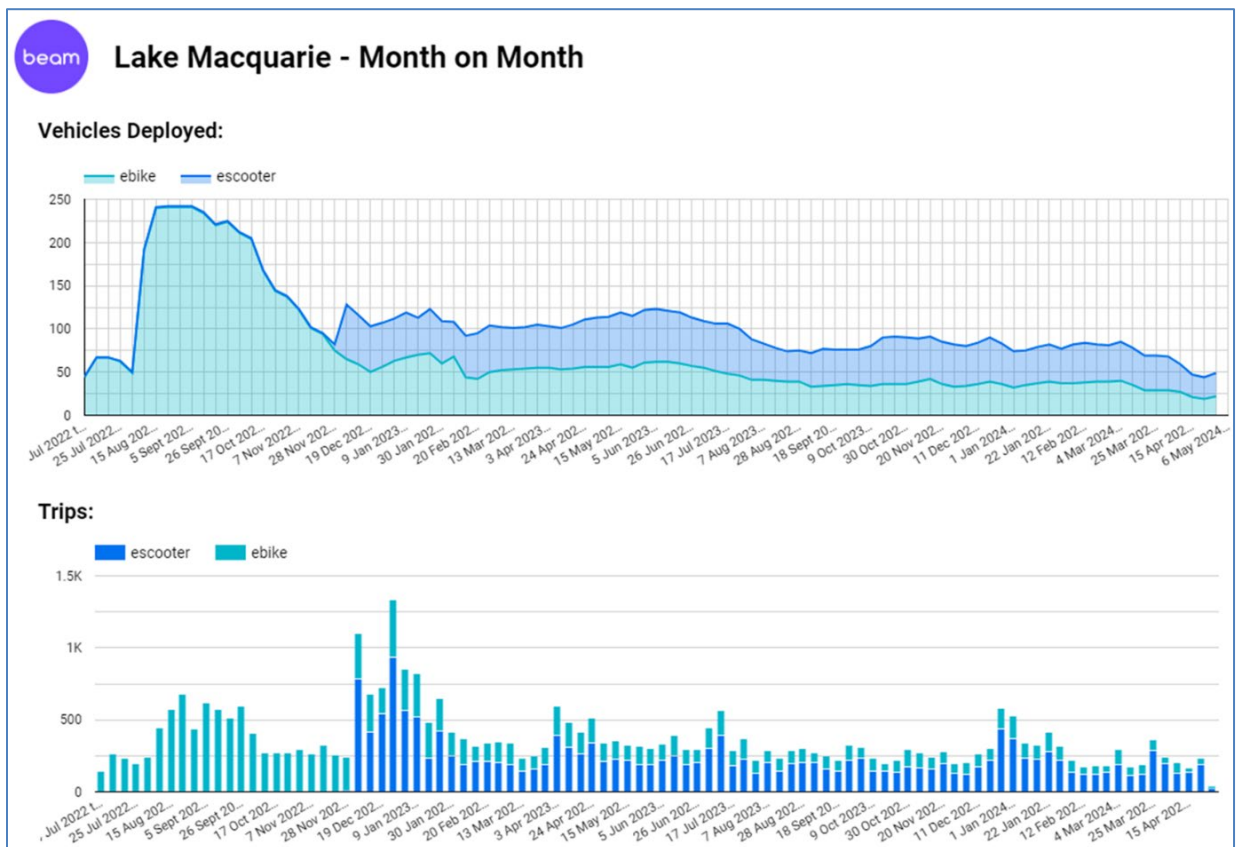
There was greater uptake of e-scooters during the trial, with 12,036 unique riders taking 17,627 trips across the life of the trial, while 8158 unique riders took 17,420 trips on e-bikes. Riders travelled further on e-bikes – 3.43km per trip on average compared to 1.57km per trip on average for e-scooters.

The usage areas for e-bikes and e-scooters were different. E-bikes could be used across the city in a mutually agreed operating zone. Over time, Beam reduced the operating zone for ease of management, and to align to utilisation. The conditions for e-scooters were directed by TfNSW. Notable challenges included:

- Electric scooter operating areas could only be enabled through a road safety audit and NSW Government gazettal process (resource-intensive to manage with time delays).

- Shared scheme e-scooters were limited to an impractically slow 10 km/h on shared pathways. This had a flow-on effect to low uptake of shared e-scooters when compared to other shared scheme markets.
- Despite a communicated desire to collaborate, the guidelines for updates to the e-scooter trial were difficult to access from TfNSW.
- Electric scooters were only permitted on roads with speed limits under 50 km/h. In a city like Lake Macquarie, where suburbs are ringed and intersected with 60 km/h roads, this made the permitted operating areas limited and impractical.
- An individual council permissions approach denied prospective users the opportunity to ride to key destinations and utilise key infrastructure ‘over the border’, such as the 31,900 Lake Macquarie residents who work in Newcastle or riders who use the cross-LGA Fernleigh Track.

A summary of vehicles deployed through the trial and number of trips is outlined below.



Ultimately, the e-mobility operator elected to withdraw operations in Lake Macquarie in May 2024. Had there been scope to test shared scheme e-scooters more thoroughly – and with realistic speed limits – we might be better positioned to understand the future opportunities for shared schemes in our city.

Community feedback on the e-bike trial

We asked the community for feedback on the e-bike trial, including:

- whether they had used an e-bike sharing scheme in Lake Macquarie or elsewhere
- motivations for using or not using an e-bike sharing scheme
- how well the trial had delivered on its objectives, including providing an affordable and environmentally-friendly transport option, reducing traffic congestion, and improving recreation and tourism opportunities
- impressions of visual amenity and safety
- customer experiences with the e-bike sharing.

Community sentiment about shared scheme e-bikes was divided. People who had used the service were generally positive but had reservations about the cost of e-bikes and reported some technical challenges. Those who had never tried a shared scheme e-bike were more negative, citing visual amenity (shared scheme e-bikes parking) and perceived risks to safety.

Early in the trial period, shared scheme e-bikes (dockless) had been poorly parked. Beam responded to this with higher rates of serving and by decreasing the number of devices in the city, which improved the situation.

Community feedback on the e-scooter trial

Transport for NSW undertook intercept surveys in June 2023, recording responses from 489 people. We have recommended TfNSW submit a copy of the research results to this legislative inquiry. Key findings:

- **Awareness and usage:** 63 per cent of respondents were aware of shared e-scooters from seeing them in use; 98 per cent of aware respondents had used them during their visit.
- **Satisfaction:** 74 per cent of respondents were satisfied with e-scooters, citing them as fun and easy to operate; 57 per cent found them to be good value.
- **Impact:** 83 per cent of respondents felt safe with e-scooters in the area; 76 per cent of non-users observed that rules were generally followed.
- **Future usage:** 36 per cent of users intend to use e-scooters again; 61 per cent support expansion, suggesting Newcastle CBD as a location.
- **Regulation:** 75 per cent of respondents agreed with legalising the use of e-scooters.

It should be noted that these survey results were provided to Council by TfNSW after the e-scooter trial had ceased in May 2024.

Specific responses to Terms of Reference

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

- Council collaborates with state and federal governments to promote safe electrified active transport through the provision of new infrastructure. Council requires new subdivision developments to meet certain design standards. Council promotes active travel through its events and via information, such as our safe cycling routes map for the city.
- The NSW Government should consider the reduction of speed limits on selected local access streets from 50km/h to 40km/h to align with latest research on road design and road safety, and expand funding for local area traffic management, footpath, shared path and cycling infrastructure.
- Continued financial support from the Federal Government for infrastructure is required to address road safety issues.

(b) Opportunities to reform the regulatory framework to achieve better and safe outcomes for riders and the community

- Address inconsistent regulations across jurisdictions including the ad-hoc and inconsistent approach to 40km/h local traffic management areas across NSW, and differences in the legal use of private e-scooters between Australian states and territories. Similar to e-bike regulation, the NSW Government should work towards a national position on e-scooters.

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

- Local businesses and residents express support for e-mobility but have concerns about pedestrian safety and device clutter for shared schemes.
- Community feedback indicates a need for more parking zones and clearer usage guidelines for shared schemes.
- Council's view is that it is difficult to regulate/ban new devices due to the aforementioned benefits. Greater investment in safer infrastructure is needed and this aligns with community expectations. E-mobility has the potential to serve some of our demographics that might otherwise have limited or inequitable transport access, such as young people.

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

- Expanded funding support for dedicated infrastructure.
- Transport for NSW-led reduction of speed limits on local streets.
- Improved end-of-trip facilities at train stations (Opal card/credit card activated bike cages).
- Integration of Council's cycle routes way-finding map, identifying safer routes, into the Transport for NSW Opal app for cycling routes.
- Education and behaviour campaigns to promote safe riding practices and helmet use awareness, particularly among children on e-bikes.

(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 regarding safety, traffic, and personal convenience

- **Classification:** The *Roads Act 1993* classifies bicycle riders as vehicles. If cyclists are treated as vehicles but the road infrastructure doesn't adequately accommodate them, this results in safety issues. A unique classification would allow for tailored regulations, infrastructure and enforcement measures that better protect cyclists. Council does not advocate for a distinct classification but the NSW Government should be transparent with the current rationale for the *Roads Act 1993* and consider a review, if necessary.
- **Policy:** We support the expanded implementation of the Transport for NSW Road Space Allocation Policy and Providing for Walking and Cycling in Transport Projects on classified roads.
- **Regulation:** Education and enforcement are both useful mechanisms for addressing unsafe behaviours. Consideration should be given to the disproportionate number of children that cycle (the largest population segment), including the growing use of e-bikes and e-scooters by this cohort.
- **Motorbike activity:** A key threat to the safety of footpath and shared path users is illegal motorbike (dirt bike) activity. Council needs assistance in designing solutions that inhibit this activity but do not restrict intended users, including e-bikes and larger cargo bikes. Council provides regular intelligence to NSW Police but illegal activity continues to be problematic.

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

- Emerging forms of micromobility must be part of the transport mix. Electric bikes and scooters offer immense benefits for individuals and the community in terms of cost and convenience, air quality, reduced noise pollution, improved transport equity and access, and reduced greenhouse gas emissions.
- New forms of micromobility also offer residents access to education, jobs and services previously out of reach, due to the difficulty of providing effective public transport in parts of Lake Macquarie. This is particularly important for socially disadvantaged communities. Research shows e-mobility results in more and longer trips taken and can increase ridership among women.³
- Council aims to increase its visitor economy and is investing in iconic active transport infrastructure that links to our wider network. Electric bikes and other forms of micromobility are an important enabler for growing the visitor economy.

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

- Improved data sharing (the uptake of e-bikes, e-scooters and other micromobility, and device-specific crash data), funding for infrastructure projects, and coordinated safety campaigns.
- Transport for NSW must implement the Road User Space Allocation Policy and Providing for Walking and Cycling in Transport Projects Policy and deliver active transport infrastructure as part of state road projects.⁴ There are numerous examples where Council has had to rectify pedestrian and cyclist safety issues associated with state road projects post-completion.
- Leadership by Transport for NSW and support for local government in translating TfNSW guidance (such as the Design of Roads and Streets manual, Cycleway Design Toolbox and Movement and Place Framework) to local planning controls.

³ [Fyhri, A., Fearnley, N., 2015, Effects of e-bikes on bicycle use and mode share, Transportation Research Part D, Transport and Environment, Vol 36, May 2015, pp.45-52. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.trd.2015.02.005>](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.trd.2015.02.005)

Fishman, E., Cherry C., 2015, E-bikes in the Mainstream: Reviewing a Decade of Research, Transport Reviews, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/01441647.2015.1069907>

⁴ <https://www.transport.nsw.gov.au/about-us/access-to-information/policy-documents>

(h) Best practice in other Australian and international jurisdictions

- The literature on best practice is extensive and new guidance from TfNSW reflects moves toward best practice. The challenge is funding and implementation.
- 2024 amendments to the Housing State Environmental Planning Policy (SEPP) to include Transit Oriented Development (TOD) precincts and planning controls are a step in the right direction. Councils need support in planning and funding infrastructure upgrades to maximise the potential of TOD precincts.

(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

- Use of e-bikes is not limited to residents and visitors in Lake Macquarie for personal reasons. While Council has no data, staff observations, together with community feedback, suggest that e-bikes are used for food delivery services and by Australia Post.
- We concur with a 2021 report by a NSW Government Taskforce, which found that improving infrastructure was an important solution in improving safety outcomes for these user groups.⁵

⁵ [Joint Taskforce: Food Delivery Rider Safety \(nsw.gov.au\)](https://www.nsw.gov.au/transport-and-infrastructure/road-safety/joint-taskforce-food-delivery-rider-safety)