

**Submission
No 180**

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

Organisation: Inner West Council

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Dear Ms Victorino

Inquiry into the use of e-scooters, e-bikes and related mobility options

Council commends the government on initiating the Inquiry into the use of e-scooters, e-bikes and related mobility options.

The accompanying submission has been prepared by Council officers and reflects the position of the Inner West Council, however has not been formally tabled at a Council meeting for endorsement.

Electric micro-mobility devices like e-bikes and e-scooters, provide significant opportunities for change in our transport system improving inequities, reducing pollution, and improving public health, as well as street safety and amenity. Strong, practical legislative support is also required to ensure safety for all road and path users.

Council is enthusiastic to see the final report recommending integration within the NSW transport system.

If you have questions about this submission, please contact

Yours sincerely

Acting Manager, Traffic and Transport Planning

Inquiry into the use of e-scooters, e-bikes and related mobility options

Submission by
Inner West Council
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Introduction

Inner West Council welcomes this inquiry. Electric micro-mobility options provide a significant opportunity for reducing emissions in the transport sector, improving population health, providing more transport options and addressing the inequities in our existing transport system.

In Australia between 2016 and 2019, electric bike sales tripled and the electric micromobility sector is evolving quickly, but opportunities and controls have not kept up with the number of bikes on our streets or fast emerging products. Better support and regulation, and a multi-modal approach are needed to leverage the effectiveness of electric micromobility devices and Inner West Council asks Portfolio Committee No. 6 - Transport and the Arts to take the lead and facilitate action from all levels of government. This is especially necessary for establishing a clear legislative framework with accountabilities to create a safe conflict-free environment where people walking and using electric micro-mobility devices can feel safe using the streets.

Electrified active transport vehicles provide enormous opportunities for short passenger trips and short-haul light freight journeys currently taken by cars, vans and trucks.

Electric bikes and scooters are significantly cheaper to purchase, run and maintain than cars providing an affordable transport option for more people. They consume significantly less space than other motor vehicles reducing the negative impacts of car traffic and parking, and making housing and workplaces more affordable for developers, purchasers and leaseholders. They are lighter, quieter and use less energy than both petrol and battery powered cars resulting in reduced maintenance costs for roads authorities and they provide better amenity and safety on our streets.

The range of electric micro-mobility devices - including commercial and personal cargo bikes, child-carriers, electric scooters and trikes, assisted wheelchairs, and personal mobility scooters - means they can be used for different journeys by people and business. Electric micro-mobility is an emerging transport sector with significant potential for cities and, with a growing population we need all levels of government need to take the lead and capture the opportunities they offer for cities and towns.

Safe and connected infrastructure as part of an integrated transport system

Safe and connected micromobility infrastructure as part of an integrated transport system is critical for supporting increased uptake by people and business.

Data collection in NSW and around the world has repeatedly shown that the largest proportion of people are “interested but concerned” – interested in cycling more often but concerned about their safety on the road with traffic. This group are likely to ride shorter

distances than traffic-confident riders but are unlikely to consider riding unless trips can be made along safe and separate cycling infrastructure. This same rationale would also apply to micro-mobility use.

On an average weekday in the Inner West up to 175,000 car journeys are shorter than 5km (2018-19 NSW Household Travel Survey) and lightweight electric devices could significantly reduce traffic congestion by replacing some of these journeys - except currently most people are fearful of riding with traffic.

Additionally, designated micro-mobility infrastructure is crucial in addressing the range of conflicts currently faced by all users of our road transport system. In addition to people feeling fearful of riding with traffic, people walking must be able to use footpaths without feeling at risk from fast travelling electric devices. Our current approach to road transport provides significant access and comfort for motor vehicle drivers with other users being accommodated predominantly on footpaths and redundant road space. This results in unacceptable conflicts as well as poor access for people who are not traveling by car. The Committee recommendations need to address this inequity and its inherent risks.

In NSW important foundational work has been done, and is currently underway, for making changes to our road transport system.

Future Transport 2056 (2018) supports more transport choices, better access, increased safety and transport infrastructure, noting that these factors make a very real improvement to places. The Movement and Place framework has been adopted across State Government agencies for land use planning and road transport. The *Directions for On-Street Transit White Paper* (October 2023) talks about reconfiguring how people travel on our streets so we can better accommodate light rail and buses. The TfNSW Freight Policy Reform Program will ultimately deliver an action plan to optimise freight transport with end-to-end approach and the *Freight and Servicing Last Mile Toolkit* (2022) recognises the importance of placemaking and the potential for small, lightweight vehicles, such as bikes, to address 'last mile' congestion problems.

For roads controlled by the NSW Government the *Road User Space Allocation Policy* prioritises walking, micro-mobility devices and freight vehicles to reduce the mode share of private motor vehicles when considering physical road space and its operation via access, speed and traffic signals. Following development of the Cycleway Design Toolbox in 2021, Transport for NSW (TfNSW) is currently consulting with Local Government to prepare a Business Case for the planning and delivery its Strategic Cycleway Corridors across Greater Sydney. While the *Providing for Walking and Cycling in Transport Projects Policy* (2021) ensures walking and cycling are incorporated from the outset and through delivery and maintenance for all new TfNSW projects.

We need to build on this important foundational work and provide a safe dedicated micro-mobility network, separated from cars and pedestrians, and accommodating the range of electrified active transport options. This is essential to increase their use by individuals and businesses. A genuine multi-modal approach is needed, including disincentives for car driving, especially for shorter journeys, and integration with public transport modes.

Inner West Council recommends the following as urgent next steps to provide a safe dedicated micromobility network as part of an integrated transport system:

- The NSW Government needs to provide ongoing and dedicated funding as part of the annual budget process for the design and delivery of its Strategic Cycleway Corridors.
- In accordance with the *Road User Space Allocation Policy*, active transport infrastructure and public transport improvements need to be provided on major corridors controlled by the NSW Government like King Street Newtown, Parramatta Road, Victoria Road Rozelle and New Canterbury/Stanmore Road.
- The NSW Government commits to no further expansion of inner urban road or motorway network.
- Upgrades of train stations under the Transport Accessibility Program (TAP) need to provide large elevators accommodating a group of people and several micro-mobility devices.
- With the requirement for micro-mobility riders to use roads except for the small proportion of shared paths, consideration needs to be given to slightly lifting the legal power and speed limit of electric bikes to improve effectiveness and safety for riders on the road.
- A planned roll out of weather protected, off-footpath bike parking corrals with charging facilities needs to commence in *high place* locations.
- The distance-based road user charging recommended by the Independent Toll Review report (July 2024) needs to be implemented.
- Changes are needed to the NSW Road Rules to ensure a safe bike network can be installed without clashing with the Road Rules.
- Public transport services including buses and regional train/coach services need to accommodate travel with bicycles without requiring dismantling of the bike, and secure parking for a range of devices needs to be provided at stops and stations.

Shared electric bike schemes

Commercial shared bike schemes play a critical role in supporting short journeys in high density places but currently Local Government cannot adequately control the bikes deployed by operators. Management and enforcement of shared schemes under existing legislation is too reactive and a range of actions are needed to support shared bikes schemes and mitigate their impacts.

In 2017, six inner city councils in Sydney worked together to prepare guidelines for dockless shared bike operators. The Guidelines outline the councils' expectations for operators on issues including customer safety and conduct, bike placement, distribution and redistribution of bikes, data sharing and collection or relocation of damaged bikes. With improved technology since this time and the deployment of shared electric bikes, the Guidelines have set a standard that is broadly accepted by most operators however, changes to the *Impounding Act 1993* in 2018 have proven inadequate in helping councils manage and enforce the shared schemes effectively.

Inner West Council recommends the following:

- State Government regulation of shared bike schemes including a permit system limiting the number of bikes per Local Government Area and a requirement for data to be provided by operators to Transport for NSW.
- Use of a data aggregator by Transport for NSW that councils have access to for compliance monitoring by **both** Transport for NSW and Local Government.
- Development of a plan in consultation with Local Government and community stakeholders, for rolling-out designated shared bike parking areas across inner Sydney. Work by iMove Australia with an Australian technology provider is exploring automatically locking, charging and facilitates sharing of any e-micromobility vehicle, whether privately-owned or part of a public or corporate fleet.
- Exploring the potential for contributions from scheme operators for the delivery of supporting infrastructure.

Safety, education and enforcement

With electric bikes, the speed differential between people walking and people cycling can be significant and Inner West Council frequently hears from people, especially older people, who are scared about using footpaths and shared paths because electric bikes are used at high speeds. Whilst a micro-mobility network separated from cars and pedestrians would address this problem to a significant extent, more is needed because the people using electric micro-mobility devices are diverse, with different language and cultural backgrounds, and different experiences of driving and knowledge of road rules. And whilst infrastructure and enforcement are critical, they alone are not enough.

With a growing population and more people using our streets in a range of different ways, education, as well as enforcement, are critical to reduce ongoing non-compliances and help people understand how to use public spaces.

Inner West Council recommends a prominent and on-going public education campaign like the 'Ride to Live' motorcycling campaign or the 'Slip-Slop-Slap' sun exposure campaign in the 1980s. Unlike driving, riding a bike has no requirement for knowledge testing or licencing and targeted campaigns for different road users would provide important key messages about the laws and acceptable practices applicable to each road user. For example, a campaign for cycling around pedestrians would emphasise safe speed, readiness to stop or manoeuvre and the requirement to give-way to pedestrians. A campaign for driving around bike riders would emphasise the 1 metre overtaking rule and passing at a safe speed.

When coupled with on-going enforcement campaigns aligned with the key messages, an on-going, high-profile education campaign would effectively facilitate the vision for transport in NSW outlined in *Future Transport 2056* – safer journeys, equitable access, multimodal mobility, resilience and improving places.

Electric scooters

In recognition of the evolving range of electric micro-mobility devices, Transport for NSW is encouraging applications from Local Government to operate trial areas for the operation of shared electric scooter schemes. The trial applies to shared commercial schemes only and would not apply to personally owned devices and Inner West Council understands this approach is intended to allow better control and management of the electric scooters for consideration as part of the transport system.

Inner West Council recognises the potential electric scooters could offer as a transport option, especially for inner urban areas where densities are high and mixed land uses create shorter journeys however, the issues mentioned in this submission – the need for

designated micro-mobility infrastructure, education and enforcement - are common to electric scooters and Inner West Council recommends the Committee learn from the Victorian experience.

Shared electric scooter trials commenced in 2022 in Victoria and, in July 2024 the State Government announced that private and share e-scooters will be permanently legalised taking effect in October 2024. This is to be accompanied by increased fines for riding on the footpath, not wearing a helmet, drinking alcohol while riding and dinking and carrying passengers.

The trial demonstrated the benefits and challenges of this emerging transport mode.

It provided an additional transport option where access to public transport was limited, and at night. Some women reported feeling significantly safer travelling by e-scooter at night, compared with walking. It freed up space on other transport modes particularly during major events. The trial contributed to a reduction in carbon emissions due to trips made by electric scooters, rather than motor vehicles, with an estimated 780 tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions avoided during the trial.

While there are benefits, the risks and impacts had to be managed and Melbourne City Council has identified the following for the consideration:

- Requiring operators to issue stricter warnings, penalties and suspensions to riders breaking the road rules.
- Requiring operators to roll-out footpath riding detection technology and establish additional exclusion zones to prohibit riding on streets in riding 'hotspots'.
- Prohibiting riding with a passenger including requiring operators to issue stricter warnings, penalties and suspensions to riders breaking the rules.
- To minimise intoxicated riding, requiring operators to limit new riders to day-time riding for their first three rides; and advocating to Victoria Police for more consistent enforcement in areas and times identified as high-risk for intoxicated riding.
- Requiring operators to make an electric -scooter unavailable if it's missing a helmet.
- Introducing physical marking of designated parking locations and actions for operators to achieve better compliance.
- Limiting the total number of electric scooters within a Local Government Area.
- Requiring operators to investigate age verification with the app.

Lightweight, short distance freight journeys

In London since 2008, the roll out of traffic-protected cycleways has resulted in a significant increase in the use of commercial cargo bikes by businesses. Local freight is a sign of vibrant economy and social activity but inconspicuous as a freight task operating around a vibrant, busy area requires good urban planning.

Electrified active transport options provide new opportunities for short-haul lightweight urban freight transport, as part of the TfNSW Freight Policy Reform program now underway, and

the Portfolio Committee No. 6 - Transport and the Arts is urged to adopt the following recommendations to help foster the change needed in all components of the supply chain:

- Identify the obstacles to widespread adoption of electric bike last-mile delivery services.
- Draw on best practices from high density concentrations of commercial, retail and residential land uses around the world.
- Explore the policies and actions needed to support electric cargo bikes for short haul deliveries.
- Establish benchmarks to foster the changes that are needed.

Fire risk of lithium-ion batteries

The number of fires caused by electric bikes and scooters in NSW has increased significantly due to the overheating of lower quality or converted devices or when an incompatible or damaged charger is used or left to "overcharge". Until recently the focus has been on electric car risks and the increase in fires from electric bike and scooter batteries has resulted in greater attention on the risks of electric micromobility devices.

Fires have occurred from electric bike and scooter charging because the batteries are not subject to the same design rules and lacked important safety features. The Federal and State Governments are equipped to fairly regulate lithium-ion batteries as has occurred for other consumer products like cars, phones and laptops and undue requirements should not be placed on electric bike and scooter batteries. Light electric vehicles are coming to market quickly and are commonly from countries where quality management can be low and to address this the Federal Government urgently needs to establish rules governing the importation, approval and use of micromobility batteries.

Inner West Council supports the recommendations of the Australian Competition & Consumer Commission (ACCC) report released in 2023 for national controls for the sale, testing and disposal of lithium-ion batteries below and asks Portfolio Committee No. 6 - Transport and the Arts to endorse these recommendations:

- Improved data standardisation and collection by State and Federal governments.
- Consumer educational resources about how to store, charge, identify damaged products and treat damaged products.
- Development of infrastructure, regulation and supporting policies to enable the safe and efficient collection and recycling of batteries.
- State and Federal Governments to establish nationally consistent regulatory framework for electrical consumer products.
- State electrical safety regulators should introduce, administer and enforce requirements for the testing, labelling transportation and storage of lithium-ion batteries and products containing lithium-ion batteries.
- Regulators continue to work with online platforms about the risks from products containing lithium-ion batteries being sold online.

In addition, the encouragement of alternative battery types such as solid-state batteries need to be explored. Lithium-ion batteries contain a volatile, flammable liquid while solid-state batteries can tolerate higher temperatures and have a higher thermal stability, making them a potentially safer alternative and the Committee is encouraged to recommend further investigation of these alternatives.

Decarbonise the transport system

Electric vehicle policies from all levels of government need to encourage shift from combustion engine cars to electric bikes as well as electric cars.

Rebate schemes and tax incentives currently focus on electric cars with no incentives for electric bikes even though they are significantly more beneficial for both the individual and wider community. For example, workers purchasing an electric car will have their fringe benefit taxes waived, but to receive the same benefit electric bike buyers must primarily use their vehicle to get to and from work and keep a logbook.

The recent Federal Government *Transport and Infrastructure Net Zero Consultation Roadmap* outlines steps for establishing net-zero transport and transport. It recognises that active and public transport can make a significant contribution to reducing transport emissions, easing congestion and reducing household transport costs while increasing physical activity and reducing pollution, heat and noise. Inner West Council strongly urges that the recommendations of Portfolio Committee No. 6 - Transport and the Arts coordinate with the Roadmap and ensure the electric vehicle policies of all levels of government encourage shift cars to e-bikes and scooters as well as electric cars, while providing a strong legislative framework to ensure safety for all road and path users.

Subsidy program

A subsidy program to help people purchase electric bikes is especially critical for people on low incomes who have relied on a bike for transport to work but cannot afford an electric bike, and Inner West Council recommends a State Government led subsidy program, similar to state-based electric car rebates.

We Ride, a national and independent voice for cycling as part of daily life, has outlined a subsidy program for Australia based on programs overseas and current subsidy schemes in Australia. It includes a 25 percent rebate, up to \$500 per electric bike, with a rebate to be processed at the retailer, and the retailer receives a transfer from the government as with state-based electric car rebates. *We Ride's* research shows up to 8.4 million kilometres of car travel could be avoided, annually, through the electric bike subsidy with each bike generating \$1,007 in benefits every year.

An electric bike subsidy program in NSW would follow recent initiatives in Tasmania which provides a try-before-you-buy scheme and assistance to buy a bike, and the City of Adelaide which has developed parameters for bike-purchase subsidies as part of its Sustainability Incentives Scheme.

The NSW Government's Transport Oriented Development (TOD) planning reforms support more development around public transport and subsidy schemes could support future residents of these developments with the purchase and use of electric bikes as has occurred in Green Square, a high-density area in the City of Sydney. An electric bike loan scheme allows residents to try an electric bike for a month with an option to purchase it at the end of the trial. The scheme was funded by Transport for NSW and operated by the City of Sydney to deliver the active transport outcomes identified in State and Local Government strategies.