

Submission
No 124

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

Name: Dr Marjorie O'Neill MP, Member for Coogee

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Dr Marjorie O'Neill MP

MEMBER FOR COOGEE

Portfolio Committee No.6

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

Executive Summary

Primary concerns about use of e-bikes and e-scooters outlined in the Coogee EO submission

- The overwhelming concern is for pedestrian safety when e-bikes and e-scooters are used on the footpath.
- The constituents making representations are almost all elderly with mobility problems. At least one has been hit by a vehicle, but all are concerned about the speed and the silence of these vehicles.
- They are concerned about rider behaviour and apparent lack of concern for pedestrians.
- They ask why police and council rangers are not enforcing current rules. For example, it is illegal to ride an e-scooter on the road or a footpath in NSW.
- There are also concern about the lack of proper management of share bikes which can be left anywhere.

Introduction

This submission is made on behalf of the Coogee electorate and is based on:

- Mixture of direct feedback from constituents
- Lived experience from the Member
- Learnings and observations from other regions and countries

We are aware of related inquiries and initiatives that affect e-scooters, e-bikes and micromobility in general. These being this current inquiry and:

- Parliamentary Committee into Electric & Hybrid Vehicle Batteries established in September 2023 and still to report <https://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/committees/inquiries/Pages/inquiry-details.aspx?pk=3005#tab-termsofreference>
- Transport for NSW's e-micromobility Interagency Group, a group of 13 NSW government departments and agencies <https://www.transport.nsw.gov.au/projects/current-projects/e-micromobility>
- NSW Fair Trading new safety standards for lithium-ion batteries in e-mobility vehicles <https://www.nsw.gov.au/housing-and-construction/safety-home/electrical-safety/lithium-ion-battery-safety/new-safety-standards-for-lithium-ion-batteries-e-mobility-devices>

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This is a recognition of the growing consumer demand for e-micromobility transport options that build on the long-term availability of cycling as an alternative to public transport and motor vehicles.

The micromobility market is a mixture of privately owned vehicles and a growing number of businesses that provide short term rental of vehicles as an affordable alternative to ownership.

The electorate of Coogee is relatively densely populated with a significant proportion of people living in flats or apartments. It is also a coastal electorate that attracts visitors from outside the electorate to its beaches and to use the coastal walkway.

Within the electorate Bondi Junction is a major transport and retail hub. It contains major public hospitals (Prince of Wales and the Children's Hospital) and the University of NSW which attract workers and students from outside the electorate. As a result, transport availability and affordability are major issues for the electorate.

The Issues

The major issues for constituents are:

- Infrastructure management
- Pedestrian Safety
- Rider capability

Infrastructure Management

The problem:

This relates to the operators and users of shared e-bikes. Many people in our community love e-bikes, and particularly the shared e-bikes. But, currently there is broad community perception that bikes are 'dumped' as they are often left in the middle of pathways creating hazards, especially on narrow residential footpaths. Bikes are often left haphazardly on sidewalks, obstructing pedestrian traffic and creating safety hazards. By creating Designated drop-off locations for shared e-bikes we can enhance the organisation and tidiness of public spaces.

Proposed solution:

Work with councils, share bike companies and local communities to identify marked drop off and pick up locations. It is advantageous for drop off zones to integrate seamlessly with public transportation hubs, encouraging multi-modal transport solutions. This connectivity supports more sustainable urban transit by making it easier for commuters to switch between bikes, buses, and trains, reducing car dependency and traffic congestion. Drop off zones should be in key community localities, identified by local council and the community.

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By geo identifying these localities, bikes will only be able to be dropped off and picked up and dropped off from these localities. Users should be 'fined' for not dropping off in these localities, while councils will also be able to fine the business that own the operate the shared bike scheme.

By centralising drop-off points, we can maintain clearer pathways and a more aesthetically pleasing environment.

While users will no longer be able to ride their share bike to their end destination, by working with councils and the community we should be able to identify a vast number of key localities that are important to the local community so that the majority of a trip is covered.

Designated locations will streamline bike retrieval and maintenance also allowing service providers to efficiently manage bike fleets, ensuring they are evenly distributed and promptly repaired when needed. This systematic approach reduces downtime and improves bike availability for users, fostering a more reliable and user-friendly service.

By creating designated areas, we can foster a sense of community and shared responsibility for shared bikes. Currently, there is significant resentment towards shared bikes in our community, by creating clearly marked zones we can promote proper usage and respect for shared resources, leading to better user behaviour and increased longevity of the bike-sharing program. Overall, designated drop-off locations contribute to a more efficient, clean, and integrated urban transport system.

Example from Europe:



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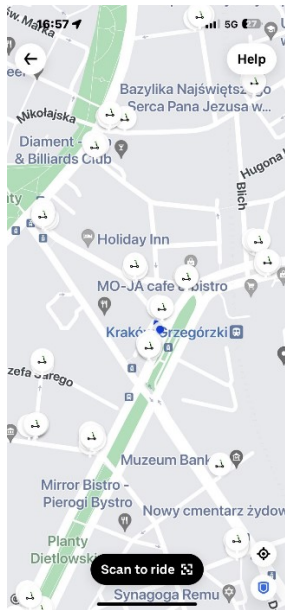
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Examples of key locations in the Coogee electorate:

UNSW

Coogee Beach

Bronte Beach

Tamarama Beach

Bondi Beach

Charing Cross

Woolworths McPherson Street

Belmore Road shops

Bondi Junction

Waverley Library

Drop off locations that should also be considered is areas where car parking currently creates visibility issues for vehicles turning out of streets. By installing share e- bike parking in these spaces and localities you will be able to solve car driver viability issues.

For example.

Drivers currently turning right out of Yanko Ave, Bronte on MacPherson street, currently experience visibility issues turning right when large trucks are parked at the intersection. As outlined and highlighted in the image below, by turning such spaces in the share e bike parking locations and not just pushing the no stooping sign back you are solving two community issues.

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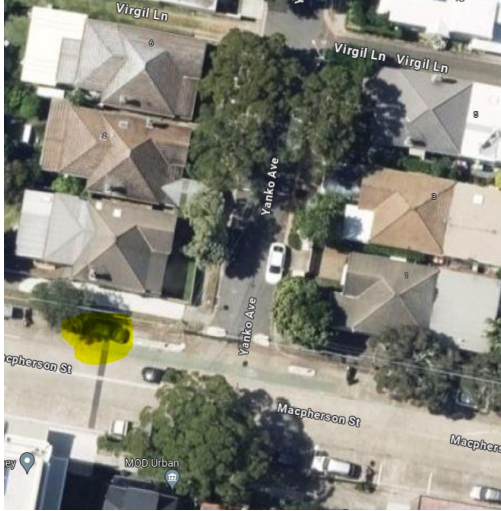
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Pedestrian Safety

The Problem:

The overwhelming concern is for pedestrian safety when e-bikes and e-scooters are used on the footpath. The constituents making representations are almost all elderly with mobility problems. At least one has been hit by a vehicle, but all are concerned about the speed and the silence of these vehicles.

Many are aware that it is currently not legal to ride an e-scooter on roads and footpaths in NSW and ask why this rule is not being enforced. We are aware that Transport for NSW is currently undertaking trials of share e-scooters in selected regional and metropolitan areas.

From the perspective of the bike rider the use of a footpath is sometimes the result of them not feeling safe on busy roads with no designated cycle lanes.

Proposed solution:

The long-term solution is the creation of more designated cycle ways and shared bike and pedestrian areas. But more can be done to promote safety to cyclists, motorists and pedestrians. For example, the providers of share e-bikes can be doing more to promote legal and responsible riding.

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Rider Capability

Problem:

There is broad community belief that the e bike users are unaware of the laws and regulations not only of the use of E bike use but also the road rules. This includes rules around riding on footpaths, helmet use and speed.

Proposed solution:

A free online short course could be designed for riders to complete. The current L drivers' assessment could be easily adapted for e bikes.

In Europe, you must be at least 14 years old to ride a bike on a public road. While there is no specific driving license required, riders are encouraged to familiarize themselves with traffic rules and scooter and bike operation to ensure safety. Information could be provided about speed rules, parking, use of footpaths, giving way and broad safety information.

For those using E bikes for work purposes, a commercial license should be created. This should be linked to their insurance.

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Direct comments and feedback from constituents

The following was posted on social media, seeking feedback from our community to help form our submission:

The NSW Government is currently conducting an e- bike inquiry. I would like your help in constructing my submission and I'd like to hear your thoughts on how we can better regulate these bikes in our community. Personally, I think we can find a better way of parking them!

We received the following comments through social media:

"I agree there is a place for e-bike rentals that provide another form of transport with regulations."

"The issue is that Lime e-bikes are mostly left where the rider ends the trip often being left on native strips and parks damaging vegetation and pathways and causing trip hazards and they are unsightly."

3. My suggestion is that regulations are considered to have allocated docking stations where the bikes must be returned to enable a refund of a reasonable deposit.

4. I would suggest that the owners of e-bike companies are also fined for bikes being dumped in our suburbs often for some time.

5. Whilst there is a contact to report an abandoned bike irregularly placed, this is time-consuming and often it is days before the bikes are picked up by Lime e-bikes' local provider.

"Love them, just wish they weren't abandoned in awkward places. They need somewhere to be left/parked"

"Messy and in the way when they are left out somewhere"

"Sydneyiders don't seem to be able to respect the system as they do in European cities. They are constantly dumped, helmets tossed, kids riding them all over the road. I was in the city a few weekends ago and there were bikes dumped in the gutters all the way down Pitt Street to Circular Quay. While they should be an asset they are actually an eyesore."

"What about the fact that you need to be 18 yrs old to ride them but you see school kids flying around on them whilst not wearing a helmet?"

We had a car crash on the same block as a school and good chunk of the people that lived on the street were out as car accidents happen weekly. We all watched in horror as kids when EarPods in (can't even hear a thing) flew through give way signs on e bikes with no helmets.

So if these kids end up dead is councils to blame for allowing such bikes into our community?"

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“More bike lanes so it is safer to ride/don't need to ride on footpath”

“If the Council, maybe in collaboration with e-bike hire companies, builds bike stations where e-bikes are hired from and returned in various areas around our community, it would improve the situation. When someone hires a bike and it is not returned to another station, the hirer is charged a fee .. say \$1000, something substantial for not returning it correctly. This would stamp out bike dumping. Other countries use this method, why not us?”

“The Snap Send Solve App used to have ability to report dumped e-bikes so that anyone walking could send on a report for their collection- but it's disappeared & now the Council website is the only place to report them but abandoned vehicles is supposed to be for cars.”

“I own my own e-bike, I find it an easy and convenient alternative mode of transport, particularly around the eastern suburbs hills (which was initially a barrier to me using a bike), and used it to travel to and from high school and now the same for university (as a matter of fact it is a faster option than public transport) - more bike lane infrastructure to encourage people to use e-bikes and improve safety for both riders, whether that be their own bike or a hire one. However I do think there should be more regulation around the lime/hire e-bikes, a lot of them don't have helmets, are dumped on the side of roads, and there just generally seems like there is an oversupply of them”

“In Toronto, Canada, E-bikes that you rent have a spot you have to “park” them back to (like a bike rack that the unit locks into) rather than leave them along the sidewalk or litter them in a river (Melbourne) or discard them like trash anywhere in a neighbourhood. If it's a bike and used on our roads it should be licensed or regulated like any other vehicle/bike subject to age restrictions, helmets, tickets by council. Why would they be exempt?”

“In Campsie they are often ridden along the footpath of Beamish St. which is a very busy shopping stretch. Old people have to try to dodge the bikes. Disgraceful 😞”

“They are a huge nuisance, and a blight on the landscape!”

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