

DISABILITY MATTERS

SUMMARY REPORT - E-SCOOTER ONLINE FORUM 17 AUGUST 2021



ABOUT

QUEENSLANDERS WITH DISABILITY NETWORK (QDN)

Queenslanders with Disability Network (QDN) is an organisation of, for, and with people with disability. QDN operates a state-wide network of 2,000+ members and supporters who provide information, feedback and views based on their lived experience, which inform the organisation's systemic advocacy activities. We believe people with disability should always be at the table when decisions are made that directly impact their lives.

QDN also currently hosts 21 peer support groups across Queensland, made up of people with a diverse range of disabilities, and convened by people with disability. The groups network socially, share information, life experiences and solutions, to create more inclusive lives and communities. Local groups are a safe space for people with disability to share information on topics that are of interest to them, to extend their social networks, and to build capacity and leadership skills. Groups usually meet on a monthly or bi-monthly basis and meetings can be face-to-face or virtual.

INTRODUCTION

During 2021 the Queenslanders with Disability Network (QDN) received a range of reports from members raising concerns about the impact of e-scooters and the way they are used. It is acknowledged that scooters enhance mobility for many, and concerns relate mainly to the adverse impacts felt by pedestrians, particularly those who are deaf or hard of hearing, blind or have low vision or use a wheelchair or other mobility device.

To explore e-scooter concerns, an online forum was held on 17 August 2021 with 30 participants with a broad range of disabilities, from across many parts of urban and regional Queensland.

The purpose of the forum was to discuss people's experiences with e-scooters, identify issues of concern, and to generate ideas to address how to enhance e-scooter safety for riders and pedestrians.

Speakers

- Brendan O'Keeffe, Manager, e-Mobility Strategy, Brisbane City Council (BCC)
- Tarni Callaghan, Manager, Contracting, Brisbane City Council (BCC)
- Jane Britt Policy and Advocacy Team Leader, Blind Citizens Australia
- Elisha Mathews, Peer Leader QDN

E-SCOOTERS AND THEIR IMPACT

E-scooters are relatively new in Queensland and are in use in Brisbane and Townsville, and their regulation is evolving, with jurisdiction between Councils and the State Government. The current speed limit is 25 km per hour (20km in Townsville), on paths and footpaths in the Central Business District (they cannot be ridden on main roads or streets), and on local suburban streets. E-scooters are left to be picked up by providers, which many forum participants advised presents problems for pedestrians.

The key concern for forum participants was safety both for riders and pedestrians, particularly pedestrians with disability.

E-scooter safety is complex and is a function of rules and regulations, technical aspects of riding and storing e-scooters, and relationships between regulators, providers, riders, and pedestrians.

QDN is requesting further engagement around key issues and solutions identified by members to explore potential change to rules and regulations at Council and State levels in order to enhance safety of e-scooter riding, storage, and the relationship of e-scooters to pedestrians.

Other cities have learnt from introducing bicycles a decade ago. Bicycle safety initiatives have been necessary and effective, and it is time now to look at how safety can be enhanced for e-scooters.

PRESENTATION SUMMARY

The presentation from Brisbane City Council (BCC) outlined the e-mobility strategy and the background to BCC tendering for and permitting use of e-scooters in the city, as well as BCC's intent to strengthen safety arrangements for e-scooter use. Parking hubs are currently being created for scooters to get them off footpaths. As a regulator, BCC has a responsibility to all citizens to ensure e-scooters are used in safe ways and that they do not present hazards to pedestrians, especially people with disability.

Jane Britt, Policy and Advocacy Team Leader, Blind Citizens Australia and QDN board member, presented outlining the spread of e-scooters around Australia and the issues Blind Citizens Australia have identified to ensure greater safety with e-scooter use. She discussed the need for e-scooters to make a noise while travelling so that blind citizens can be warned of their approach. She highlighted that overseas experience is that e-scooters are banned from footpaths. The key solutions identified by Blind Citizens Australia are:

- a 10 km speed limit on shared paths
- geofencing to ban e-scooters from built up areas
- a ban on leaving scooters anywhere on paths
- a ban on alcohol use with e-scooter riding
- penalties for unsafe use of e-scooters.

The presentation by QDN member Elisha Mathews identified the potential problems people in wheelchairs may have with stationary or moving e-scooters. She has experienced a number of incidents where she has been blocked from progressing along a footpath by e-scooters. Motorised wheelchairs are required

to be registered with a verified driver, where e-scooters are available to everyone regardless of training or qualifications, unregistered and relatively unaccountable. She explained that e-scooter infrastructure is not established, and without this in place problems will continue. She advocated for BCC and e-scooter providers to provide better safety infrastructure, and to continue to talk to people with disability to find solutions to e-scooter safety concerns.

BREAKOUT ROOMS

Participants were allocated to breakout rooms to discuss the issues and to identify three key actions going forward. The predominant issue for the participants was safety of riders and pedestrians. E-scooters left on paths and speeding scooters presented hazards for pedestrians generally, but especially people with disability. There is a clear need for parking hubs, incentives for riders to park e-scooters, and new speed limits that are more pedestrian friendly.

FURTHER ENGAGEMENT

It is important that Council and State regulators and e-scooter providers engage with people with disability in order to amend regulation of e-scooters to reduce hazards to pedestrians and improve safety.

People with disability who have lived experience with these issues can provide particular insight into the hazards presented by e-scooters. Further engagement with people with disability is encouraged to identify concerns and co-design potential solutions.

KEY ACTIONS IDENTIFIED BY PARTICIPANTS

Issue	Proposed action
Reduce speed of e-scooters	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Amend state speed limit to 10 kmh from 25 kmh Bring in speed inhibitor software Geofence high pedestrian traffic areas as e-scooter free
Orderly storage of e-scooters	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop compulsory parking for e-scooters Introduce incentives for riders to follow rules Introduce warnings for riders of e-scooters
Enforce rules	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Train council staff and police in enforcement of e-scooter rules
Enhance awareness ambience of e-scooters	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> For blind people enable e-scooters to make a noise For deaf people enable flashing lights on e-scooters
Strengthen regulation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Introduce registration for e-scooters
Training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Introduce education programs for riders and public
Research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Examine overseas experience of regulating e-scooters
Engage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue to consult and engage with stakeholders with disability

DETAILED PARTICIPANT ISSUES AND SUGGESTIONS REVIEW

- Examine overseas experience with e-scooters and identify learnings
- Review cycling safety lessons looking at the interaction between cyclists and pedestrians to inform potential e-scooter safety measures
- Investigate upgrades to e-scooters to make noise for blind people and implement flashing lights for deaf people
- Investigate options for speed inhibitor software
- Investigate studies that have engaged with people with disability overseas and what they have learnt
- Recommend e-scooter providers consider useability of mobile apps, and involvement of people with disability testing navigability, call centre staff response times and their skills in working with people with disability.

COMMUNICATION AND ENGAGEMENT

- Continue to consult and engage with stakeholders
- Introduce education and training programs for riders and public
- Train council staff and police in enforcement of e-scooter rules
- Review incident reporting process to enable vision impaired to report incidents
- Differentiate between private and public e-scooters
- Develop a safe future plan for e-scooters
- Consider the opportunity to influence Olympic Games infrastructure incorporating the needs of pedestrians, cyclists and e-scooters and involve people with disability in co-design.

RULES AND REGULATIONS

- Geofencing designated areas as e-scooter free, e.g., Queen Street Mall
- Develop compulsory parking for e-scooters
- Introduce incentives for riders to follow rules
- Introduce warnings for riders of e-scooters
- Impose fines on riders who leave e-scooters in doorways and on street
- Strengthen safety policies
- Introduce registration for private e-scooters
- Design and width – there is a clash between the current infrastructure and the current width of footpaths and this needs to be considered in future planning design
- Safety speeds – change limit to 10/km per hour in line with international research
- Training for new users as most accidents caused by new users.

CONCLUSION

The take-up and use of e-scooters in metropolitan areas has brought with it a range of safety issues and concerns for pedestrians sharing footpaths and local roads, particularly for people with disability.

The issues and concerns raised by forum participants make it clear that the experiences of people with disability highlight the need to improve safety, rules and regulations around e-scooter use for riders and pedestrians.

QDN looks forward to continuing this work, by and for people with disability and further engagement with key stakeholders to pursue these issues and recommendations, and will continue to update members on this important issue.