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# Position Paper on Personal Mobility Devices (PMDs)

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## Background

In recent years there has been rapid and significant growth in the popularity and availability of e-scooters and other Personal Mobility Devices, while legislation and regulation has struggled to keep up. Personal Mobility Devices (PMDs) or ‘e-ridables’ are broad terms that can refer to a wide range of electric powered devices, including e-scooters, electric unicycles, electric skateboards, ‘hoverboards’ and Segways.

Blind Citizens Australia (BCA) recognises the ongoing role PMDs are likely to play as a way of providing a practical, ecological and economical alternative to city traffic, and as “last-mile” transportation to help bridge connections within public transport networks. However, these devices can pose significant risks to people who are blind or vision impaired. It is therefore crucial that governments across Australia introduce consistent rules regulating their use to promote the safety of both users and pedestrians.

## Where are e-bikes and e-scooters legal in Australia?

The laws on the use of e-scooters and other PMDs currently varies significantly across Australia. Some governments – such as in Tasmania and Western Australia – have allowed private ownership of these devices to varying extents, while other jurisdictions – such as Queensland and South Australia – have required private companies to establish schemes where e-scooters and e-bikes can be hired as a way for tourists and locals to get around (‘hire and ride schemes’) a designated zone, while prohibiting private ownership.

## Issues and Concerns

When used inappropriately, PMDs create a significant safety hazard for pedestrians who are blind or vision impaired. The foremost of those concerns is the difficulty detecting e-scooters approaching as they run almost silently and are capable of speeds of at least 25km/h. We are gravely concerned by reports of e-scooters available on the market that can reach speeds of up to 90km/h.

In addition, ‘hire and ride’ devices are often deposited across pedestrian areas after being used, creating a tripping or collision hazard for people who are blind or vision impaired. Similarly, these devices may be left in areas that block tactile guidance systems, traffic lights, or walls that are essential for the independent mobility of people who are blind or vision impaired.

Reckless endangerment caused by scooter misuse has amplified safety concerns for all pedestrians, but especially those who are blind or vision impaired. In recent years, an overall increase in injuries has been recorded by Australian medical professionals, including both to the e-scooter users and other pedestrians or bystanders who have been injured by the scooters. In WA, doctors reported a “near exponential rise in e-scooter related injuries”, with 39 e-scooter patients admitted to Royal Perth Hospital (RPH) for more than 24 hours in 2021, that number jumping to 62 in 2022. In just the first two months of 2023, 19 patients have required admission[[1]](#endnote-1).

International research has indicated that e-scooters could be three times more dangerous than cycling, with riders engaging in anti-social behaviour including using devices on footpaths, travelling too fast, racing other riders and performing dangerous stunts[[2]](#endnote-2). Additionally, use of scooters under the influence of alcohol has increased safety concerns given the dangers to both pedestrians and riders themselves[[3]](#endnote-3).

## Policy solutions

We note that the National Transport Commission, the statutory body for developing road regulations, released a 73-page Final Report[[4]](#endnote-4). in August 2020 after spending 18 months considering the barriers to the safe use of PMDs. The report recommended e-scooters be allowed for use at speeds of 10km/h on footpaths and shared zones, and 25km/h on bicycle paths and residential streets (roads with speed limits of 50km/h or less).

BCA broadly supports the recommendations of this report; however, we go further and urge all jurisdictions to ban PMDs from use on footpaths, and allow their use only on dedicated bike lanes and residential streets.

Action must also be taken to reduce the risk of the near silent operation of PMDs. This can be achieved through consistent national regulation on the mandatory installation of the Acoustic Vehicle Alerting System (AVAS) on all PMDs. This system, which has been mandated for use in electric and hybrid vehicles across Europe and the United States, emits an artificial noise of 75 decibels while the device or vehicle is being used.

## Recommendations

To help ensure the safety of people who are blind or vision impaired (and other pedestrians), Blind Citizens Australia recommends the Federal Government work with State and Territory governments to ensure nationally consistent rules on the use of e-scooters and other PMDs. This should include the following reforms:

1. E-scooters and other PMDs should be prohibited from use on footpaths.
2. The speed limit for the use of e-scooters should be capped 25km/h on shared paths, bicycle paths and small roads, and at 10 km/h in high use pedestrian areas.
3. PMDs that are imported to Australia undergo strict regulation checks to ensure that the maximum allowed Watts are not exceeded, and top speeds cannot be exceeded.
4. All e-scooters – whether privately owned or part of a ‘hire-and-ride’ scheme – must be equipped with AVAS technology, without the capacity for this device to be removed or deactivated
5. All e-scooters and other PMDs are equipped with a bell or other warning device.
6. States and Territories that allow ‘hire-and-ride’ e-scooters must require the operators of such schemes to include geo-locking mechanisms whereby e-scooters are forced to slow, or prohibited entirely from entering built-up, busy pedestrian areas like malls and tourist destinations.
7. Hire-and-ride schemes must include a system for the deposit and placement of e-scooters and e-bikes after use in pedestrian areas. This may include introduction of fines for failing to place devices in a safe place at the edge or off the footpath after use.
8. Begin public advertising campaigns relating to the safe use of e-scooters and e-bikes, both for users and for other pedestrians or bystanders.
9. Ensure laws and regulations relating to e-scooters and other PMDs are properly enforced with penalties imposed if they are breached.
1. ABC News (2023). Warning of Exponential Rise in e-Scooter Crashes.

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2023-03-25/warning-of-exponential-rise-in-e-scooter-crashes/102145078> [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Independent (2022). E-scooters could be three times more dangerous than cycling, study finds. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/electric-scooters-escooters-danger-cycling-uk-b2246548.html> [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Kleinertz et al (2023). Risk factors and injury patterns of e-scooter associated injuries in Germany. <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41598-022-25448-z#:~:text=Of%20the%20278%20e%2Dscooter,scooters1%2C3%2C13> [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. National Transport Commission (2020). Barriers to the safe use of personal mobility devices. Retrieved from <https://www.ntc.gov.au/sites/default/files/assets/files/NTC-Decision-RIS-PMDs.pdf> [↑](#endnote-ref-4)