

Youth Council's Feedback on E-Scooters

Prepared for the Wellington City Council Strategy and Policy Committee

21 May 2020

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Position Statement

E-scooters have had a strong positive impact on the lives of young people in Wellington. They are a useful and fun transport choice, particularly for those without cars. Although the e-scooter trial has uncovered some issues, we believe the overall benefits far outweigh the costs. We are strongly in favour of the scheme being continued.

Retaining, but adjusting, the e-scooter programme is a positive step for Wellington

We recognise the wide range of views around e-scooters, and would like to see a pragmatic approach taken to address concerns, without the knee jerk reaction of removing e-scooter public share services from Wellington City. Feedback outlined in Wellington City Council's report shows that public support for e-scooters remains, and is in fact larger than the negative views of e-scooters.

With private e-scooters rising in popularity, Youth Council views it as more prudent and worthwhile to pursue the ability to shape the usage of e-scooters and their place in Wellington, rather than dictate to Wellingtonians the manner in which locals and tourists can choose to travel.

E-scooters bring a vibrancy to Wellington and enhance the view that Wellington is the coolest little capital. Particularly for young people, the transport options that e-scooters provide cannot be ignored. Is it important that all factors are examined when deciding on how to best modify the use of e-scooters in Wellington City.

Overall, it is important that the vast group of well meaning and studious e-scooter users who ride sensibly and with proper regard for the public can continue to do so. Trust that the majority of Wellingtonians will do the right thing is important, to ensure we don't single out one group.

With the positive vibe provided by e-scooters well-established, there are some practical changes that should be considered to recognise and mitigate some of the safety concerns raised. We note that there appears to be a divergence between the perceived safety concerns, and actual safety events. Nonetheless, below we outline a number of practical and pragmatic ideas to better enhance the e-scooter programme.

Summary of Recommendations

1. Introduce more dedicated e-scooter parking at popular destinations.
2. Reconsider requiring automatic enforcement of speed restrictions (including, for example, around Wellington Hospital).
3. Align restrictions on e-scooter use around the waterfront with actual behaviour by removing the 10 km/h speed limit and the no-ride zone at Oriental Bay.
4. Replace GPS-enforced parking restrictions with dismissible in-app warnings about allowed parking locations. Fine users only after manual confirmation of illegal parking.
5. Continue improving cycling infrastructure.
6. Address issues making our footpaths dangerous for e-scooter usage, particularly:
 - a. Barriers like those found on Taurima St in Hataitai near the tunnel entrance that force riders to use the road
 - b. Footpaths that give way to stairs with little visual warning, like at 139 Wallace St, Mt Cook.

Key Issues

Parking

We welcome more dedicated parking spaces like the one at the train station. Such spaces are a win all round.

- They clearly identify good places to park.
- They make it easier to find an e-scooter to ride.
- Their use reduces clutter on footpaths.

The \$1 incentive currently offered for parking in the railway station park could be expanded to cover all dedicated parking spots. We expect this would increase their use somewhat, but that the dedicated parking spots would still be useful without this incentive.

The introduction of dedicated parking should not come paired with further restrictions on where scooters can be parked. Much of the utility of e-scooters comes from the fact that they can take you right to your destination. Let riders use dedicated parking when convenient, but don't force it on them.

Recommendation: Introduce more dedicated e-scooter parking at popular destinations.

Low-speed zones

Council proactively introduced a range of restrictions on their use with the intention of improving safety. One of these restrictions was a "slow zone" around Wellington Hospital

(Clause 8.3, Code of Practice). This has been enacted by hire companies through speed restrictions being automatically applied when scooters enter the designated area.

Although well-intentioned, this restriction has dangerous unintended consequences.

Consider an e-scooter rider trying to pass the hospital on Riddiford St with no prior knowledge of the restriction. In an attempt to avoid potentially vulnerable pedestrians, they choose to ride on the road. When the speed restriction is enacted, they are rapidly slowed to 10 km/h, barely giving the traffic behind them time to slow. The rider then has no choice but to switch to the footpath, bringing them closer to the pedestrians everyone was trying to protect.

This is a textbook case of a well intentioned policy causing unintended harm. We urge the Council to reconsider requiring automatically enforced speed restrictions, instead trusting riders to make the right decisions for themselves and those around them. If necessary, signage could be introduced giving e-scooter riders an extra reminder to slow down around the hospital.

If speed restrictions must be continued, Council consider requesting that e-scooter providers offer an audible warning a few seconds before speed limits are enacted. This would limit the risk to the rider, but would still force them onto the footpath.

Recommendation: Reconsider requiring automatic enforcement of speed restrictions (including, for example, around Wellington Hospital).

Waterfront speed limit and restrictions

The waterfront is popular with pedestrians. At peak times, it can be difficult to walk around the waterfront, let alone ride. At such times, a good case can be made for the 10 km/h speed limit (Clause 8.6, Code of Practice) and the off-ride restrictions around Oriental Bay (Clause 5.15, Code of Practice).

However, outside of peak times, the waterfront is one of the safest places in Wellington to ride an e-scooter. It offers wide open smooth surfaces and great visibility (and views!). A faster speed is possible without raising the same level of safety concerns. Although there will always be riders that ride in a manner that doesn't recognise the situation they are in (for example, riding at speed during peak times), by and large riders should be allowed to best determine the right speed and adjust this speed depending on the situation.

To summarise, the flat 10 km/h speed limit poses several issues.

- It prevents a lot of perfectly safe behaviour.
- It encourages riders to use more dangerous routes, such as Cable St.
- It is a needless restriction that limits the public's responsiveness to other restrictions.

In practice, most riders are either unaware of the restrictions or choose to ignore them. We urge Council to trust riders to ride safely and remove these restrictions.

Recommendation: Align restrictions on e-scooter use around the waterfront with actual behaviour by removing the 10 km/h speed limit and the no-ride zone at Oriental Bay.

GPS-based enforcement of parking restrictions

GPS is not sufficiently accurate for its current use in enforcing parking restrictions. Parking an e-scooter near, but not inside, a no-park zone is a frustrating experience, particularly around large buildings. The interference they cause means the inaccuracy is often far more than the 7–10 metres claimed in the report.

This is particularly bad around the Golden Mile. Many side streets have bike racks adjacent to the Golden Mile. These would be perfect places to leave e-scooters, yet most are unusable due to this issue. Similar issues occur outside Victoria University campuses and the airport.

We do not believe that the parking restrictions should simply be removed. Rather, we would like to see a more rider-friendly implementation. A potential solution to this is riders being warned if attempting to park an e-scooter in what the app believes is a restricted area. They should then have the option of ignoring the warning if they know the GPS location is incorrect. Fines should then only be applied after manual review (which could include the review of photos submitted by the user to confirm the parking location).

Recommendation: Replace GPS-enforced parking restrictions with dismissible in-app warnings about allowed parking locations. Fine users only after manual confirmation of illegal parking.

Dangers to riding on footpaths

First and foremost, Wellington needs more bike lanes, particularly protected ones. So many of the problems with e-scooters would be resolved if people were simply given more space to separate. The Council is already making good progress in this area and we hope to see it continue.

In places where safe bike lanes are not available, there are some physical changes to Wellington's footpaths that could improve the safety of riders.

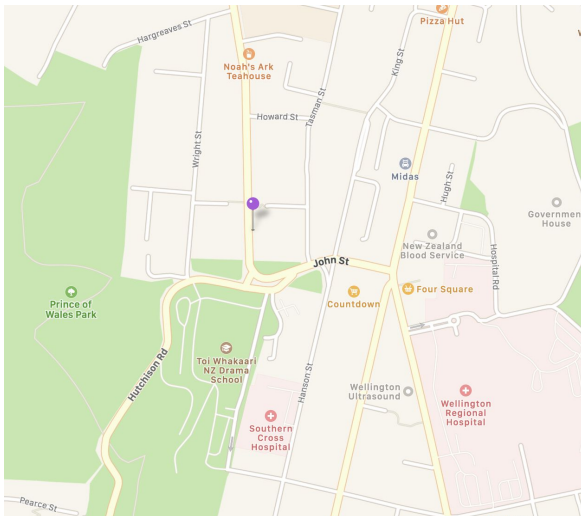
Several of our footpaths feature barriers, presumably to prevent their entry by bicycles. An example can be found on Tuarima St in Hataitai, where the Mt Victoria tunnel shared path ends.



These barriers force e-scooter users on to the road. There is no dedicated bike lane through Hataitai Village, so riders must mix with traffic before returning to the footpath.

These barriers also issues pose for other wheeled footpath users, such as wheelchair and pushchair users. We believe they should be removed.

Several of our footpaths transform into stairs with very little visual warning. One particularly bad example can be seen outside 139 Wallace St in Mt Cook.



The footpath follows a gentle curve over the hill before suddenly giving way to stairs. This poses a serious danger to e-scooter users, particularly those riding at night. Potential remedies could include:

- A single reflective line across the footpath to more clearly highlight the first step.
- Signage before the footpath splits from the road indicating e-scooter users should leave the footpath.

Recommendation: Continue improving cycling infrastructure.

Recommendation: Address issues making our footpaths dangerous for e-scooter usage, particularly:

1. Barriers like those found on Taurima St in Hataitai near the tunnel entrance that force riders to use the road
2. Footpaths that give way to stairs with little visual warning, like at 139 Wallace St, Mt Cook.

Conclusion

For young Wellingtonians, e-scooters are a fantastic addition to our city. We hope our Council can also see these benefits and is willing to continue the trial while continuing to refine the policy affecting their use. With the right incremental improvements, e-scooters can be made safer for everyone.