

**Submission
No 44**

NON-REGISTERED MOTORISED VEHICLES

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Thank you for establishing an inquiry into the use of non-registered motorised vehicles. This is a subject of discussion in many of the community groups I meet with in my capacity as Road Safety and Transport Officer for Coffs Harbour City Council. Please note that the views in this submission are my own formed after discussions with stakeholders, community members, and from customer requests to Council.

The definition of a motorised wheelchair as a pedestrian is not well-known. It is quite common to see elderly people on a motorised wheelchair on all types of roads – often sharing the lane with heavy vehicles – negotiating roundabouts and busy intersections. A review of the RMS crash statistics for Coffs Harbour (2008 – 2012) revealed just one crash with a vehicle type – “motorised wheelchair”. However this incident was not listed as a pedestrian crash.

The speed of motorised wheelchairs can be controlled by speed governors, but the prevalence of second hand vehicles in the community means that they are often capable of speeds above the legal limit. This is hard to enforce and may be also due to lack of education.

The Health campus could not provide me with data about hospital admissions due to non-registered motorised vehicle crashes. Anecdotally there appear to be some pedestrian / pedestrian crashes and single vehicle crashes, particularly on steep gradients and uneven ground. Users seem unaware of the insurance and legal ramifications of crashing into other road users.

There is an increasing unease in the community, particularly senior pedestrians about the numbers and types of non-registered motorised vehicles on shared paths and footpaths. Electric bicycles are quiet and can travel at high speeds, but are legal on shared paths. There are also concerns about the use of motorised skateboards. Motorised wheelchairs come in many sizes, and the larger ones are of particular concern to other road users on footpaths and shared paths.

The installation of shared paths enables more users to travel safely, and facilitate senior and others active transport use. However, Council is under severe budgetary constraints, particularly for infrastructure maintenance, so while numbers of motorised vehicles are increasing and should be encouraged; all capital footpath infrastructure works are on hold.

There is a demand for free registration of motorised wheelchairs in line with the Queensland regulations. At present the retailers are able to provide instruction and after sales assistance regarding the rules, suitability and use of the mobility aids they are purchasing. However, many are purchased second hand or online, often without even a user’s manual. Registration would facilitate education of users as well as monitoring types and condition of vehicles in the community. It would also assist users obtain insurance and could contain a provision for monitoring user’s health and ability to control the vehicle.

Motorised vehicles can encourage people to try alternative modes of transport other than the car and this should be encouraged. Council supports active transport modes, particularly as Coffs Harbour is a typical ageing community with increasing levels of health concerns. Income levels in on the North Coast are also lower than the State average, so active transport modes provide cheap, available transport, and motors enable people to travel longer distances more comfortably.

Council’s Access Committee is investigating the use of recharge points in Council facilities such as the library, and in shopping centres. This extract from a letter to the shopping centres contain details of the scheme:

As you would be aware there are many people who now use electric scooters and wheelchairs to visit shopping centres and other social venues maintaining as far as possible their ability to lead independent lives. Many of these people are aged or have mobility problems and the availability of these mobility aids is of benefit to all.

This type of mobility aid however has, depending on battery size and quality, a limited range restricting the ability to spend time either relaxing in company or shopping. There is now a commercial scheme being promoted nationally as the “RECHARGE Scheme” to provide battery recharge points in shopping centres and café, etc. Details of the scheme are available at www.rechargescheme.org.au . All that is required is a standard 10 amp power outlet with sufficient space to park a scooter or wheelchair and a standard “Recharge Point” wall sticker. These mobility aids use very small amounts of power and the cost to a provider is estimated to be in the order of 30 cents per hour.

This Scheme was discussed at the September meeting of this Committee and it was unanimously agreed that the scheme would be of great benefit to the people of Coffs Harbour and the region. It would enable users of these mobility aids to shop in the secure knowledge that if their chairs/scooters were running low on power a boost was available close by.

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