

NON-REGISTERED MOTORISED VEHICLES

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MANLY COUNCIL RESPONSE

This responds to a recent Parliamentary Joint Standing Committee on Road Safety request for submissions on the use of non-registered motorised vehicles.

The submission terms of reference states:

“That the Committee inquires into and reports on the increasing use of non-registered motorised vehicles, including mobility scooters, electric bicycles, Segways and quad bikes on public roads, footpaths and public land and their impact, with particular reference to:

- a) The current status of non-registered motorised vehicles in road rules definitions and the extent of road safety problems related to their use;*
- b) The adequacy of data collection for injury and fatality rates arising from the use of non-registered motorised vehicles;*
- c) Vehicle standards requirements for non-registered motorised vehicles, including vehicle design, engine capacity, mass and speed controls;*
- d) The extent and effectiveness of education and the necessary skills and competency training for users of non-registered motorised vehicles, particularly in relation to safe use;*
- e) Insurance implications of injuries and fatalities sustained and caused by non –registered motorised vehicles;*
- f) Any other related matters.”*

Introduction

In the past few years there has been an observable increase in the number of non-registered motorised vehicle being used in Manly. Mostly these vehicles interact with other road users without incidents or complaints being lodged with Council. However, with increasing use of non-registered motorised vehicles some clarity as to their status would be welcomed by Council.

Transport function of non-registered motorised vehicles

Non-registered motorised vehicles can provide a viable alternative to car use. Generally, these vehicles are light weight, produce few emissions and have a small carbon footprint when compared to registered motorised vehicles.

Many non-registered motorised vehicles are often used as an alternative to either walking or cycling because these vehicles either provide mobility or extend the range of accessibility for their users.

Non-registered motorised cycles (electric or small combustion engines), for example, significantly extend the range of cyclists and provide less able cyclists access to this sustainable transport mode and its many benefits including the health benefits of cycling.

Mobility scooters are now common place both on our roads and footpaths. These vehicles clearly provide a vital transport function for their users and provide accessibility to essential services.

Some non-registered motorised vehicles are used as toys or for recreational use. However, they often could be used for a transport purpose.

Given that this class of vehicle can provide a useful and sustainable transport alternative to car use that could complement public transport and active transport modes some status should be afforded to this class of vehicle within the Road Rules.

Road safety

The road safety risk to non-registered motorised vehicle users and to other road users from the use of non-registered motorised vehicles differs dependent on the environment in which these vehicles are used.

Use on road

Some non-registered motorised vehicles such as powered bicycles and some mobility scooters can be used on the road. These vehicles tend to be light weight in design and able to travel at relatively low speeds. These vehicles are vulnerable road users and they share many of the road safety issues and road rule compliance issues that face cyclists (these issues are discussed later). Non-registered motorised vehicles tend to travel at slower speeds than general traffic and in a collision are likely to be the more seriously damaged party.

Use on shared paths and cycle paths

Within Manly, non-registered motorised vehicles are mostly observed being used on shared paths and cycle paths where they share the space with cyclists and pedestrians.

Manly has installed an extensive shared path network that connects most of the main local centres within our Local Government Area. Very few incidents on these shared paths are reported. This could be as a result of lack of data collection or, more likely, that the severity of incidents is minor and would not warrant the attention of the police or other emergency service.

Council does receive some complaints each year about cyclists on footpaths and near misses between cyclists and pedestrians on shared paths. These complaints tend to be in locations where pedestrian activity is high and/or the footpath / shared paths are of a reduced width (either as a result of other uses such as alfresco dining or because the shared path is of a minimal standard). The increased use of non-registered motorised vehicles would likely lead to similar complaints when their use becomes as every day as cycling.

Use in pedestrian areas

Manly undertakes regular enforcement to prevent cycling and other non authorised vehicle use within our major pedestrian areas including the Corso. However, this does not deter all cyclists and unauthorised vehicles from using this space, particularly at times when pedestrian activity is minimal. Some complaints are received by Council about cycling within our pedestrian areas. No accidents involving cyclists and non registered motorised vehicles have been reported to Council in recent years.

Use of helmets

Within Manly, and the wider metropolitan area, compliance with the wearing of cycle helmets on bicycles and on some non-registered motorised vehicles has been observed to be very low. This appears to be particularly so with the younger road users and school children. Manly council has run several campaigns to encourage use of cycle helmets but these campaigns have only been partially successful.

Non-registered motorised vehicles can attain higher average speeds and, in some cases higher maximum speeds than similar unpowered vehicles. The severity of a road accident relates in part to the speed and existing conditions.

Adequacy of data

The Roads and Maritime in NSW send each council a yearly report of their crash statistics history. This data is usually one year behind as it takes this long for the coroner to determine the causes of the crashes and for the data to be recorded and sent to local councils. The

information provided only records crashes that are reported to the police, not incidents in which only details are exchanged. The data identifies what caused a crash using Road User Movement (RUM) codes, but in the case of a pedestrian or pedal cyclist it does not state whether a non-registered motorised scooter, bicycle, wheelchair, etc. was involved.

In order to get a clearer understanding of the severity of a crash involving a non registered motorised vehicle a system needs to be devised to identify these specific incidences for data analysis. Otherwise, a system where insurers identify the number of claims they have received for such incidences could be explored.

Vehicle standard requirements

There are several toy companies selling non registered motorised vehicles, there are conversions being made to existing non registered motorised transport, and there are motorised wheelchairs and electric bicycles. The motorised wheelchairs and electric bikes are exempt from having to be registered as their engine capacity is not to exceed 200 watts. However, Segways, motorised scooters and skateboards, and wheelmans are prohibited vehicles and are banned from use on roads and in public areas.

The use of these vehicles cannot be monitored and it would be difficult for council rangers and police to fine them unless they voluntarily stop and give details. There should be standards that are met before these non registered vehicles are imported into Australia to minimise safety concerns with excessive speed from the engine and/or poor design.

Education

The main education workshops that are delivered in Manly Council are Senior Road Safety Workshops. Within this workshop a portion of time is spent on motorised wheelchairs. This includes the road rules, when you may want to think about using a motorised wheelchair/scooter, and why people choose to travel in this manner. After the workshops a feedback sheet is filled in with comments. So far, comments on the workshops have been very positive. For the older generation the education campaigns and workshops seem to give them more information and knowledge when deciding if they want to use a motorised scooter/wheelchair.

The motorised wheelchair/scooter retailer should give advice and assistance to older users before purchasing. This could include a recommended time on where and how much time to spend on the scooter in the first week etc. One issue that is raised though is when should a senior person stop using a motorised wheelchair/scooter? Currently, there are no medical tests in place to determine if there is a time in which an elderly person is no longer capable of using a motorised wheelchair/scooter in a safe manner.