



**Joint Oireachtas Committee on Transport and
Communications**

Wednesday January 19th, 2022

13.00 – 16.30

**Opening Remarks by John Fulham, Public
Engagements Manager, Irish Wheelchair Association**

Opening Remarks – Joint Oireachtas Committee on Transport and Communications 19th January, 2022

John Fulham – Public Engagements Manager, Irish Wheelchair Association

Chairperson, Members of the Committee, on behalf of Irish Wheelchair Association, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today, alongside my colleagues from the National Council for the Blind and Irish Guide Dogs for the Blind, to discuss our concerns regarding the Road Traffic and Roads Bill 2021 with particular focus on the use of E-Scooters in Ireland.

Irish Wheelchair Association is one of Ireland's leading representative organisations and advocates with and on behalf our 20,000 members, people with physical disabilities and limited mobility, to address matters which are important to their lives. Our voice is here to represent that community on what is a matter of serious concern.

In recognising the advent of E-Scooters and their increased usage in our society, we also recognise that E-Scooters could potentially contribute to addressing climate change and traffic congestion issues as part of a broader strategic approach. However, critical to this is the necessity that E-Scooter use is implemented in a safe and practical manner and that the required legislation, regulation and practices do not place disabled people or those with limited mobility, in a vulnerable position and compromise their independence.

In advance of the draft legislation being published, Irish Wheelchair Association created a position paper highlighting our concerns and given the shared nature of our concerns, worked jointly with NCBI and Irish Guide Dogs, to create a joint paper to raise awareness and support us all in having informed debate on this issue. Both papers have previously been submitted for your attention.

Having reviewed the legislation, a number of the issues previously raised are not addressed and amendments are required to ensure the safety of disabled pedestrians and those with limited mobility. Today, you are hearing from all three organisations on issues of shared concern including reduced speed limits, prohibited use on footpaths, usage controls, parking infrastructure and management of behaviour, in both private and scheme managed ownership.

The two areas which I will address are those of parking infrastructure and private E-Scooter use.

As a wheelchair user, I have lived experience with bicycles and scooters of how badly planned and managed parking can severely impact and significantly impede the day to day lives of disabled people, those with limited mobility including the elderly and parents with buggies. The impact of unmanaged and careless parking of micro mobility vehicles blocks pathways, places obstacles which result in disabled people being unable to proceed with their daily tasks or placing themselves at risk by going out on roads to circumnavigate the blockage, should they even be able to. Added to obstacles such as illegally parked cars, wheelie bins etc, we cannot compound the issued and place an additional obstacle to this list. My own experiences will testify to this challenge as have I frequently faced circumstances when out on my own or when I had my son in his buggy, of blockages from badly parked cars and bikes, forcing me to turn home as I was left with no alternative. Unless addressed, E-Scooters will add to this challenge.

Legislation does not mandate designated parking areas nor prohibit free floating, lock to parking. Feedback from our membership experience, from both home and abroad, is that free floating, lock to parking must be prohibited and that designated parking bays/areas are a necessity. Placement of

designated parking bays must take into consideration the recommended circulation spaces with pathways and approach routes remaining unobstructed.

The other significant area of concern is the management of private E-Scooter ownership and behaviour. Having spoken with several E-Scooter Scheme Providers, use of E-Scooters operated through a scheme structure can offer technologies and controls which can help manage driver behaviour. While such technologies are not a silver bullet to all issues, they will not exist on those vehicles which are privately owned. Therefore, it is important to address key concerns in this area. Given the potential growth in private ownership, the proposed legislation makes it an offence to supply an individual under the age of 16 with a e-scooter. However, it is essential that this provision is coupled with a minimum age requirement for the use of E-Scooters. Maturity and the ability to behave responsibly means we must ensure we are consistent and appropriate in the age requirements we set. This alongside reduced speed limits and prohibited use on footpaths is an important provision for the safety of all concerned, E-Scooter users and people with disabilities.

As always, subsequent to the important first step of creating the right regulatory framework, will be the implementation of those controls. The reality is this a global trend, and that E-Scooters will become a growing presence in Ireland. However, in relation to all the key areas mentioned today, there are lessons to be learned which have been made elsewhere in other countries, ones that can be avoided. Ireland has the opportunity here to lead the way with safety at its core.

People with disabilities are not vulnerable, it is the constructs of the society around us that creates the vulnerability. I urge you to act upon our representations today by proposing and supporting necessary amendments to the Road Traffic and Road Bills 2021 to ensure that we do not create the circumstances where disabled people are, yet again, adversely impacted by the environment created around them.

I thank you again for the opportunity to present to you today and am happy to address any questions you may have and hear the contributions you wish to make on this issue.