

## Oireachtas Transport Committee Members Briefing – January 2022

### Introduction

NCBI welcomes the opportunity to discuss with the Committee our position on the regulation of e-scooters in Ireland as proposed within the Road Traffic and Roads Bill 2021. NCBI together with IWA and Irish Guide Dogs for the Blind have areas of common concern that we seek to highlight to ensure the legislation is robust and can guarantee the safety of disabled pedestrians and those with mobility issues.

NCBI works with people who are blind or vision impaired across the country. According to Census 2016, there are 54,810 people living with sight loss in Ireland. We provide practical and emotional support, rehabilitation services, and other training designed to help people with sight loss live independently and confidently.

In our view, now is the time to get the legislation right around e-scooter usage as their popularity is growing every day. It is an opportunity to learn lessons from other countries as this legislation will govern both private ownership and shared public schemes that will operate in cities. E-scooters do have a role to play in a variety of ways for improving our carbon footprint and increasing transport options for people on short journeys. But guaranteeing the safety of both rider and pedestrians must be paramount.

To achieve this a suite of minimum safety standards must be enshrined in law. These include:

- Prohibition of usage on footpaths or shared spaces
- Requirement for specific parking bays
- Installation of a universal sound solution, which is robustly tested and researched, to allow pedestrians to hear them approaching
- Maximum speed limits of 12 kph with lower speed limits of 6 kph in certain areas.

### Speed Limits

The legislation currently allows for maximum speed limit of 25 kph and allows for local authorities to reduce this to 20 kph in certain areas or on particular roads. However, we believe this is still too fast.

We are calling for this maximum speed limit to be reduced to 12kph. This would help to reduce risk for pedestrians and e-scooter riders.

We are also calling for additional consideration to be given to lower speeds around certain areas such as schools to 6 kph. Go slow zones via geo-fencing in shared schemes may be one element to consider. However, enforcement will be a core component to the success of abiding to speed limits.

## Sound alert system

Given the silent nature of e-scooters, for people who are blind or vision impaired, they will have no way of knowing e-scooters are approaching them until they are extremely close unless there is a sound omitted from the e-scooter.

EU regulation mandates all manufacturers to equip their new electric and hybrid vehicles with an Alert Vehicular Acoustic System (AVAS) since 1 July 2021. So while this regulation does not cover e-scooters, it presents an opportunity for Ireland to lead out on legislation in this area.

NCBI recommends a universal sound solution that has been tested in the local context and scientifically proven to be effective. Such technological research is currently underway so won't be ready when legislation is passed but provision should be made for it.

Given the legislation applies to both private ownership and shared schemes we'd be raising the standards of safety. Shared scheme providers would have to install such sounds at design stage and some are already doing research in this space but it does need to be robustly tested to guarantee no unintended consequences and is complementary to the sounds applicable to electric cars.

In addition to this sound, any shared scheme operators should offer e-scooters with bells which are easily accessible to the driver without them having to move their hands from the handlebars.

## Experiences to date: NCBI Survey Data

NCBI seeking responses from service users across the country on their experiences and 21 responses gathered to date. From this small sample:

- 75% of reported incidents occurred on footpaths
- 62% of respondents reporting incidents reported multiple occasions
- Incidents reported across 8 different counties
- 57% reported e- scooters reduced their confidence to walk or access the community

## Personal Stories gathered from survey

"I had a collision with an e scooter around 8 months ago on my way to work. Thankfully, I wasn't injured but the rider was knocked to the ground. I'm very grateful this collision occurred after I had done extensive mobility training and was confident going on my usual route. If it had happened to me 6 months earlier it would have severely set me back therefore stopping me travelling independently to work."