

Road Traffic and Roads Bill 2021 Position Paper

November 2021



Introduction

NCBI, the Irish Wheelchair Association and Irish Guide Dogs for the Blind have prepared a position paper to support members of the Oireachtas to have an informed debate on the upcoming Road Traffic and Roads Bill 2021 particularly in relation to e-scooters.

The three organisations recognise that the use of E-scooters is more prevalent in our communities and welcomes the introduction of legislation to cover both shared schemes and private use. However, it is abundantly clear that there are amendments required to ensure the safety of disabled pedestrians and those with limited mobility within the legislation.

NCBI, the Irish Wheelchair Association and Irish Guide Dogs for the Blind are happy to meet with any member of the Oireachtas to discuss these points in more detail.

Concerns and Solutions

Keeping Footpaths Safe

Under no circumstances should e-scooters be permitted for use on footpaths. The Road Traffic and Roads Bill 2021 must expressly prohibit the use of e-scooters on footpaths and include such usage as an offence.

Maximum speed limits for E-scooters

The legislation currently allows for maximum speed limit of 25 kph and must be reduced to 12kph in line with other European countries, with consideration given to lower speeds around certain areas such as schools to 6 kph.

Alert Vehicular Acoustic System (AVAS)

AVAS should be required on all e-scooters so they can be heard approaching. This is essential for the safety of pedestrians who are blind or vision impaired. The EU regulation 540/2014 mandates all manufacturers to equip their new electric and hybrid vehicles with an Alert Vehicular Acoustic System (AVAS) by 1 July 2021. While this regulation does not cover e-scooters, it presents an opportunity for Ireland to lead on legislation in this area. In addition to AVAS, operators should offer e-scooters with bells which are easily accessible to the driver without them having to move their hands from the handlebars.

Designated parking bays for e-scooters

Free floating, lock to parking must be prohibited. Designated parking bays should be enclosed with high contrast and off the pedestrian accessway in order to prevent injuries to disabled pedestrians and those with limited mobility. These parking bays should ensure a detectable kerb (minimum height of 60mm) which separates walkways from parked e-scooters. Placement of designated parking bays must take into consideration the recommended circulation space of 2000mm when there is a raised kerb open to an adjoining carriageway. Where this pathway width is not possible, the pathway or approach route should remain unobstructed and have a clear minimum width of 1700mm with passing spaces for wheelchair users and 2000mm for Guide Dog users.

Geo-fencing

There must be areas within each community where e-scooters are prohibited from use such as in shared use spaces. Geo-fencing is one potential solution which can minimise risk and can be used specifically to the local context, reducing speeds or implementing no go zones in shared spaces, areas with high foot fall and congested, high risk areas such as shared cycle lanes and those not segregated from bus stops.

Insurance and licensing

Provision for insurance and at least a provisional license must be included within the legislation. The requirement to hold a provisional license is aligned with the provision that prevents supply of e-scooters to those under the age of 16 within the legislation and it would ensure that they have a thorough understanding of the Rules of the Road. It is also essential that e-scooters have accessible registration plates so that if they break the rules of the road, riders can be identified, and fined or prosecuted.

Minimum age requirement

The current Bill makes it an offence to supply an individual under the age of 16 with a e-scooter. It is essential that this provision is coupled with a minimum age requirement for the use of e-scooters. This is an important provision for the safety of e-scooter users and other road users.

Conclusion

Internationally, there have been roll backs and bans introduced as a result of injuries to the public caused by e-scooters. Ireland has an opportunity to lead the way in the introduction of legislation that recognises the safety of all road users at its core.

The measures outlined above are the baseline requirements that must be included within the Road Traffic and Roads Bill 2021. NCBI, the Irish Wheelchair Association and Irish Guide Dogs for the Blind are willing to engage with all members of the Oireachtas to discuss them in more detail.