

E-scooters: The impact legalization would have in the UK

February 19 2020, by Graeme Sherriff, Luke Blazejewski and Nick Davies



Credit: AI-generated image ([disclaimer](#))

It is currently [illegal](#) to ride e-scooters in public spaces in the UK, but this has not stopped riders appearing on roads and pavements. An [upcoming national consultation](#) means it is a good time to consider the implications of e-scooters coming to UK streets.

E-scooters are an example of new ["micromobilities"](#) – short-distance [transport](#) options like bike-sharing schemes, sometimes with electric motors—that are changing how people travel in urban areas. In the UK, e-scooters are likely to be used in busy town and city centers, where people take lots of short journeys for work, education and leisure. The locations where rentable e-scooters could be introduced will probably follow Europe: transport hubs like stations, large businesses and shopping areas and university campuses.

The national consultation will include decisions on where e-scooters can be ridden. In terms of both speed and potential safety issues, e-scooters are slower than cars but faster than walking and probably closer to cycling. The pavement may seem the best place for them, but there have been reports of [pedestrians being put at risk](#) or injured by scooters.

Sharing urban space

Cycle lanes may be a more attractive idea. [Research in Atlanta](#) found that even temporary segregated lanes make people feel safer on a scooter. Yet the UK is behind many European cities when it comes to dedicated and safe infrastructure. This raises the question of how [e-scooter](#) users can safely share space with pedestrians or general traffic.

The UK can learn from [cities in Europe and elsewhere](#) on how to balance e-scooter use and available space. Barcelona [has introduced regulations](#) to limit scooter use and speed when sharing space with pedestrians, and in [Paris e-scooters have been banned](#) from pavements.

The UK can also [engage in dialogue](#) with e-scooter operators. Dockless [e-scooter company Lime](#), for example, has been organising roundtable discussions for researchers, local authorities, transport providers and the police. They have [put forward their views](#) on how cities can support the development of e-scooters.



Credit: Clément Proust from Pexels

Legalising e-scooters would require considering how they will interact with other road and pavement users. If e-scooters are to be made legal in the UK, the government [may follow Germany](#) by specifying minimum standards for safety features such as lights, reflectors, bells and brakes. Some cities also require both adults and children to [wear helmets](#) when riding e-scooters.

In the UK, [Bikeability](#) is an established training course for those who take up cycling. A similar scheme for those using e-scooters may be

valuable, [alongside online and in-app resources](#) and [some operators are providing this](#). Driver education on how to share the roads with e-scooters and other new forms of transport is also important. The highway code will need to change to provide guidance on how e-scooters and other road users can safely share space.

Public benefit or hazard?

Parking is also an issue. E-scooters need to be left somewhere between journeys, and their convenience is dependent on a certain flexibility of pick up and drop off. Scooters that are [inconsiderately parked or abandoned](#) are unsightly and obstructive. They can also deter people from using public space and can be a serious impediment to people with limited mobility.

E-scooter companies have tried different approaches to addressing thefts and inappropriate parking, including asking [people to lock them](#) and [sounding alarms](#). [Geofencing](#) – where operators use GPS technology to limit precisely where a scooter can be ridden or parked—can be used to stop users leaving scooters where they cause an obstruction.

It is also important to consider the implications of e-scooters for public health in the UK. [Industry claims](#) that e-scooters provide low intensity workouts may be plausible. However, the UK sustainable transport charity, Sustrans, has raised concerns that [e-scooters may replace walking trips](#) and therefore have a negative impact on activity levels. Equally, heavy on-pavement scooter use means people are less keen to walk.

E-scooters can be considered an answer to the problem of the "last mile": that final part of a public transport journey from station to destination that feels too far to walk. This means they can help people take other forms of public transport, by providing a link between a station or bus

stop and a place of work, for instance. Even with their short range, then, they could help reduce longer car journeys. A further potential benefit is that, where companies are willing, [use data can be shared with local authorities](#) to help make improvements to infrastructure and transport systems.

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Provided by The Conversation

Citation: E-scooters: The impact legalization would have in the UK (2020, February 19) retrieved 6 May 2024 from <https://techxplore.com/news/2020-02-e-scooters-impact-legalization-uk.html>

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