



DAC BEACHCROFT

MANAGING MICROMOBILITY



INTRODUCTION

ALISON KEY, REAL ESTATE PARTNER AT DAC BEACHCROFT.

Mobility service operators have come under the spotlight during the COVID-19 crisis facing new challenges in terms of reducing the risk of infection through shared vehicles. Yet with many essential workers reluctant to use public transport services some shared mobility services have proven to be a popular choice in urban areas. Their wider introduction affects all public and private landowners because micromobility vehicles may be used and/or parked on private land. These vehicles present opportunities and risks for landowners, which can be navigated with some forward planning.

Martin Wedderburn, a leading transport consultant, shares his views on the opportunities presented by this evolving form of transport.



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Micromobility has been in the UK for some years, mostly in the form of e-bikes. Their enhanced range has extended journey options for people; and the electric assistance attracts a greater diversity of people to cycling. With the Government announcing rental e-scooter trials, the UK has the opportunity to embed more alternatives to private car use with important considerations ahead on issues such as data, safety and viability as part of micromobility's contribution to decarbonising transport.

Richard Dilks, Chief Executive of CoMoUK.

CoMoUK is the collective body for the public benefit of shared transport.

Micromobility is an umbrella term that refers to the growing number of small, often electric powered vehicles such as e-scooters, e-bikes, self-balancing devices and e-skateboards that we are increasingly seeing on our streets. The term micromobility refers to the type of vehicle used regardless of whether it is owned by an individual or provided as a mobility service by an operator.

Images of dockless bikes and e-scooters littered across pavements or landing vandalised in canals have created negative headlines. The safety of some of these vehicles when operating on roads and on pavements has also been called into question. Yet the potential benefits of these vehicles shouldn't be underestimated, offering users easy and flexible travel options for short journeys without the hassle of finding parking. On-demand mobility services can integrate with private and public transport offering a convenient last mile travel option. If these lightweight and electric vehicles replace

trips made by heavier, fossil fuel powered vehicles, the potential environmental benefits are clear. For people without access to a car or who are unable to walk longer distances for health reasons, micromobility also potentially opens up accessible and affordable travel options.

The proliferation of micromobility vehicles has been rapid, backed by investor interest in new technologies and mobility service models. As with Uber and all new mobility services, it remains yet to be seen which models will eventually return a profit. Yet as new vehicles appear on our streets, public bodies are finding that they need to play catch-up in terms of regulatory frameworks. The Department for Transport is currently running a Call for Evidence called the Future of Transport Regulatory Review¹, including questions on micromobility such as minimum vehicle requirements, whether there should be requirements on users and which vehicles should be allowed on the road network.

¹ Department for Transport (2020) [Future of Transport Regulatory Review](#)

What is micro mobility?

The International Transport Forum (ITF) has recently published a report on Safe Micromobility that cuts through some of the hype². From a simple safety perspective, the speed and weight of a vehicle determine its kinetic energy, which in turn is linked to the risk of serious injuries. This provides a sensible basis for creating appropriate vehicle type definitions. Type A micromobility vehicles are those with a maximum speed of 25km/h and a maximum weight of 35kg. ITF recommends that micromobility vehicles should not be used on the pavement (with some exceptions such as mobility scooters), and that type A vehicles can mix safely with cyclists where safe cycling infrastructure is available and should therefore be subject to the same regulations. Faster and heavier micromobility vehicles should be treated more similarly to mopeds.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS FOR DEVELOPERS AND LANDOWNERS

1. OPPORTUNITY

If the increased use of micromobility results in lower car use, there will be consequent reductions in space for car parking in prime areas, potentially releasing the land for alternative use. Using smaller and more efficient vehicles will also help the sustainability credentials and carbon budgets of the organisations involved.

The increasing use of micromobility vehicles can be anticipated in dense urban areas for short trips and for last-mile trips to and from stations; also for the many short trips made in suburban areas. Realistically, without safe infrastructure, their use will be limited in the most car-dependent, out-of-town sites.

Micromobility could be transformative for large campus-style developments, which require large areas of car parking and where cars are also used for internal trips. If easy and efficient electric vehicles are available on a turn-up-and-go basis for trips within the site, car parking can be moved to the edges of the sites freeing up land and improving the quality of the public realm for users.

2. ADVANCE PLANNING

Pro-active planning gives landowners more control. In practice planning for micromobility means looking at whether the access routes to a site and within it are suitable for different vehicle types, identifying potential target markets and designing in the right facilities. Larger

²International Transport Forum (2020) [Safe Micromobility](#)

landowners may also wish to establish partnerships with selected mobility service operators to provide a high level of service on their site.

3. AUDIENCE

The current target market for micromobility is still very much the typical early adopter profile, with the novelty factor attracting people with a strong interest in new technologies and younger urbanites with less car-dependent lifestyles. Yet as they become more mainstream, different types of micromobility vehicle will appeal to different demographics and in different places. For example, the expansion of e-bikes has widened the target demographic for bike hire systems and cycling in general. Electrically assisted micromobility vehicles will obviously become relatively more appealing than human-powered traction in areas with hills.

4. INTEGRATION

Micromobility vehicles may be very space-efficient, but they do still require some space to park. Rather like bicycles, users expect to be able to park them relatively close to their destination and if no dedicated space is provided they will quickly start to clutter the pavements. Parking solutions are similar to bicycles except that without cycle stands they may require different forms of demarcation.

Employees and residents want secure, covered storage space for longer periods. Visitors and users of dockless shared micromobility vehicles want convenient space near their destination.

After the experience of dockless bike hire in the UK and e-scooters in some international cities, mobility services are increasingly being regulated through geofencing. This describes the use of virtual boundaries around a geographical area to define where certain actions like returning and locking a vehicle can or can't happen. Landowners can demarcate parking areas both physically for the user to see on site and digitally for the user to see on the app.

5. DATA

All shared mobility services generate large volumes of data giving insight on who uses them, when and where. Landowners entering into partnerships with operators should include a data sharing agreement to gather more information on visitors to their site and where they travel from. Ultimately data sharing should be a win-win for both parties. If service improvements can be identified, operators will see increased revenues and landowners will benefit from greater insight into their customer base, transferable knowledge for other sites and greater satisfaction levels among visitors to the site.



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