Is it finally time for the UK to decide how e-scooters should be legalised and regulated?

By Richard Shrubb

After five years of rental trials, Britain still has no permanent legal framework for private e-scooters. LEVA-EU, Cycling UK and the Walk Wheel Trust all broadly agree that the current limbo is unsatisfactory. The difference is largely over what should replace it.



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Safety as a core concern

E-scooters remain on British streets, even though privately owned ones are only permitted on private land. Department for Transport data shows 235 pedestrian injuries from e-scooter collisions in 2025, 54 of which were classed as serious. Previous research shows a majority of collisions involved privately owned e-scooters. Consequently, for all three organisations we spoke to, legalisation and regulation are important in tackling such an issue.

Cycling UK's Head of Campaigns Duncan Dollimore had the strongest comments on the matter: "What we're seeing from the collisions involving scooters is they seem to be more serious than typical collisions from bikes at the same speed, because people are adopting a different position." He feels that the trials in the UK are for 'too big, too powerful and too fast machines.'

Maximum continuous rated power as a proxy for safety isn't the core problem in the eyes of Annick Roetynck, CEO of LEVA EU:"Power limits are totally, totally nonsense. The vehicle has to be limited at 25 kilometres an hour. So what difference does it make whether it's 500 watts or one kilowatt maximum continuous power?"

For Roetynck, kinetic energy is the most important factor: the power of impact in a collision. "The only factors relevant to the safety of these vehicles are mass and speed. That decides what the impact is going to be when there's a crash."

What regulation is in place and what needs to change?

With e-bike regulation, the UK was in the EU at the time, and our laws broadly mirror those of our European neighbours. The obvious regulatory solution may therefore be to look to Europe to tackle the 'legal purgatory' we are currently stuck in.

At EU level, the regulatory picture is already fragmented. Some light electric vehicles fall under Regulation (EU) 168/2013, the type-approval regime for two- and three-wheel vehicles and quadricycles, while others — including many e-scooters — fall under the Machinery Directive. Technical standards such as EN 17128 then sit alongside national rules governing where and how the vehicles can be used. Roetynck said, "Our vehicles are in two pieces of legislation which were never meant to be for these vehicles."

In Roetynck's eyes, that isn't recommended due to a hotchpotch of EU regulations overlaid by 27 member-state regulations that, in some cases, don't even conform to the EU regulations they stem from.

LEVA-EU has been lobbying the European Commission for coherent regulation for some time and sits on several EC panels. Frustratingly for Roetynck, however, this means dealing with parallel core regulations rather than building a single framework.

In her view, the EU and the UK both need to look at light electric mobility and develop a coherent approach from the ground up: "Let's go ahead and create a specific framework, not just for e-scooters but for all light electric vehicles, from e-scooters all the way to microcars."

Dollimore agrees on the problem of incoherent legislation: "We haven't started this well with the way the trials have been approached, because they should have had a far more cautionary approach to the trials in terms of weight, speeds and those sorts of things, because they could always have increased them if it was not proving to be problematic."

From the Walk Wheel Trust's position, Simpson said, "Repeatedly extending the trials for hire scooters means there isn't certainty for the public, providers or local leaders. Those using hire scooters risk having their scooters removed overnight. Meanwhile, those who could benefit from their own scooter aren't being given this option. A clear e-scooter law could finally set out speed limits, fire safety standards, parking arrangements and other details vital to make these vehicles work for all of us, whether we're using them or not."



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Can e-scooters drive modal shift from cars?

One of the main reasons cited in the drive for e-scooters is a modal shift from cars, ultimately reducing congestion. Rental e-scooter data in the UK is mixed on this front, with the DfT and Transport for London indicating that only a minority of the modal shift comes from motor vehicles, while the majority comes from other forms of travel such as public transport and walking.

Pointing to this data, Dollimore said, "The key thing for me is it was showing a degree of modal shift away from walking and public transport and cycling rather than what we wanted, which was modal shift away from driving."

Cycling UK has quite a strong position on e-scooters: "Our position is very clear. They're not active travel." Dollimore expanded, adding, "They're not something that has a health benefit from using. It's not like walking and cycling are the same, and the strongest case for investing in walking and cycling is the health benefits they offer. You don't get that with e-scooters."

For London, Transport for London Phase 2 research found the modal switch from other forms of travel to e-scooters included:

- 48.1% walking
- 8.2% cycling
- 7% car/taxi/private hire

For the national DfT UK-wide modal shift data in December 2021:

- 42% walking
- 21% private motor vehicle/taxi
- 18% public transport
- 10% cycling

However, Roetynck said the German traffic modelling study LEV4Climate showed the potential of e-scooters as part of wider light electric mobility. "The researchers had nine different vehicles starting with e-scooters all the way to microcars, and for every trip they chose the lightest possible vehicle. They found that 76% of all car trips in Germany could be made with a light electric vehicle, which would cut passenger car emissions by 44%, or 57 million tonnes of CO2-equivalent a year."

LEVA-EU challenges that framing more directly. For the association, the goal is not active travel as such, but reducing reliance on heavy, polluting cars by giving people access to much lighter electric vehicles. Roetynck pointed out that walking and cycling are simply not an option for many of the roughly 90 million disabled people in the EU. Defining desirable mobility solely around active travel therefore risks excluding them from cleaner alternatives to the car: "It really keeps people away from means of transport that could offer them huge benefits."

Light electric vehicles can fill that gap, but the morass of regulation affecting e-mobility in the EU stands in the way. Roetynck gave the example of the e-scooter: "There are a lot of people who would be interested in e-scooters if there were a seat on it. An e-scooter with a seat or without a seat — hardly anything changes when it comes to kinetic energy." But under current rules, she pointed out, "Put a seat on it, and it becomes a moped [under EU regulations] – where on earth is the common sense in all this?"

While Cycling UK's position is quite tough, the Walk Wheel Trust's position is somewhat softer, aligning more closely with Roetynck's point that people of all physical abilities should be able to get out without using a car. Simpson said, "E-scooters are a great addition to the transport mix, helping to reduce urban traffic and air pollution. We're the charity making it possible for everyone to walk, wheel and cycle, and we'll stay focused on active travel. Everyone deserves the benefits it brings – for their health, our NHS, and the joy it brings."

For Roetynck, the case for modal shift is that the more light personal vehicles are on the road, the fewer heavy combustion-engine and electric cars and trucks will be used. That benefits everyone. She added, "To be honest, we don't care what is being used as long as it's electric and as long as it's light." In her home in Gent (B), she pointed out that she uses her car so infrequently that she and her husband often forget where they've left it, and they only really use it to visit her husband's family in the UK 3-4 times a year.

A safely regulated future?

After six years of trials, the debate has moved beyond whether e-scooters should be legalised. Cycling UK wants a more precautionary framework; Walk Wheel Cycle Trust wants an end to the current legal limbo; and LEVA-EU argues that regulating scooters in isolation risks repeating the fragmentation already seen across Europe.

Dan Simpson, Policy and Public Affairs Manager England at Walk Wheel Cycle Trust, summed up his view on legalisation, saying: "We need to end the legal purgatory e-scooters are in – it's bad for those who want to use them and for regulating their use."

The decision facing government is therefore not simply whether to allow private e-scooters onto British roads, but what it wants them — and the wider family of light electric vehicles — to achieve. ●