

**Briefing for the Camden Culture and Environment Scrutiny Committee meeting of 16 May 2023.
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e-scooter and e-bike hire trial - sustainability concerns

Firstly, my thanks to my local Labour Councillor, Anna Wright, for alerting me to this C&E Committee meeting, and secondly the Chair, Councillor Awale Olad, for allowing my written submission. I apologise that I am not able to attend the meeting in person.

I should make clear from the start that I agree with Camden that there is a climate emergency; that I am persuaded by the science, particularly the conclusions of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change AR6 Report and the most recent Synthesis Report (March); that we are at a CO2 emissions tipping point and this represents an existential threat.

Last month, Camden undertook to make consideration of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions central to all decision-making. The significance of this to this submission should become apparent as you read on.

Outline argument

I believe there are good reasons to be sceptical of Lime, Tier and Dott's sustainability claims, and that there is convincing scientific evidence that the hire trial may be adding to, not reducing, global CO2 emissions.

Hire trial micromobility may be zero emissions at the point of use but if the scheme as a whole accelerates global warming, then it is not worth promoting – indeed, it should be stopped immediately.

Of course this runs counter to UK government and Transport for London support for the hire trial. Moreover, it undermines the providers' business models. So if Camden does the right thing and pauses its participation in the trial there will be significant pushback not only from the providers, but from TfL and central government.

It may come as a surprise to learn that neither TfL nor the Department for Transport has done any meaningful due diligence on the providers' sustainability claims. That has emerged over the past year or so from various answers to written questions tabled in the House of Lords and the Greater London Assembly (copies available on request).

If Camden is to be true to its climate emergency declaration and commitment to make GHG emissions central to its decision-making, the hire trial providers' sustainability claims should be subject to independent and open scientific scrutiny on a par with that applied by the IPCC to climate change. The science that underpins the IPCC position is open to public scrutiny; the same should be true of the providers' sustainability claims. We need to see their carbon lifecycle analyses, not just unevidenced green assertions and aspirations of the kind published on their webpages.

The fundamental problem is that making electric vehicles produces much more CO2 than making internal combustion engine (ICE) vehicles. You may have seen Volvo's 2021 CO2 manufacturing emissions comparison for its [electric and ICE XC40 models](#). Volvo itself estimated that an electric XC40 would have to be driven about 50,000 miles before the CO2 debt was repaid.

Today's agenda item 8 concerns the parking of dockless hire bikes. In 2021, I was told by Councillor Adam Harrison that the construction of the hire bays in Camden would reduce "street clutter"; the very opposite has proved to be the case. Hire trial e-bikes and e-scooters are routinely left across pavements where I live, within metres of our local hire bay – even when it is nearly empty.

Councillor Harrison also informed me that the purpose of the hire trial was to promote "more sustainable modes of transport". The term "more sustainable" is widely used by the hire trial micromobility providers on their websites.

In a referendum last month, Parisians voted overwhelmingly to ban Tier, Dott and Lime hire e-scooters, principally in reaction to the public nuisance caused by pavement riders. As a result Tier, Dott and Lime will cease to their rental e-scooters in Paris from 1 September. The referendum was widely covered in the world's press, but one article in particular stood out: Le Monde on 1 April, with the headline (translated into English):

["Electric scooters: three questions about their dangerousness and their environmental impact"](#)

The sub-section headed "Are e-scooters environmentally friendly?" included this quote from Mathieu Chassignet, described as "an engineering specialist in mobility":

"The operators communicate little, or bad information about the necessary environmental data – particularly regarding the true life cycle of e-scooters, how they are dealt with at the end of their life and the features of fleet management".

This tallies with recent academic research. A shared e-scooter/e-bike paper published in January 2022 concluded, among other things:

"We show that personal e-bikes and e-scooters emit less CO2 than the transport modes they replace, while shared e-bikes and e-scooters emit more CO2 than the transport modes they replace. This finding challenges a common vision in transport that 'sharing is caring' for the environment."

See section 6 "Contributions and conclusions" in "[Mode choice, substitution patterns and environmental impacts of shared and personal micro-mobility](#)" published by Elsevier in January 2022, authors: Daniel J Reck, Henry Martin and Professor Kay W Axhausen.

For all these reasons and examples, and many that this briefing is too short to include, I ask that as a matter of urgency the Committee call for a full council-wide debate on Camden's participation in the hire trial.

Acknowledgement:

My thanks to neighbour Margaret Shanks for the French to English translation of the Le Monde article quotes. During her long career, she has specialised in technical and financial translation.