

Conference

Micro-mobility: the next big thing?



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Background Note

The many analyses available on the micro-mobility phenomenon disagree on everything but two statements: that micro-mobility represents a potentially huge global market and that key players (regulators, industry, consumers) need to work closely together to make it a success. Micro-mobility is also widely praised for its potential to reduce congestion, yet the jury is out whether it replaces or complements public transport by covering primarily first/last mile trips. Other aspects such as its safety record and the financial viability of existing sharing schemes are much disputed. Similarly, as it is often believed to replace walking, micro-mobility's contribution to GHG emission reduction is not clear-cut.

This conference aims to be the first large-scale, multi stakeholder, transnational event that puts shared micro-mobility at the centre of its works in order to develop a common agenda through an inclusive and participatory process. While several definitions of micro-mobility exist, this conference will focus on light, electric, floating vehicles made available in urban areas through sharing schemes that let users locate, reserve,

(un)lock and pay for them through their smartphones. Currently these offers typically include electric bikes, scooters and mopeds. Other vehicles used primarily for re-creational purposes (e.g. segways, hoverboards and monowheels) are not covered.

The focus on sharing schemes is justified by the specific additional challenges they present to cities, industry and consumers alike. Shared vehicles are parked in the public space where they are picked up and left after use. They are subject to vandalism (with many of them ending up in rivers and oceans) and are available only in designated areas, usually central and affluent ones. They can only be used with a smartphone, linked to a credit card. Occasional users of shared vehicles are less likely to wear a helmet than owners using them regularly. Shared vehicles are vulnerable to abusive use by multiple riders, riders under age or under influence. Cities – and other regulators – play a key role in authorising or banning operators and in defining conditions under which the service can be provided. They also play a role, together with public transport companies, to enable synergies with shared micro-mobility options.

Shared or not, micro-mobility vehicles need to operate in a regulatory framework that defines where they can be used (e.g. roads, bike lanes, sidewalks, pedestrian areas, 30 kph areas), at what speed, after which training, as of what age and in compliance with which safety rules (e.g. helmet, lights, turn signals, etc.). Electric scooters in particular, as a very popular yet relatively new and less known vehicle, pose additional safety challenges requiring dedicated attention. The lack of e-scooter fatality and injury statistics – in the face of alarming anecdotal evidence – seems the obvious place to start.

Looking at possible future developments, micro-mobility is not necessarily limited to personal mobility, but could also become the way to manage personal deliveries and include a shared fleet of delivery drones or autonomous delivery shuttles that could be made available for occasional (short-term) rent through a smartphone to send or receive small parcels within designated areas. Shared

cargo e-bikes – similar to existing sharing schemes – could be a more realistic option in the short run.

Cities have reacted to the advent of shared micro-mobility in very different ways, ranging from total prohibition to total openness, with many shades in between. Some have adapted their policy over time to developments on the ground, despite including to reactions from the public. Latecomers have usually taken a more restrictive approach than early embracers.

The conference will offer an opportunity to exchange experiences, match needs and expectations, identify key challenges and put forward suitable solutions. As a result of a participatory and inclusive process it aims to develop a shared agenda for action by all relevant players. As the EU completes its institutional transition and defines its future political agenda, the conference provides the occasion also for a reflection on the need for possible intervention at EU level, including of financing or regulatory nature.

