

MOTION: That the draft Electrically Assisted Pedal Cycles (Construction and Use) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2018 be affirmed – 12th May 2020.

- Mr Principal Deputy Speaker, I beg to move.
- Mr Principal Deputy Speaker thank you for the opportunity to bring this Statutory Rule before the Assembly today which will remove electrically assisted pedal cycles in Northern Ireland from the regulatory process, and bring us into line with the Republic of Ireland and Britain as well as many other counties in Europe.
- Currently within these islands Northern Ireland is the only region that requires this type of electric bike to be registered, licensed and insured as a motor vehicle.
- The Rule is made under powers contained in the Road Traffic (Northern Ireland) Order 1995.
- I will briefly set out the background to this Rule.
- An electrically assisted pedal cycle, or e-bike as they are more commonly referred to, is a bicycle with an integrated motor which can provide assistance to a rider whilst they are pedalling. Currently such e-bikes are, by law, considered to be motor vehicles and therefore, require registration and licensing before they can be used on public roads in Northern Ireland.

- However they have been exempt from registration and licensing in GB since 1995 and these new regulations will finally bring us into line with this position.
- This difference in approach has been highlighted by a number of MLA colleagues and by many members of the public. Like them, I share the desire to make it easier for people to use e-bikes and I share their frustration as to why we have been left out of kilter with the legislative position in GB and the Republic of Ireland for so long.
- The regulations set out the requirements which bicycles, tandem bicycles and tricycles must meet in order to be classified as an EAPC for use on public roads. They are being made under powers in primary legislation and state that compliant EAPCs are not legally considered to be motor vehicles. This means that e-bikes are no longer required to be registered, licenced or insured as a motor vehicle. Also riders of these vehicles will no longer be required to hold a valid driving licence. As is the case with ordinary bicycles, legally they are not required to wear a safety helmet, but our clear advice is that, whatever sort of bike you are on, you should always wear a helmet.
- The principal objective of these regulations is to simplify and reduce the regulatory burden on the public whilst maintaining safety standards. The second objective is to promote cycling as a mode of transport, and an important one in helping us to achieve the modal shift to a greener, cleaner, healthier society.
- Since taking up my ministerial post in January I have been keen to encourage our people to embrace active travel. I feel this is even more important today as we battle the Covid-19 emergency. While we must continue to do all we can to protect our community from this pandemic,

in recent days I have set out how my Department can contribute to the recovery phase and encourage more of our people to walk and cycle.

- Last week, I announced in the Assembly that I am creating a Walking and Cycling Champion within my Department. An important role of the champion will be to ensure that we deliver our commitment to increase the percentage of journeys made by walking and cycling.
- To help achieve this it is really important that we work on a collaborative basis across the Executive and with councils, communities and citizens right across the North. I am pleased to confirm to members that the Walking and Cycling Champion has already set up an action focused group of stakeholders, from both within and outside government to provide advice and act in a challenge role to my Department. We have also been in touch with several of our local councils and I am pleased at the level of encouragement and support we are receiving from them. By working together Mr Principal Deputy Speaker, we can achieve the change we desire to see.
- We must also not lose sight of the environmental and social justice benefits to our community of people switching from bus or car use to e-bike use. A reduction in car use leads to less congestion on our roads, less damage to our road infrastructure, a decrease in air and noise pollution and greenhouse gases. There is also the potential of fewer road traffic collisions as a result of fewer cars on our roads. And importantly, an e-bike is more affordable to many more homes than a car.

- To summarise Mr Principal Deputy Speaker the main objectives of these regulations are to;
 - Simplify and reduce the legislative burden on those who wish to ride an e-bike
 - Promote cycling as a mode of transport that has health and environmental benefits; and
 - Reduce congestion in our cities and towns

Conclusion

In closing, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker, a lot of change has been forced upon us by the challenges of covid-19 but this can also be the start of a time of change if we choose it. There is an opportunity to build a better future and we should seize it.

I commend the motion to the Assembly and ask that it affirm the Regulations.