**Presentation by Jen Nickols**

Good Afternoon Everyone,

Thank you to the vendors for your presentations today.

I’m sure you have given people a lot to think about.

I would like to begin by saying that while I am an Executive member of Blind Citizens Australia, Tasmania, I am here to represent myself today.

I am keen to see E-scooters become part of life here in Tasmania;

I am not here to try and put forward new policies or suggest changes to legislation.

However, I would like to highlight some of the issues I have been confronted with, and make some suggestions which I believe will allow the E-scooter trial to be successful, with the knowledge that there has been a full consultation with all stake-holders.

Following 13 years of blindness, I have an excellent sense of orientation of my environment and can walk safely with my dog guide.

The other day I was walking up the left-hand side footpath on Elizabeth Street towards the Hill Street grocer with Nellie my Seeing Eye dog.

Firstly, I was confronted by a skateboarder who decided to test out his personal best time down the middle of the footpath, leaving me a little shaken.

I gathered my wits to cross Rupert St, and approach the ‘scary’ Augusta Road intersection.

The traffic was banking up at the lights on my right and now I was unable to hear, or see anything, as a metro bus was idling beside me.

Cars were flying through the flashing amber lights onto Augusta Road and I was not sure whether they were going to turn into the grocers or continue on.

Imagine my surprise and shock, as Nellie stopped just when I was expecting her to turn left into the safety of the Car Park.

I didn’t have time to stand and work out why, as a car beeped, causing us both to instinctively jump to the left,…. right into the middle of a tangle of what I later learnt, was a total of 8, E-scooters both purple and orange, all parked across the corner of the only safe pedestrian access to the grocer.

I was on the ground with Nellie on top of me.

This was just one of my own personal experiences, and believe me, I have plenty of others.

They mainly involve speed, inappropriate parking, lack of audible noise and/or poor behaviour.

I am very aware of the way that we can call to complain to the vendors, but should I wish to do this, I have two options.

I can either stand and wait for someone to come along and tell me what colour the scooter is, or I can use a special program called Aira, where a US citizen can view and record what I would see through the back of my phone camera. This is very handy, but comes at a financial cost to me.

Then I raise the question. What if the scooter is privately owned?

Who is enforcing these rules?

Who do I call then?

When these scooters are immobilised they become very heavy, but I am not embarrassed to say that I have become somewhat of an expert at lifting them and moving them out of our way.

My only regret is that the scooter which spoke back to me the other day, threatening to call triple zero if I was to damage the vehicle, did not do as it promised.

I would have been most willing to wait for the police to arrive that day as the bruise on my shin lasted almost three weeks when I landed on that scooter, which was lying in the middle of the path.

While I think that the E-Scooters are a wonderful idea for Hobart and Launceston, I feel it is extremely important that there is a broader round table discussion with state and local government to ensure an effective monitoring and reporting of incidents and the enforcement of regulations and user rules.

This is especially so, when you consider that not only are we now dealing with the two vendors of this trial, but more and more privately owned PMD’s are appearing around the cities.

The current rules allow e-scooters to ride on footpaths at a maximum of 15 kilometres per hour, yet under the same rules a power wheelchair that is required for everyday mobility, is limited to only 10 kilometres per hour.

I note that it has been suggested the scooters should be restricted to riding on the outside of the footpath, thus allowing room for people to safely exit shops.

However, Is this practical?

Consider Collins Street between the Mall and Murray St on the JB Hi-fi side, as an example.

Firstly, you have people gathering at the traffic lights near the mall to cross Collins Street just before a seated area where others congregate to chat.

The taxi rank is next, with The Central Bar and Café tables often in the middle of the footpath.

A dog guide is trained to walk up the left-hand side, so we already have to avoid sandwich boards, car doors which are open, and trucks in loading zones which don’t bother to tether their doors back, according to WHS practices.

At the corner of Murray Street, there is more alfresco dining, people gathering at the lights, and a very narrow area to get through with the large concrete pillars.

Not forgetting of course, the telecommunications boxes, and the list goes on….

An audible noise would definitely help to ensure safety.

Could they make a continuous 5 second intermittent beeping noise which is a lot of extra auditory stimulation for someone without sight?

Or, a horn which could sound behind a pedestrian?

Good ideas, but how would someone who has ASD and is sensitive to unusual sounds for example, cope with this sudden noise?

With this in mind, I feel it is extremely important to highlight that every solution, which has been recommended as the trial progresses, has its own pros and cons, not just for someone without eyesight, but the many other groups in the community whose needs must be considered.

I feel there would be great value in bringing together all the stakeholders in a round table discussion and envisage these groups would include, but not be limited to;

representatives from Disability Voices Tasmania, Council of The Ageing, Blind Citizens Australia, Visibility, Para-Quad, Neuron, Beam, Tasmania Police and most importantly Local and state Government representatives from the relevant city councils and State Growth.

I can see a need for a problem-solving or consultation group that can constantly monitor the trial and ensure one solution for one group does not create problems for other groups.

We have all heard stories in the media, of accidents, inappropriate parking, people riding the scooters under the influence of alcohol, and that list goes on, there are also many more positive stories as well.

We just need to get this balance right for everyone.

It can work.