



Keeping mobile

How to safely use your mobility scooter

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NZ TRANSPORT AGENCY
WAKA KOTAHĪ



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This publication is also available on the NZ Transport Agency's website at **www.nzta.govt.nz**

Keeping mobile

How to safely use your mobility scooter

A mobility scooter can be your key to independence and freedom. If you have limited mobility, or are unable or unwilling to drive a car, a mobility scooter is a great way to get you where you want to go safely – particularly if you're just going to the local shops or anywhere that's a little too far away to walk.

If you currently use a mobility scooter or are considering using one in the future, this booklet is for you. It contains practical advice on your rights and responsibilities, as well as safety and maintenance tips.

Skills required to use a mobility scooter

- Adequate depth perception or distance judgement.
- Adequate vision with or without corrective lenses.
- Adequate reaction times.
- Adequate hearing with or without hearing aids.
- Ability to scan left to right and right to left without restriction.
- Physical capacity to handle a motorised vehicle.

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Be informed

If you're using a mobility scooter for the first time, or if it's been a while since you've ridden one outdoors, consider doing a training course. It's a great way to make sure you know how to use it safely.

To find out about training courses in your area, contact your local road safety coordinator (your local council can tell you who this is).



Know your legal responsibilities

Mobility scooters are legally defined as wheeled 'mobility devices'.

You don't need a driver licence to operate a wheeled mobility device, nor are they required to have a warrant of fitness or registration. However, there are some important legal safety requirements that you need to know about.

- You must operate your mobility scooter in a careful and considerate manner.
- You must use the footpath when one is readily accessible, and stay close to the side of the road where a footpath is not readily accessible.
- When on the footpath, you mustn't travel at a speed that endangers others.
- You must not ride, or let any person ride, in a way that may cause you or them injury.
- If you are involved in a crash, you must stop to see if anyone is injured, help anyone who is injured and report the crash to the police within 24 hours.
- It is recommended that a GP agrees with the purchase and use of a mobility scooter.

If you have lost your driver licence due to reduced vision and/or hearing, a mobility scooter may not be the best solution for you. Consult your GP for advice.

Be aware that careless use of a mobility scooter does carry legal implications. For example, operating a mobility device carelessly, inconsiderately or at a hazardous speed can result in you being fined \$100 (or more, if you are repeatedly found doing so). If you cause a crash where someone is injured or killed, and you fail to stop, you could be convicted of careless or inconsiderate use of a vehicle, and could face a fine of up to \$4500, or up to three months' imprisonment.

For more information:

- call 0800 699 000
- visit www.nzta.govt.nz
- write to Private Bag 6995, Wellington 6141.

Choosing the right one

Before you buy a mobility scooter, it pays to do some research and find a model that suits you.

- Check the weight and size to make sure you can comfortably handle the controls and steering.
- Check that it has enough power to do the trips you want to use it for.
- Check that you can get parts and servicing for it.



Plan your route

Plan your route carefully.

- Work out the shortest and safest route – avoid having to cross busy roads, roundabouts and intersections, where possible.
- Time your journey so you'll be back before dark.
- Avoid times of the day when you know there'll be heavy traffic.
- If you're unsure whether a shopping complex or public area has suitable access, make enquiries before beginning your journey.
- Make sure the distance you want to travel (both there and back) is within the range of your mobility scooter.



Ready to ride?

- You shouldn't use your mobility scooter if you're under the influence of alcohol, drugs or medication that may affect your driving ability. If you're unsure, ask your GP or chemist.
- Take a suitable carry bag – don't carry objects loose in your lap.
- Ensure that the battery is fully charged.
- Know who to call if something goes wrong with your mobility scooter.



Tips for a safe journey

As a general rule, you should behave in the same way as a pedestrian – if a footpath is readily accessible, you must use it.

Smooth manoeuvring

- Don't drive up or down steep slopes.
- Never put your mobility scooter in neutral (or leave it out of gear) when on a slope.
- Take particular care when turning. Slow down when turning on sharp corners or slopes.
- Be careful when driving on uneven surfaces. Slow down and try to avoid going over potholes, cracks, etc.
- Approach kerbs head-on rather than on an angle.
- Don't let another person stand or sit on your mobility scooter while you're using it.

Courtesy first

- Adjust your speed to the conditions. Stay alert around children, as they can be unpredictable and move in front of you suddenly.
- If you're travelling slowly, it's courteous to stay on one side of the footpath to allow others to get past you. Show particular consideration for the elderly or those who may have a vision or hearing impairment.
- Don't travel faster than surrounding pedestrians, particularly if they are unable to move out of the way easily, such as if you're on a crowded footpath or at a concert venue.
- If you stop to talk to someone, turn off the controls so the mobility scooter is not accidentally knocked forward.



See – and be seen

- Remember that drivers may find it hard to see you, because you're nearer to the ground than a motor vehicle or pedestrian. If possible, fit a flag to your mobility scooter at a height of at least one and a half metres off the ground to make you more visible. Brightly coloured clothes can also increase visibility.
- If you have glasses for long-distance vision or bifocals, make sure you wear them. Remember, vision can be compromised at sunrise or sunset because of increased reflections and low visibility. Sunglasses might be an option. Protective eyewear may be needed when driving if the wind is blowing up dirt and dust or roadworks are being undertaken.
- Fitting a rear-view mirror can help you see hazards coming up behind you.
- Always check over your shoulder when changing direction.
- Always listen and watch for vehicles coming out of driveways. If in doubt, wait until you're sure the way is clear. If you use a hearing aid, always wear it when using your mobility scooter.
- Some scooters have indicators. If you have them, use them so that other road users are aware of your intentions.

Cross with care

- Try to cross a road at a pedestrian crossing or at an intersection with stop or give way signs. Where this is not possible, take particular care and don't be afraid to ask for assistance.
- Always check very carefully that the way is clear before crossing a road.
- Use the shortest possible path across the road.
- Never cross where you can't see the oncoming traffic (eg on a hill, at a curve in the road, or where parked cars are obstructing your view).
- Never cross without first looking across to check that you will be able to get back onto the footpath on the other side. Avoid travelling over kerbs.
- Take particular care at intersections and roundabouts. Cross as a pedestrian would, from footpath to footpath. If the intersection or roundabout is very busy, consider taking an alternative route.

Beware of interference

- Radio wave sources, such as radio and TV stations, amateur radio transmitters, two-way radios and cellphones, may affect the operation of mobility scooters.
- Don't operate hand-held personal communication devices, such as mobile phones, while your mobility scooter is switched on.
- Avoid going near radio or television transmitters and people who are using mobile phones.



Parking

- Take your hand off the power control and remove the key before getting off your mobility scooter. Remember to take the key with you when you are leaving it unattended. If possible, park in a sheltered area.
- Don't leave your mobility scooter unattended if it is parked in the way of other pedestrians.



If you have to use the road

The law says that you must use the footpath if it is readily accessible. However, where there is absolutely no other option but to use the road, keep to the following guidelines to ensure your safety.

- Always travel on the left-hand side of the road and as close to the edge of the road as possible.
- Obey all traffic signs and signals, and give way to pedestrians who are crossing. Look out for children, because they often lack the skills and experience to negotiate traffic safely.
- Be aware that your mobility scooter is not as powerful or as conspicuous as other vehicles on the road.
- Watch out for obstructions in the road ahead, such as drains, potholes and parked cars. When passing parked cars, watch out for doors being opened in your path, or a vehicle moving off without indicating and vehicles coming up behind you.
- If you have indicators, use them. If not, use hand signals. Try not to startle pedestrians if you use a warning device, such as a horn.
- If you need to go on the road regularly, consider getting your mobility scooter fitted with indicators, lights, a horn, reversing beepers, warning flags and rear-vision mirrors.

Using public transport

Urban buses on public transport services are not able to carry mobility scooters due to weight restrictions.

Some taxi companies are able to carry you and your mobility scooter to your chosen destination. Check before booking.

Some trains and train stations are more accessible to mobility scooters than others. There may be limitations on the services you can use, the times of day you can travel and the kind of assistance that staff are able to provide. There may also be special conditions relating to the size and agility of the mobility scooter (and your ability to operate it in tight spaces). Once again, it pays to phone ahead to check before beginning your journey.



What to do if the going gets tough

If you have periods of confusion when riding on your mobility scooter, or you have problems with vision that mean you don't notice things that you should, or you start forgetting where you are going, you must stop using the mobility scooter.

You should then seek advice from a medical practitioner before using your mobility scooter again.

If you are advised not to continue using your mobility scooter, your nearest Age Concern, Citizens Advice or CCS Disability Action office may be able to help organise alternative transport.

The NZ Transport Agency's *Keeping moving* booklet contains more information on alternative transport schemes. Please call 0800 699 000, email info@nzta.govt.nz or write to Private Bag 6995, Wellington 6141 for your free copy. *Keeping moving* can also be viewed online at: www.nzta.govt.nz/traffic/senior-road-users/driving/keeping-moving.html.

How to care for your mobility scooter

Charging

There are a range of battery types. Some of the more common battery types are the traditional sealed lead acid batteries (like what you may find in your car) and Lithium Iron Phosphate (LiFePO₄) batteries.

Ensure you charge your batteries, according to the manufacturer's instructions, so you don't run out of power when you're away from home.

Going on holiday?

If you're not going to use your mobility scooter for more than one month, ensure the batteries are fully charged, and arrange for someone to recharge them once a fortnight.

Servicing

It is recommended that a routine maintenance check be carried out every six months by a qualified service technician.

Batteries

With moderate use (up to 15 hours per week) and if correctly charged, batteries should last 12 to 18 months. If your device uses 'wet type' batteries, you'll need to check your battery acid level every two weeks.

Tyres

Check your tyre pressure at your local garage every three months – under-inflated tyres are more likely to get punctures and can affect the handling of your scooter.

Under-inflated tyres also require your scooter to use more power. This reduces the distance you can travel on a single charge.

Storing

If possible, have somewhere secure to store your mobility scooter, such as a garage, where it won't be stolen or exposed to the weather.

Key points

- Plan your route.
- Make sure you can see and be seen.
- Stick to the footpath where you can.
- Be courteous to others.

Follow these simple rules and you should enjoy trouble-free years with your mobility scooter.



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Disclaimer

The material in this booklet is given as advice on good practice on the use and care of mobility scooters and power chairs. The NZTA has endeavoured to ensure the material in this document is technically accurate and reflects such limited legal requirements as exist. However, the document does not override governing legislation. The NZTA does not accept liability for any consequences arising from the use of this document. If the user of this document is unsure whether the material is correct, they should refer to the relevant legislation and contact the NZTA.

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