

Appendix 1 – Legal implications: Advice from the Comptroller and City Solicitor

Statutory duties

The City Corporation has a duty under s.130 of the HA 1980 to assert and protect the rights of the public to the use and enjoyment of any highway for which they are the highway authority.

It also has a network management duty under s.16 of the Traffic Management Act 2004. This requires it to manage its road network with a view to achieving, so far as may be reasonably practicable having regard to their other obligations, policies and objectives, the following objectives:

- a. securing the expeditious movement of traffic on the authority's road network; and
- b. facilitating the expeditious movement of traffic on road networks for which another authority is the traffic authority.

Under section 122 of the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 local authorities are under a duty to exercise functions conferred on them under that Act so far as practicable, having regard to matters specified in subsection (2), to secure the expeditious, safe and convenient movement of traffic (including pedestrians).

The City Corporation is also subject to the public sector equality duty under section 149 of the Equalities Act 2010. This means that in the exercise of its functions it must have due regard to the need to advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it. This includes removing or minimising disadvantages suffered by people due to their protected characteristics (such as visual or mobility disabilities).

An unmanaged proliferation of bikes on the highway arising from dockless bike hire schemes may compromise compliance with the above statutory duties.

Statutory powers to deal with bikes on highway

Dockless cycle hire schemes which do not necessitate any infrastructure being placed on the highway fall outside the existing legislative framework and do not need the City Corporation's consent to operate in the City. However, there are some existing statutory powers available where bikes are left so as to cause an obstruction, nuisance or danger.

1. Section 137 HA 1980 – If a person, without lawful authority or excuse, in any way wilfully obstructs the free passage along a highway he is guilty of an offence and liable to a fine not exceeding Level 3 on the standard scale (currently up to £1000.00.)
2. Section 148(c) HA 1980– if, without lawful authority or excuse a person deposits anything whatsoever on a highway to the interruption of any user of

the highway he is guilty of an offence and liable to a fine not exceeding Level 3 on the standard scale.

3. Section 149 HA 1980 – if anything is so deposited on a highway as to constitute a nuisance, the highway authority for the highway may by notice require the person who deposited there to remove it forthwith. In the event of non-compliance, a court order may be obtained authorising the removal and disposal of the offending item. If the highway authority has reasonable grounds for considering the item constitutes a danger (including a danger caused by obstructing the view) to users of the highway and ought to be removed without the delay of seeking a court order it can remove the item forthwith and, ultimately, seek a court order for its disposal.

Street trading and ‘waste’

Consideration has been given to whether the provision of dockless cycles for hire is caught by local legislation which makes it unlawful for any person to engage in unauthorised street trading in the City. “Street trading” is defined in the City of London (Various Powers) Act 1987 to mean the selling or exposing or offering for sale of any article or thing in a street. However, dockless cycle hire schemes involve bikes being available on the highway (or on private land with the consent of the owner) for temporary hire by members of the public, with payment being made via an App, and no person in the street engaged in the hiring out of the bikes. As the 1987 Act prohibits a person from selling etc. items in the street, not the temporary hiring of bikes in the way proposed which is more in the nature of a service (and not dissimilar to the existing Santander cycle hire scheme except that there are no docking stations), the activity would not amount to unauthorised street trading.

Consideration has been given to whether definitions of “waste” or “litter” in legislation apply. It is considered that these terms are not intended to cover bicycles left temporarily on the highway and which are in use for the benefit of the operators and their customers and officers are not aware of any decisions on this point. It is not considered that this adds significantly to the City’s statutory powers to deal with bikes on the highway.

Regulation by making byelaws

Government guidance states that byelaws are considered measures of last resort after a local council has tried to address the local issue the byelaw applies to through other means. A byelaw cannot be made where alternative legislative measures already exist that could be used to address the problem. Byelaws should always be proportionate and reasonable.

It follows that there is a risk that the case for making a byelaw to regulate dockless bike hire could be undermined if all bikes on City streets were to be classed as obstructions and removed under existing powers. This would not prevent the application of the Street Obstructions Policy as proposed.

In relation to the activities of other local authorities in this area, it is understood by City officers that action is proposed to be pursued through a proposed London-wide byelaw.

TfL and London Councils have proposed establishing a regulatory framework for dockless bike hire schemes by way of a London-wide byelaw as the Boroughs have power to make byelaws for good rule and government under section 235 of the Local Government Act 1972. This would necessitate each authority delegating their byelaw-making powers to London Councils' TEC. The byelaw would then be made by way of the new simplified procedure introduced by Regulations which replaced the requirement for Government confirmation of the byelaw.

(However, the City Corporation has a different power to make byelaws for good rule and government contained in the City of London (Various Powers) Act 1961 to which the new simplified procedure does not apply. The City Corporation's participation in London-wide byelaw arrangements may therefore require a separate byelaw (which would need to be confirmed by the relevant Secretary of State) to interface with the TEC byelaw as part of the London-wide controls).

Liabilities

In the event of loss, injury or damage being caused by the cycles, the person responsible would depend on the circumstances of each case. For example, if a cycle had remained in a dangerous position for days without the highway authority taking steps despite complaints, some liability would be likely to rest with the highway authority. If an accident occurred a few moments after the cycle was left in a dangerous position and the highway authority had no reasonable opportunity to identify and remedy the danger, it is unlikely any liability would rest with the highway authority, and therefore would be more likely to rest with the user and/or operator. In addition, the steps proposed to secure the co-operation of operators in ensuring safe practises would help demonstrate that the City is taking reasonable measures consistent with its responsibilities.