

# Capitola City Council

## Agenda Report



**Meeting:** April 10, 2025

**From:** City Manager/Police Department

**Subject:** E-Bike Safety

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**Recommended Action:** Receive report regarding existing City e-bike safety initiatives and direct the Mayor to sign a letter regarding proposed State legislation for e-bike safety to Representatives Dawn Addis, Gail Pellerin, and Senator John Laird.

**Background:** The use of electric bikes (e-bikes) has increased significantly in recent years. This trend has a number of positive community benefits, including:

- **Environmental benefits:** e-bikes are a lower environmental impact alternative to cars, significantly reducing greenhouse gas emissions and air pollution. They contribute to cleaner urban environments and help combat climate change.
- **Health and fitness:** Riding an e-bike promotes physical activity while allowing riders to adjust the level of assistance based on their fitness or terrain, making cycling accessible to a broader range of people, including those with limited mobility or endurance.
- **Cost-effective and efficient transportation:** e-bikes are a cost-effective mode of transportation, with lower operating and maintenance costs compared to cars. They also help reduce traffic congestion and provide a faster, more flexible way to navigate urban areas.

However, the use of e-bikes has created some issues in the community. In particular, some e-bike users are not familiar with the "rules of the road." This unfamiliarity can create hazards for other users, particularly when e-bikes fail to stop at stop signs, ride on sidewalks, travel on the wrong side of the road, or operate with more passengers than the e-bike is designed to allow.

Under California law, e-bikes are limited to motors of 750 watts or less and are divided into three different categories, or Classes, as follows:

Class 1 = Pedal assist to up to a maximum of 20 mph

Class 2 = Throttle and pedal assist to up to a maximum of 20 mph

Class 3 = Throttle up to 20 mph. Pedal assist up to a maximum of 28 mph. Must be 16 years of age or older.

**Discussion:** The City has launched several local initiatives to enhance e-bike safety. These include raising awareness through education, hosting community events, leveraging social media campaigns, partnering with local businesses, and enforcing existing safety regulations.

**Education:** The Capitola Police Department's Traffic Unit presents annually to New Brighton Middle School students about e-bike safety. The workshop is interactive and involves students by informing riders of the rules of the road, proper e-bike handling, safe riding habits, and helmet use.

**Community Events:** The Police Department has partnered with the California Highway Patrol organizing "bike rodeos" at the Capitola Mall to encourage youth engagement with local law enforcement and to distribute safety equipment and information. The events provide an good opportunity for education and outreach, promoting safe biking habits and vehicle code awareness within the community.

**Public Awareness through Social Media:** Social media has been an excellent tools to disseminate messages to the broader community. The Police Department posts several times a year to remind e-bikers about safety and being responsible riders.

**Collaboration with Local Businesses:** The City has implemented a “Capitola Star Card” program giving youth a punch card sponsored by Capitola Village businesses to provide treats when young e-bikers are being exemplary community ambassadors.

**Enforcement:** While education, incentives, and outreach are important components of ensuring public safety, enforcement is another tool to help ensure traffic safety rules are being followed. On an annual basis, at the start of the school year, the Traffic Safety Division conducts concentrated high visibility activity around e-bike safety near New Brighton Middle School. Typically, Police Officers will issue warnings during the initial phase of the annual enforcement cycle, followed by issuing citations and/or confiscating e-bikes when necessary. Officers often work directly with parents or guardians of the youth who are in possession of e-bikes with egregious violations.

Data regarding historic levels of e-bike-related accidents is not currently available, however, starting in 2024 the Department began using a specific code to flag all e-bike-involved accidents. Moving forward we will be able to track accidents to monitor the effectiveness of various programs.

Earlier this year, Capitola PD created a special two-week operation regarding youth and e-bike use. Police Officers were strategically present at the time school let out, to make contact with young riders. During those two weeks, the Police Department issued 13 warnings and 13 citations. The citations were for violations such as no helmet, unsafe turns, stop sign violations, cell phone use, and failure to obey traffic signs and signals. Warnings were given for minor traffic infractions, including riding on the sidewalk. Officers noted that the majority of juveniles observed were wearing helmets and following the vehicle code.

The Police Department also actively enforces the use of illegal electric motorcycles, such as Talarias and Surrons. Two Talarias were impounded in March as part of this effort.

Legislation: While the City enforces existing regulations, at times it appears that regulations have not kept up with e-bike technology and actual usage patterns. Adopting Capitola-specific regulations would pose numerous challenges, most significantly that the City is only two square miles. Creating a unique regulatory scheme for such a small City would be very difficult to enforce and confusing to the public. As a result, staff is proposing the City send a letter to elected officials in Sacramento with conceptual new regulations the City could support to promote e-bike safety.

1. **Establish a minimum age of 14 for Class 2 e-bikes:** Class 2 bikes have a throttle and require no user pedaling input. Based on observations of rider behavior, the availability of a throttle on the Class 2 e-bikes can lead to less rider engagement and greater overall risk. Currently, there is no minimum age to ride a Class 2 e-bike. The minimum age to ride a Class 3 e-bike (assist up to 28 mph) is 16.
2. **Establish a written test/permit administered by the DMV for users less than 16 years old to use Class 2 e-bikes:** Currently, there is no test or permit required for use of an e-bike for any age/person.
3. **Require traffic safety education as essential core curriculum for schools:** In some other countries traffic safety education is integrated into school curriculum and community practices. In the US, drivers education is the only required traffic training and it's for people to drive a car, but comprehensive education on how to be a pedestrian, a bike rider, a transit user, etc. are relegated to elective educational opportunities.

Fiscal Impact: Cost for current e-bike safety initiatives are included in the adopted FY 2024-25 Budget

Attachments:

1. Draft letter regarding proposed legislation

Report Prepared By: Jamie Goldstein, City Manager; Sarah Ryan, Chief of Police

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