



City Council Agenda Report

Meeting Date: June 10, 2025

Prepared By: Steven Son

Approved By: Gabe Engeland

Subject: E-Bike and E-Scooter Regulations

COUNCIL PRIORITY AREA

- ☒ Business Communities
- ☒ Circulation Safety and Efficiency
- ☒ Environmental Sustainability
- ☐ Housing
- ☐ Neighborhood Safety Infrastructure
- ☒ General Government

RECOMMENDATION

Introduce an Ordinance of the City Council of the City of Los Altos Repealing Chapter 8.32 in its entirety and replacing it with a new Chapter 8.32 entitled “Bicycle and Electric Mobility Devices” to Title 8 (Vehicles and Traffic) of the Los Altos Municipal Code.

FISCAL IMPACT

Not Applicable.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

Not a Project Under CEQA.

PREVIOUS COUNCIL CONSIDERATION

Not Applicable.

BACKGROUND

The City has received numerous concerns from Los Altos residents regarding the unsafe use of e-bikes and e-scooters on city streets and sidewalks, particularly by juveniles. Residents have reported, and City staff have observed, riders without helmets, multiple riders on e-bikes or e-scooters designed for one rider, excessive speeding, unsafe behaviors on sidewalks, riding against traffic, and a general disregard of traffic laws. There is a perception that current state law does not adequately address safety concerns related to e-bikes for riders and passengers, as well as for pedestrians on sidewalks.

After consultation with the Police Department, this matter was brought to the Complete Street Commission (CSC) on October 30, 2024. Staff provided background regarding the e-bike law,

potential upcoming legislation, and the need for a city ordinance to address areas not covered by state law or to introduce regulations that are more stringent than what currently exists in state law.

The proposed ordinance recommends the following:

1. The operators of e-bikes and e-scooters must wear a helmet.
2. E-bikes and e-scooters shall not be operated on the sidewalks throughout the City, with the exceptions identified below.
3. The number of riders on an e-bike and e-scooter shall not exceed one (1), unless the e-bike or scooter are specifically designed for multiple riders.

ANALYSIS

California Vehicle Code (CVC) 231 classifies an e-bike as a bicycle, granting the same rights and privileges. CVC 21100 further extends vehicle driver rights, including, but not limited to, a provision concerning driving under the influence, to bicycle riders. Under existing State law, bicyclists and e-bicyclists can operate on the road and the sidewalk without restriction. However, CVC 21100(3) and 21207 permit local agencies to restrict the operation of bicycles and e-bicycles.

For e-scooters, CVC 21221 provides similar rights and privileges to those of a vehicle operating on the highway, including, but not limited to, provisions concerning driving under the influence. CVC 21230 permits e-scooter operation on bicycle paths, trails, or bikeways, unless the local authority or the governing body of a local agency has jurisdiction over that path, trail, or bikeway and prohibits that operation by ordinance. CVC 21235 mandates a valid driver's license for e-scooter operation and prohibits sidewalk use, except when entering or leaving an adjacent property.

DISCUSSION

At the October 30, 2024, CSC meeting, based on public feedback, the CSC identified that many of the recommendations from the Police Department and staff were already included in current State law, and that a local ordinance should focus on the points identified above. Furthermore, the Commissioners expressed concern about restricting e-bikes on all sidewalks, particularly for children. Under CVC 231, an e-bike is considered equivalent to a bicycle. For this reason, the CSC is concerned that restricting e-bikes on all sidewalks could inadvertently impact young riders who may not be comfortable riding in the street.

At the January 29, 2025, meeting, the CSC recommended adopting sidewalk restrictions only in the downtown area. The proposed ordinance reflects the belief that a more comprehensive ordinance with citywide application is more appropriate, as the observed issues and unsafe behaviors are not limited to the downtown area. Police officers have observed similar concerns around the high school, business districts outside of downtown, and other locations throughout the city. Staff believes limiting restrictions to downtown would not effectively educate residents on the proper use of e-bikes and e-scooters.

To address the concerns of the public and CSC, the proposed new ordinance includes key exceptions for sidewalk riding:

- **Children Under 12:** Children under the age of 12 are permitted to ride on sidewalks, provided they exercise necessary precautions, particularly when around pedestrians.
- **Unsafe Road Geometry:** Riders can use existing sidewalks with caution in areas where the road lacks a designated bicycle lane or sufficient width for safe navigation

While some of the recommended ordinances will duplicate existing State law, the Los Altos Police Department would like to adopt them into the municipal code for flexibility. Currently, if a police officer cites a resident under the State law, the citation will be considered by the traffic court, which will determine the penalties and fines. If the Council adopts the State law into the City's municipal ordinance, the police officer has the option to issue a warning or cite someone under the municipal ordinance, and the resident will pay a fine based on the City's fine schedule.

ATTACHMENTS

1. Ordinance
2. Appendix A