

Memorandum

To: Mayor Hudes and Los Gatos Town Council

CC: Town Manager, Chief of Police, Town Attorney, Town Clerk

From: Vice Mayor Rob Moore and Councilmember Maria Ristow

Subject: E-Bike Safety

Background:

Over the past few years, the use of [e-bikes](#) and [e-motorcycles](#) in Los Gatos has risen significantly, especially among younger riders. Residents in Los Gatos have observed students behaving in unsafe ways and sometimes engaging in anti-social behavior while riding two-wheeled electric vehicles. While there has not been a dramatic increase in juvenile injuries locally, the risk of a serious injury is substantial. [National Institutes of Health data](#) shows that e-bike riders have 2.4 times greater odds of severe injury than traditional cyclists. Furthermore, many minors don't understand the rules of the road and their brains are not fully developed. [Marin County has reported](#) that 35% of e-bike crashes between October 2023 and March 2024 involved riders under 16 years old. Tragically, riders aged 10 to 15 have five times the crash rate of adults. [Recent statistics show](#) cyclist deaths continue to rise in the US, with e-bikes representing an increasing percentage of these incidents, particularly among younger riders.

Even legal Class 2 e-bikes present safety challenges over Class 1 and solely human-powered bicycles. Class 2 e-bikes can reach speeds of 20 MPH using throttle power alone (no pedaling required) and many can be modified to exceed their legal speed limits. Due to the throttle, they are easier for inexperienced riders to operate at high speeds and they don't require the same physical effort as Class 1 e-bikes, potentially leading to less cautious operation.

Contributing to the increased risk to riders and bystanders, is the recent proliferation of e-motorcycles. While traditional e-bikes (Class 1, Class 2, and Class 3) are legal and well regulated by the State of California and in the Town of Los Gatos, e-motorcycles are unregulated, throttle-operated electric vehicles that are not street legal. They often don't have pedals, can travel up to 60 MPH, and can be purchased online from sites like Alibaba. These e-motorcycles usually cost between \$3,000 and \$7,000, meaning that most of the time, teenagers are not purchasing these vehicles themselves: their parents are purchasing them for their children. There are a variety of quality [educational resources](#) available to students and parents in Los Gatos, but oftentimes they are not made to guide purchasing decisions.

The Los Gatos-Monte Sereno Police Department (LGMSPD) has made significant efforts to safely enforce the law and curb dangerous e-bike and e-motorcycle behavior in Los Gatos. Recently, during the start of the school year, the Police Department increased its visibility at local schools to promote safety among Los Gatos students. Additionally, Los Gatos School Resource Officers continue engaging in proactive education including bike rodeos happening in fall in partnership with [Safe Routes to School](#). Several dozen citations were issued during the first week of school, however the problem persists.

The Town of Los Gatos has an obligation to ensure that the children of our community don't

inadvertently make a life-altering decision.

Recommendation:

To increase the safety for all road and trail users in Los Gatos, we recommend a four pronged approach: education, registration, legislation, and enforcement.

1. **Education - Buyer's Guide:** Education is a critical aspect of limiting the prevalence of illegal e-motorcycles in Los Gatos. To accomplish this, the Town of Los Gatos should create a "buyer's guide" specifically targeted at parents, but accessible to all. This buyer's guide should have specific recommendations about the kinds of e-bikes that are safe and legal, and where you can buy these legal e-bikes in town. It should also specifically give examples of the common brands of e-bikes/ e-motorcycles that are illegal such as Surron and Talaria with photos, as well as flagging legal class 2 e-bikes that can be hacked to exceed 20 mph.
 - The Town of Los Gatos should work with Los Gatos' three local bike shops (Summit Bikes, Mike's Bikes, and Specialized Bikes) to promote these shops as where to buy legal e-bikes in Los Gatos. These bike shops have also demonstrated an interest in doing more to promote safe, legal bike riding behavior in Los Gatos.
2. **Registration Program:** Decreasing the quantity of illegal e-motorcycles going to and from local schools could make a significant difference in curbing their prevalence. The Town of Los Gatos should work with Los Gatos High School, Los Gatos middle schools, and Los Gatos Safe Routes to Schools to create an e-bike registration program. Only legal Class 1, 2, and 3 would be eligible for registration. This program should require that all e-bikes ridden by students to Los Gatos schools are registered, and registered riders could receive a large, colored sticker for their e-bike. The registration could utilize the Town's existing online registration resources.
 - After this program has been put in place, school staff and Los Gatos School Resource Officers will be able to begin enforcing only allowing registered e-bikes to be parked on campus. Illegal e-motorcycles would not be able to be registered, and could therefore be banned from campus.
3. **Support Legislation:** Part of the challenge with addressing hazards from e-bikes and e-motorcycles in Los Gatos is limited state regulations from the State of California. Accordingly, the Town of Los Gatos should support statewide legislation to better address this issue.
 - First, the Town of Los Gatos should work with our state legislators to expand the [Marin County e-bike pilot](#) to Santa Clara County. [AB 1778](#) allows Marin County to enact a pilot program that bans anyone under 16 years old from riding Class 2 e-bikes, thus putting the same regulations in place for both Class 2 and 3 e-bikes.
 - Second, the Town of Los Gatos should support [AB 875](#). AB 875, authored by Assemblymember Al Muratsuchi, would provide law enforcement officers more latitude to remove and impound illegal e-motorcycles. This legislation is supported by the California Police Chiefs Association.
 - Further legislation efforts could include expansion of [AB 2234](#), the San Diego Electric Bicycle Safety Pilot Program, that prohibits a person under the age of 12 from operating any electric bicycle.
4. **Enforcement:** The Town of Los Gatos should explore taking legislative action to align an E-bike Ordinance with the Town's [Social Host Ordinance](#).

- Doing so would allow for the Town to issue up to a \$1,500 administrative citation for parents of a juvenile found in violation of e-bike laws.

*Simplistic example of how to structure a Buyer's Guide:

Illegal	Can be converted to be illegal	Legal
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All Surrón e-motos • All Talaria e-motos • Segway Xyber 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Super73 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Electra • Trek • Specialized • Gazelle

Note: The three bike shops in Los Gatos only sell street-legal e-bikes. **Shop locally, shop legally!**