



**TOWN OF LOS GATOS
COUNCIL AGENDA REPORT**

MEETING DATE: 11/04/2025

ITEM NO: 13

DATE: October 26, 2025
TO: Mayor and Town Council
FROM: Chris Constantin, Town Manager
SUBJECT: **Informational Report on E-Bike Safety, Education, Enforcement, and Legislation**

RECOMMENDATION: Receive the informational report summarizing the Los Gatos-Monte Sereno Police Department's (LGMSPD) local, regional, and statewide efforts and alignment in addressing electric bicycle (e-bike) safety, including education, enforcement, legislative awareness, and partnership collaboration. No Council action is requested.

FISCAL IMPACT:

The implementation of the e-bike safety and education initiative for FY 2025-26 is anticipated to be accommodated within existing departmental budget allocations. No additional General Fund appropriation is required at this time. The Community Outreach Coordinator, School Resource Officer, Motor Officer, and Traffic Sergeant encompass the majority of the efforts related to bike safety.

STRATEGIC PRIORITY:

This report aligns with the Town's goal of public safety.

BACKGROUND:

At the September 16, 2025, Town Council meeting, the Council requested a comprehensive update on e-bike safety initiatives, including what has been done locally, regionally, and statewide. The discussion at the prior Council Meeting also included proposed recommendations related to education, an e-bike registration program, advocacy towards supporting legislation, and enforcement, all of which are focused on mitigating risks associated with e-bikes. This report consolidates those efforts, outlines ongoing initiatives, identifies legal

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Reviewed by: Town Manager, Assistant Town Manager, Town Attorney, and Finance Director

and staffing limitations, and highlights current or forthcoming changes under new state legislation. E-bike use has increased dramatically in Los Gatos, particularly among youth riders commuting to schools. While e-bikes promote sustainability and reduce congestion, their growing popularity has introduced new safety risks, including excessive speed, unsafe riding behaviors, and aftermarket modifications that push devices beyond legal classifications.

DISCUSSION:

Community Context

Los Gatos is a bicycle-friendly community with high student ridership at Los Gatos High School (LGHS), Fisher Middle School, and multiple elementary campuses. Morning and afternoon peaks concentrate many young riders into narrow corridors shared with vehicles and pedestrians. Concerns from parents and residents have centered on helmet compliance, sidewalk and wrong-way riding, multiple riders, riders not following speed or rules of the road, and high-powered unregulated e-motorcycles operated by minors.

These challenges are not unique to Los Gatos. Across California, jurisdictions are struggling to balance mobility access with safety enforcement, leading to increased collaboration through state law enforcement associations, Complete Streets and Safety Commission (CSTC), service clubs, both local school districts, the Los Gatos Youth Commission, and Safe Routes to School.

Legal Considerations

Definition and Classification of Electric Bicycles (E-Bikes)

Electric bicycles (e-bikes) are regulated under section 312.5 CVC, which defines an e-bike as a bicycle equipped with fully operable pedals and an electric motor of less than 750 watts. These vehicles are distinct from mopeds, motorcycles, or off-highway vehicles (OHVs) because they do not require a driver's license, registration, or insurance when operated within their classification limits.

To promote uniform enforcement and public understanding, e-bikes are categorized into three classes that determine where they may legally operate and what safety equipment is required:

Class 1 – Low-Speed Pedal-Assist E-Bike

Equipped with a motor that provides assistance only when the rider is pedaling and ceases to assist when the bicycle reaches 20 mph. Class 1 e-bikes are permitted on most bikeways and multi-use paths unless restricted by local ordinance.

Class 2 – Low-Speed Throttle-Assist E-Bike

Equipped with a motor that can propel the bicycle independently of pedaling, but stops providing assistance at 20 mph.

Class 3 – Speed Pedal-Assist E-Bike

Equipped with a motor that provides assistance only when pedaling and ceases at 28 mph.

Riders must be at least 16 years old and wear a helmet regardless of age.

Summary Table: E-Bike Classification Overview

Class	Assist Type	Top Speed (Assisted)	Rider Age/Helmet Rules
Class 1	Pedal-Assist Only	20 mph	<18 Helmet Required
Class 2	Throttle or Pedal	20 mph	<18 Helmet Required
Class 3	Pedal-Assist Only	28 mph	≥16 Only; Helmet Required

Local Initiatives and PartnershipsEducation and Outreach

Since 2022, LGMSPD has centered e-bike safety around education and prevention.

Back-to-school campaigns: included saturation patrol enforcement during the first week back to school to ensure rules of the road were followed, with an emphasis on e-bike related matters.

2025 LGMSPD E-Bike Safety and Violation Awareness Brochure: The School Resource Officer worked with both school districts to develop a dedicated e-bike safety and legal code brochure that was dispersed to students and parents at the school's approval, utilizing their internal communication platform. The brochure is on LGMSPD's website and has been provided in many other community presentations. The brochure covers the following –

- Legal distinctions between e-bikes and off-highway vehicles (OHVs)
- Safety requirements (helmets, lighting, licensing)
- Common California Vehicle Code violations
- Impoundment authority for unregistered and reckless use. Tow authorities for towing ebikes will be added once AB 875 is signed and becomes law.

Outreach efforts: Both updated safety brochures and social media have been utilized to reach the broader community and student families across Fisher Middle School, Daves Avenue, Van Meter, Blossom Hill Elementary, and LGHS. Topics include helmet laws, age limits, and legal classifications.

Community Meetings and Neighborhood Watch: LGMSPD participated in a community focused bike/e-bike safety presentation on September 17, 2025, at the Rinconada Hills Clubhouse. Approximately 40-60 youths and adults participated in the session led by Community Outreach Coordinator, Jackie Rose, with the support of two LGMSPD patrol officers, and a Reserve Officer who is cross trained as a bike patrol officer and brought one of LGMSPDs e-bikes.

LGMSPD dedicated website for e-bike safety: The website features videos, downloadable brochures, distinction between e-bike classifications, and state law summaries (<https://www.losgatosca.gov/2811/Electric-Bikes>).

School Resource Officer 'Bike Cage' conversations: LGMSPD's only SRO, Officer Reyes, conducts weekly 'bike cage' conversations at LGHS and Fisher Middle School, reinforcing helmet use, safe riding techniques, and equipment standards during after-school hours. Officer Reyes participates in educational programs at the schools on bike safety and bike rodeos.

Los Gatos Youth Commission: The Los Gatos Youth Commission has led three consecutive years of peer-driven e-bike campaigns. The initiatives also included QR-coded signage, that were displayed at Spring into Green and the Monte Sereno Picnic, linking to safety videos created by LGMSPD or the Youth Commission and online resources, all developed with LGMSPD guidance.

School and Regional Partnerships

LGHS Bike Registration Program: In collaboration with the LGHS school administrators, LGMSPD helped develop the LGHS e-bike registration program in September. Students must complete an online safety course before receiving a bike cage permit. Early evaluations show fewer modified bikes on campus and higher helmet compliance. This was also a primary area of concern during the annual report to the Los Gatos-Saratoga Unified School District Board Meeting in early October 2025.

Safe Routes To School: The Department works closely with Wendy Riggs, the Los Gatos Safe Routes to School coordinator. LGMSPD's Traffic Sergeant serves on the Safe Routes to School board, aligning or representing enforcement efforts and trends and providing a public safety perspective.

LGMSPD Directed E-bike Enforcement: During the first week of school, LGMSPD deploys saturation patrols in high-traffic corridors near schools. Motor Officer Velasquez and patrol teams focus on education-first contacts, providing verbal warnings and guidance prior to any citation issuance. The SRO, in collaboration with the motor officer, is working to identify common corridors of e-bike violations and frequent violators in order to focus efforts in these high impact areas with a coordinated plan. This will allow for the most effective and efficient use of extremely limited resources.

State Legislative Landscape

There are several state laws that pertain to e-bikes and are provided in the table below.

Bill	Year	Summary/Effect
AB 1909 - "OmniBike Bill"	2023	Expanded cyclist protections and standardized right-of-way laws. Preempts local licensing or registration mandates, limiting Town authority to voluntary school-based programs.
AB 1778 - Marin County Pilot	2024	Authorized Marin County to test youth-specific age restrictions and e-bike safety education. Established data collection and reporting framework for statewide expansion.
SB 381 - Micromobility Standards	2024	Defined e-mobility device categories, clarified equipment and speed limits for modified devices.
SB 1271 – Updated E-Bike Classifications and Limitations	2024 (Effective Jan. 1, 2025 as a phased approach over future years)	Targeted unsafe modifications, improper use of electric motors, battery safety, and defined e-bike classifications.
AB 875 - E-Bike Impound Authority	2025 (Effective Jan. 1, 2026)	Authorizes peace officers to impound unsafe or illegally modified e-bikes, recover administrative costs, and require safety course completion before release.

Limitations and Challenges

While the Department continues to make progress, several limitations constrain enforcement capacity and consistency:

- **Staffing:** LGMSPD currently maintains one SRO and one full-time motor officer, that both work a 4-day / 10-hour schedule. Broader enforcement or sustained patrol presence will depend on staffing levels, overtime funding, calls for service, and cross-training options.
- **Legal Boundaries:** State preemption limits the Town authority to create mandatory registration or licensing programs. Enforcement relies on state Vehicle Code authority and local discretion. Additionally, traffic enforcement stops cannot be made based on age, and therefore, officers need to identify clear violations prior to a stop being made. Also, should an e-bike rider choose not to comply and yield to an officer's attempt to stop, a pursuit is not likely as the risk does not outweigh the danger to the public or rider(s) if an e-bike violation is the only purpose of the stop. The Police Department's pursuit policy is available on the LGMSPD website.

- Equipment Identification: Modified or unlabeled e-bikes make determining class difficult, requiring officer discretion and safety prioritization.
- Public Expectation Management: Education-first enforcement may be misunderstood as leniency. LGMSPD will continue to emphasize prevention and youth accountability while issuing citations for ordinance or vehicle code violations when necessary. Additionally, under 14607 CVC, it is a misdemeanor for a parent or guardian to knowingly permit an unlicensed minor to operate an illegal e-bike on a public roadway.
- Towing: There are two tow companies on LGMSPD's rotational tow. These tow companies also service the greater West Valley communities as well. It is unknown how adding e-bike tows may impact the availability or response of the service.

Future Workplan Considerations (2026–2028)

- Education and Outreach: LGMSPD to continue the outreach initiatives with existing partnerships and support of the School Resource Officer when time permits. Collaborate with the elementary schools and offer support should they want to pursue the bike registration model that Los Gatos High School has implemented.
- Targeted Enforcement: Train a second motor officer (as staffing allows) for expanded school-zone coverage and overall traffic enforcement throughout LGMSPD jurisdiction. This would add an additional enforcement modality that has swifter and more successful access to e-bikes and other comprehensive benefits. Maintain an education-first model.
- Legislative Advocacy: Support advocacy efforts by the Town Council, should there be attention towards expanding current or implementing new pilot programs that involve the Los Gatos community and further guardrails on e-bikes statewide.

CONCLUSION:

The Los Gatos-Monte Sereno Police Department's layered approach of education, engagement, and selective enforcement has fostered improvements in safety culture among student riders. With new legislative tools under AB 875 and continued collaboration with schools, Safe Routes, and the Youth Commission, LGMSPD remains positioned to stay focused on protecting youth riders and sustaining safe mobility across the Town. Through continued partnership with the Town Council, schools, Safe Routes to School, and the community at large, Los Gatos can serve as a model for proactive, balanced, and community-driven e-bike safety.

Attachments:

1. LGMSPD Informational E-Bike Safety Brochure