



**TOWN OF LOS GATOS
PARKS AND SUSTAINABILITY
COMMISSION REPORT**

MEETING DATE: 04/07/2025

ITEM NO: 5

DATE: April 4, 2025
TO: Parks and Sustainability Commission
FROM: Nicolle Burnham, Parks and Public Works Director
SUBJECT: Receive Information Regarding Regulation of E-Bike Use in Parks and Open Spaces in Nearby Jurisdictions

RECOMMENDATION:

Receive information regarding regulation of E-Bike use in parks and open spaces in nearby jurisdictions.

BACKGROUND:

This report responds to the Commission work plan item brought forward by staff during the February meeting of the Parks and Sustainability Commission. It provides an overview of California's legal definitions of e-bike classes, explores regulations enacted by other municipalities, and examines the role of e-bikes within the Town's parks and open spaces.

DISCUSSION:

State of California E-Bike Classifications:

According to California Vehicle Code (CVC) 312.5, an "electric bicycle" is a bicycle equipped with fully operable pedals and an electric motor of less than 750 watts. CVC Section 312.5(a) defines e-bikes into three classes depending on the bicycle's level of assistance and speed:

- A "class 1 electric bicycle," or "low-speed pedal-assisted electric bicycle," is a bicycle equipped with a motor that provides assistance only when the rider is pedaling and that ceases to provide assistance when the bicycle reaches the speed of 20 miles per hour.
- A "class 2 electric bicycle," or "low-speed throttle-assisted electric bicycle," is a bicycle equipped with a motor that may be used exclusively to propel the bicycle and that ceases to provide assistance when the bicycle reaches the speed of 20 miles per hour.
- A "class 3 electric bicycle," or "speed pedal-assisted electric bicycle," is a bicycle equipped with a speedometer and a motor that provides assistance only when the rider is pedaling and that ceases to provide assistance when the bicycle reaches the speed of 28 miles per hour.

PREPARED BY: Name: Meredith Johnston
Title: Administrative Technician

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Staff has gathered data on the rules and regulations surrounding e-bike use in other municipalities, focusing on enforcement challenges and the strategies these municipalities employ to ensure compliance. This includes an examination of different approaches to regulation, monitoring, and the practical measures taken to address issues such as speeding, safety, and education in e-bike management.

Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District E-Bike Policy:

The Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District (Midpen) has established specific policies regarding the use of electric bicycles (e-bikes) on its preserves. As of June 29, 2022, the Board of Directors approved the following guidelines:

- **Designated Trails:** Class 1 and Class 2 e-bikes are permitted on select paved and improved trails at Ravenswood and Rancho San Antonio Open Space Preserves. These trails are clearly marked to indicate e-bike access.
- **General Restrictions:** E-bikes remain prohibited on all other District trails, including those where traditional mountain bikes are allowed. This decision was informed by studies assessing the potential impacts of e-bikes on natural resources, visitor experiences, and trail maintenance.
- **Accessibility for Mobility Disabilities:** E-bikes are permitted as mobility devices for visitors with mobility disabilities on trails where bicycles are allowed, in compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act.

These policies aim to balance recreational use with the preservation of natural habitats and the enjoyment of all visitors of Midpen.

Marin County E-bike Policy:

- **Paved Pathways:** Class 1 or Class 2 e-bike are allowed on multi-use paved pathways maintained by the County of Marin. Class 3 e-bikes are prohibited within Parks facilities except upon public roadways and parking lots or when specifically signed to permit them.
- **Speed Limits:** The speed limit for all bicycles is 15 mph on County-maintained pathways. Some pathways may have a speed limit of 10 mph.
- **Restrictions:** You cannot ride a Class 3 e-bike on a bike path. Class 3 e-bikes must be ridden in a bike lane or bike route. Class 3 e-bikes must stay on public roadways and in parking lots within Parks facilities

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On March 25, 2025, Marin County Board of Supervisors approved the introduction of an e-bike ordinance that would make it illegal for children under age 16 to operate a Class 2 e-bike in unincorporated Marin and require riders of all ages to wear helmets on such e-bikes. This ordinance is scheduled as a consent item on the agenda for May 20, 2025. ¹

Managing the Impact of E-Bikes in Los Gatos Parks and Trails:

The growing popularity of e-bikes presents challenges for Los Gatos park services and trail management. The wide variation in e-bike designs makes it difficult to distinguish between classes (1, 2, and 3), complicating regulation enforcement. With high user volumes, safety concerns, and limited park officer availability, managing e-bike use has become increasingly complex. The Town has 1.5 park service officers that must cover vast regions, and enforcing e-bike regulations requires resources that are often stretched thin.

Evolving technology and inconsistent rider knowledge add to the difficulty, while resistance to regulations and a lack of public education further complicate efforts to ensure a safe experience for all park visitors. Balancing e-bike benefits with effective regulation is a pressing concern for park authorities.

Proposed Work Plan for Policy Development:²

Following are the steps staff will be taking to address concerns related to e-bikes in parks and trails:

- **Research:** Gather data on e-bike usage, legal requirements, and best practices.
- **Get Feedback:** Collect input from the Commission and Town Attorney's office.
- **Propose Potential Changes:** Develop policy options, such as trail designations, speed limits, and educational programs.
- **Discuss Changes:** Review proposed changes with the Commission
- **Recommend Changes:** Present final recommendations to the policy committee and council for approval.
- **Adopt:** Implement the ordinance change and new policy after approval.
- **Work Plan Timeline:** The entire process is expected to take 18 to 24 months due to staffing limitations.

¹Marin County March 20 and 25, 2025 <https://www.marincounty.gov/news-releases/e-bike-ordinance-draft-reaches-supervisors-desks#:~:text=A%20draft%20ordinance%20heading%20to,assisted%20speed%20of%2020%20mph.>

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CONCLUSION:

E-bikes are an important component of sustainable park management in Los Gatos, offering numerous environmental, accessibility, and recreational benefits for residents and visitors alike. As the popularity of e-bikes continues to grow, staff is recommending that the Town of Los Gatos develop a thoughtful and comprehensive policy to manage their use within the park system. This work will be completed by staff in the coming months with input requested from the Commission at critical intervals.

Attachments:

1. E-Bike Data