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HAWAII NEWS

## Bill to regulate Big Island bike tours advances

By Michael Brestovansky Hawaii Tribune-Herald

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Editors' Picks



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KELSEY WALLING / TRIBUNE-HERALD / DEC. 30

A tour guide begins an e-bike tour in Hawai'i Volcanoes National Park.

A proposal to impose regulations upon commercial bike tour operators in Hawaii County has advanced despite pushback from bicyclists and tour groups.

County Council Bill 125 began life in January as a simple measure to prohibit bike tour groups from operating on two specific stretches of West Hawaii roads — Kohala Mountain Road and a roughly 8-mile stretch of Akoni Pule Highway between Kohala Mountain Road and Pololu Valley Lookout — due to safety concerns about poor sight lines and limited shoulder space.

But since then, over the course of multiple committee meetings and amendments, the

bill has morphed into a more holistic series of code changes that would require bike tour operators to register with the county and allow it to prohibit bike tour groups on any road where their presence would be deemed detrimental to public safety.

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The latest incarnation of the bill went before the full Council on Wednesday for its first reading, where it was amended for a fifth time.

As currently written, the bill requires operators to register with the county each year for a first-time fee of \$500 and \$250 for every subsequent year. Failure to do so will incur a \$1,000 fine.

While the earlier drafts of the measure — which were largely focused on road safety in

very specific areas — were well supported by residents, the more recent versions have been less popular, particularly among bicyclists. Several tour operators testified against the bill, arguing that it unfairly restricts their businesses.

“This is the exact opposite of what Hawaii should be doing,” wrote Alexander Candelario, owner and founder of Big Island Bike Tours. “If people are not going to be allowed to explore on a bicycle, then they will drive, rent a car, or join a bus or van tour. This not only has more of an impact on roads and highways, but it also negatively impacts the environment, neighborhoods and parking.”

Travis Counsell, president of the Hawaii Bicycling League, wrote that the effort behind the bill would be better spent elsewhere.

“People riding bicycles have the same rights

to the road as people driving vehicles across Hawaii,” Counsell wrote. “If a roadway has ‘limited lines of sight and a lack of passable shoulders’ as noted in the bill, the most equitable and effective solution would be to improve road signage, reduce speed limits and conduct more education about everyone’s responsibility to share the road safely.”

Hilo Council member Jenn Kagiwada agreed, saying that the measure seems to fly in the face of the county administration’s commitment to “Complete Streets,” a policy of making all county roads safe and accessible for multiple forms of transportation, not just cars. She suggested the bill appears defeatist in that it identifies unsafe roads only to restrict access to them rather than work to make those roads safer.

On the other hand, Hilo Council member Sue Lee Loy said she supports the intention behind the bill because it puts better regulations upon businesses that rely on county roads to operate.

“They are using our infrastructure to run their commercial enterprises,” Lee Loy said, adding that the bill at least allows for the county to track how many tour groups there are on the island and where they are operating.

The Council voted to pass the bill on first reading, with Kagiwada voting against.

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Email Michael Brestovansky at [mbrestovansky@hawaiitribune-herald.com](mailto:mbrestovansky@hawaiitribune-herald.com).



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