

HAWAII NEWS

Honolulu Council wheels out e-bike measures

By Ian Bauer

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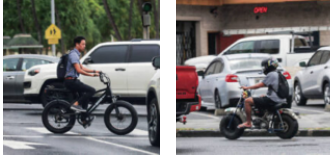


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AUG. 30

An electric bike user travels along Ward Avenue.



Two pieces of legislation meant to provide clearer safety standards and more regulation on the use of fast-moving electric bicycles on Oahu’s public roadways and sidewalks and in parks, rolled out of Honolulu Hale this week.

The City Council voted Wednesday to approve the first reading of Bill 52, which seeks to revise city laws to include a three-class system adopted in other jurisdictions around the country.

Introduced by Council members Tyler Dos Santos-Tam and Augie Tulba, the bill states an e-bike — defined as “a bicycle equipped with fully-operable pedals, a saddle or seat for the rider, and an electric motor of less

than 750 watts” — should now meet requirements of one of the following classes:

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>> **Class 1:** An electric 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 mph.

>> **Class 2:** An electric bicycle equipped with a motor that may be used exclusively to propel the bicycle and that is not capable of providing assistance when the bicycle reaches the speed of 20 mph.

>> **Class 3:** An electric 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 28 mph.

At the meeting, Waianae resident James Manaku Sr. said the city needed to address the use of e-bikes, especially those ridden by teenage children.

E-bikes “are good to have ... but these kids are going crazy,” he said. “In Waianae they’re on the highway competing with the cars, and that is crazy.”

Vice Chair Esther Kia’aina suggested that pending legislation she’s co-sponsored with Dos Santos-Tam — Bill 44, which looks to lower speed limits in school zones — could be modified to cover e-bikes.

“During committee consideration (for Bill 44), I will be offering an amendment to have a specific speed limit for e-bikes for city parks as well as city sidewalks,” she said. “There’s

various ways of tackling this issue, and I think it's critically important for all of us to provide safety for all — not just our keiki and kupuna, but all of the residents of Oahu.”

The Hawaii Bicycling League, which helped craft Bill 52, also spoke in support.

“This measure adds important clarifications to our law, and it also supports a charter amendment in 2006 that was adopted by the voters that requires the city to be a more bicycle- and pedestrian-friendly city,” HBL Advocacy Director Eduardo Hernandez said.

A similar Council resolution adopted at the same meeting urges the state Legislature to “update and clarify” Hawaii laws related to “electric bicycles and electric dirt bike motorcycles.”

Council member Val Okimoto’s Resolution 199 states that e-bikes and “the unlawful use of electric dirt bike motorcycles masquerading as e-bikes on or in the public roads, streets, bicycle paths and lanes, sidewalks, parks, and open spaces has increased dramatically in recent years, with 5,300 e-bikes registered as of March 2023.”

The resolution asserts that Hawaii’s traffic code says that e-bike riders, as all bicycle riders “riding upon a roadway, generally have the same rights and duties as other vehicle drivers.”

However, “unlike 41 other states as of July 2023, Hawaii does not follow the 3-class system under which e-bikes are categorized by their speeds and level of assistance,” the resolution states.

The legislation also states that “while only e-bikes that would be classified in Class 1 may be lawfully operated on Hawaii’s public roadways, e-bikes that operate at speeds exceeding Class 1 and even beyond speeds permitted in Class 3 — ‘out-of-class’ e-bikes — are frequently driven on public roadways.”

“Numerous public complaints have been received involving e-bike riders failing to

observe the applicable laws, including riding on sidewalks in Honolulu,” the resolution states.

It says complaints include “riding in parks and open spaces; riding without a helmet when required; failing to observe rules of the road in traffic — weaving between lanes of traffic, or against or perpendicular to the flow of traffic; failing to observe speed limits and traffic signals; failing to yield to pedestrians; and performing ‘wheelies’ and other stunts on city roadways.”

The resolution asserts legal issues regulating e-dirt bikes have hampered law enforcement.

“E-bikes are easily confused with electric dirt bikes, which are a type of two-wheeled, off-highway (or off-road) vehicle capable of driving off paved or gravel surfaces, such as trail and forest roads with rough terrain; and unlike e-bikes, dirt bikes are not ‘bicycles’ under state legal definitions because they lack operable foot pedals and most have a maximum speed capacity that greatly exceeds 20 mph — some up to 90 mph; and fall instead under the state law definitions of a ‘motorcycle,’” the resolution states.

Before the vote to adopt Resolution 199, Okimoto said, “In 2024 alone the unlawful operation of e-bikes and (e-dirt) bikes has played a part in a spate of e-bike accidents.”

Those incidents included “the death of an

electric dirt bike rider not wearing a helmet after being hit by a motorist when the rider was turning against a red light signal in urban Honolulu, and the criminal injury of a child e-bike rider who disregarded a stop signal,” she said.

She called on the state to impose stringent “registration and license requirements for e-bikes, separate from traditional bicycles, with increased fees for e-bikes that can operate over 30 mph,” and to “penalize ‘responsible persons’ when a minor operates an e-bike or (e-dirt) bike unlawfully” as well as “penalties for violations.”

“This is really to keep our community safe by those who are not following the rules,” Okimoto said.

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