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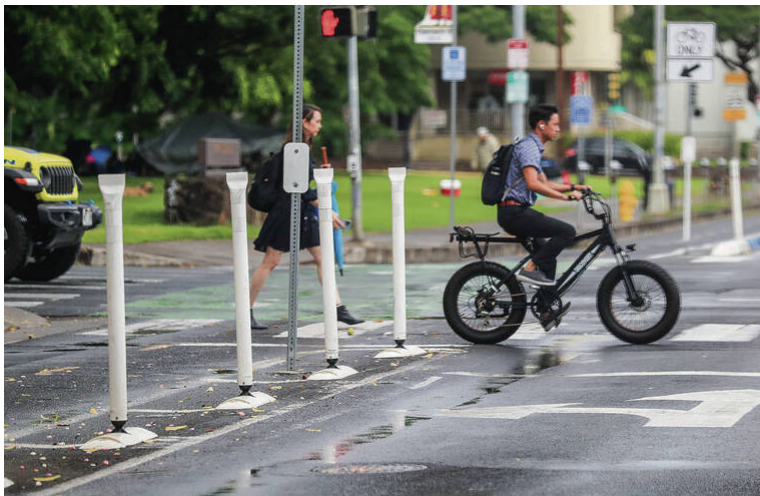
HAWAII NEWS

# City proposes working group to study e-bikes

By Ian Bauer

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JAMM AQUINO / JAQUINO@STARADVERTISER.COM

Electric bicycles, which have become a popular form of alternative transportation, are raising concerns by the public. The Honolulu Department of Transportation Services is working to review the e-bike issue with data it hopes to collect from an e-bike working group it is forming. Above, an e-bike user travels along Ward Avenue.

Concerns raised by public and local officials over incidents of dangerous or unlawful operation of fast-moving electric bicycles on Oahu's public roadways, sidewalks and open spaces have prompted the city Department of Transportation Services to review the e-bike issue.

At the City Council's Committee on Transportation meeting this week, DTS Director Roger Morton announced plans to form a working group involving city and state agencies as well as a bicycling advocacy group to study e-bike use on the island.

That move follows introduction of Council legislation — namely, Bill 52 and Resolution 199 — that seeks more regulation at the city and state levels over the use and possession of e-bikes.

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In particular, Bill 52 defines an e-bike as “a bicycle equipped with fully-operable pedals, a saddle or seat for the rider, and an electric motor of less than 750 watts,” while their motors cannot allow the machines to go more than 20 mph.

The measure, which passed the first of three readings before the full Council in early September, also seeks to revise city laws to include a three-class system that’s based on the top speed and components of e-bikes, which other jurisdictions have adopted around the country.

At a committee meeting Tuesday focused on further review of Bill 52, Morton said his department supports the measure’s “intent.”

However, he said, “There’s been so much going on with e-bikes in the Ewa region — all over the island, really — that I think the public expects more than just defining the bills.”

“So for that reason the department has

decided to stand up a working group to take a comprehensive look at e-bike use and regulation in Hawaii,” he added.

Besides DTS, he said the Honolulu Police Department, city Emergency Services Department, city Department of Customer Services, city Department of the Corporation Counsel and state Department of Transportation would largely comprise the planned working group.

“Along with our organizational partners, the Hawaii Bicycling League has agreed that they will do some research for us,” he said.

He said the working group plans to review helmet rules, age restrictions and other legalities pertaining to e-bike use on public streets.

“There’s a lot of bikes out there that are frankly not legal that are on the street right now,” said Morton. “We’d like to take a look at whether we can define ‘dangerous riding behavior’ so that our partners at HPD have a little bit more tools to keep our keiki safe.”

He said the group will also study “what really are legal riding areas.”

“And then finally we would like to take a look at what type of education we can do,” he added. “We think that education is a big part

of this.”

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He said the timeline for this working group — expected to hold at least three nonpublic “internal” meetings before they’re done — would see its work completed by the Transportation Committee’s November meeting.

“There would be time to move a bill out by the end of this Council term,” Morton told the panel, “and we would make an interim report in the October transportation meeting. So, we’re not opposed to passing this measure out right now, but we would ask that you consider allowing us to get our working group together.”

He said the city plans to include “the retailers of these devices,” too.

“We’ll have a special meeting with the

retailers,” he added. “We’ve also asked the Department of Education to consult with us over school use. There’s been some schools that have banned these bikes, other schools have not, but we’d like to get a view from the (DOE) for that.”

At the conclusion of the working group’s review, “there may not be many changes” to Bill 52, he said, “because frankly, a lot of the issues are statewide issues that would be covered in the statewide traffic code, but we’re going to include our state partners,” said Morton. “I know they’ve told me already that they are planning to introduce some legislation to further define the issue of e-bikes within state law.”

“So, we’re not sure exactly what ordinance change we’d recommend, if any, but we would ask that you just hold up a little bit so that we can catch up with ourselves,” he said.

The police support the city’s planned e-bike review.

“There’s a lot of issues that need to be addressed,” HPD acting Capt. Michael Campbell told the Council. “This is a growing industry, and we need to get it right the first time.”

Meanwhile, HESD Director James Ireland

said his paramedic department “is seeing e-bike accidents with increasing frequency” — incidents that he claims fall into three categories.

“One of them is where people lose control of the bike, or the e-bike, either through just their own inexperience, often the younger people, and also through exhibition of speed — wheelies, standing on the seat — things like that,” he said.

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He added many are “either crashing in the middle of the road, or they’re colliding with stationary vehicles or other stationary objects.”

E-bike riders are crashing their machines into pedestrians as well, he said.

“They’re fast, they’re often going on the sidewalk and they’re quiet because they’re

electric,” he added.

The third type of e-bike accident involves collisions with moving vehicles, he said.

“The injuries we’re seeing are extremity injuries and fractures, chest and abdominal-pelvic injuries as well as head injuries,” said Ireland. “The head injuries are particularly sad because they are preventable, or at least can be mitigated with a helmet, and we’re not seeing a lot of helmet use with e-bikes, including (with) children.”

Hawaii law states children under age 16 must wear a helmet while riding a bicycle. And a person must be at least 15 years old to ride a “low-speed electric bicycle” registered to an adult household member.

During public testimony, Kaneohe resident Donald Sakamoto said as a blind person he’s afraid to walk on public sidewalks for fear of being hit by often quiet, electrically powered vehicles like e-bikes.

“These people don’t have a bell or don’t even notify when they’re coming behind you or coming before you,” he told the Council. “It’s very dangerous for pedestrians like myself.”

Sakamoto said the city’s planned e-bike working group should also involve the National Federation of the Blind or the Hawaii



Association of the Blind to better represent Oahu’s disabled community, and give more insight to Bill 52.

Ultimately, Dos Santos- Tam, chair of the Transportation Committee, successfully recommended the panel pass Bill 52 for a second reading before the full Council.

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“But we’ll have the (information) briefing as recommended by Director Morton in October,” he added. “We’re going to allow the working group to catch up to where we’re at, and then we’re going to come back in November to make any amendments that perhaps come out of this working group.”



47 COMMENTS



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