

ORANGE COUNTY TRAFFIC COMMITTEE

COMMITTEE REPORT OF: April 25, 2024 **ITEM A**

SUPERVISORIAL DISTRICT: All

SUBJECT: Amend Traffic Ordinance for E-bike regulations

LOCATION: Countywide

INITIATED BY: Wei Zhu
OC Public Works/Traffic & Development Support

REQUEST: Approve plan to request Board of Supervisors to amend Orange County Ordinance 6-4-102, 500, & 501 for E-bike Regulations

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The use of E-bikes has seen a significant rise in Orange County, particularly in areas like Ladera Ranch Community, offering an affordable and convenient transportation alternative. However, E-bikes also pose a heightened risk of severe injuries compared to traditional bikes due to their increased speed and weight. To address these safety concerns, OC Traffic Engineering conducted an E-bike Study in Ladera Ranch Community earlier in 2023, aiming to establish a framework for enhancing e-bike safety across the county. One of the key recommendations arising from the study was the need to amend the County’s Ordinance to better regulate e-bikes.

During the Board meeting on December 19, 2023, supplemental item S35D was introduced, directing OC Public Works, in consultation with the Orange County Traffic Committee, to draft an ordinance updating the County of Orange’s municipal code to incorporate e-bike safety regulations. Following thorough research on existing state laws and policies of peer agencies, OC Public Works revised the Traffic Ordinance with amendments tailored specifically to address e-bikes. The amended Traffic Ordinance underwent a series of iterations and collaborative efforts with County Counsel and the County Traffic Committee.

OC Public Works intends to propose amendments to the following Traffic Ordinances to establish clearer regulations regarding e-bikes:

- Ordinance 6-4-102 Definitions
- Ordinance 6-4-500 Bicycle Operation
- Ordinance 6-4-501 Bicycle on sidewalks

RECOMMENDATION

Approve plan requesting Board of Supervisors to:

- 1) amend Ordinance 6-4-102, 500, & 501

BOARD ACTION NECESSARY TO ENACT THIS RECOMMENDATION

1. Approve this report.
2. Amend Orange County Ordinance 6-4-102, 500 & 501. This requires two readings (on separate days) and then would go in effect thirty (30) days after final passage.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

Committee Member from OC Sheriff: Raised concern about the language in Section 6-4-501 (d), noting apparent contradictions.

County Counsel: Suggested interpretation should consider whether riders are on the sidewalk or just entering it.

Public Inquiry: Questioned if the ordinance extends to harbors, beaches, and parks.

Committee Response: Clarified that the ordinance applies solely to public roadways within the County's unincorporated area. Private community associations or some cities may choose to adopt the County ordinance instead of creating their own.

Additional Public Inquiry: Raised the classification of Surrón bikes as either E-bikes or Motorized Bicycles.

OC Sheriff Committee Member's Response: Suggested they may be regarded as motorcycles and referred to the State law for clarification.

Public Comment: Inquired about the legality of equestrians using sidewalks.

County Counsel's Response: Indicated further research is necessary to provide a definitive answer.

Press Inquiry (Voice of OC): Asked about the distinctions between the County ordinance and State law regarding E-bike regulations.

OC Traffic Engineer's Response: Explained that while the State may establish standard regulations like age limits and helmet requirements, local authorities may have jurisdiction over specific regulations concerning operation on local infrastructure, such as setting speed limits or restricting certain devices on particular facilities.