

Date of Hearing: May 6, 2026

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Buffy Wicks, Chair

AB 1557 (Papan) – As Amended April 16, 2026

Policy Committee:	Transportation	Vote:	13 - 1
	Judiciary		12 - 0

Urgency: No State Mandated Local Program: Yes Reimbursable: No

SUMMARY:

This bill makes several changes regarding the legal sale and operation of electric bicycles (e-bikes) in California, including reducing the maximum speed and power of e-bikes, prohibiting the use of more-powerful e-bikes by children under 16 years of age, and making related, enforceable restrictions on manufacturers and retailers of e-bikes.

Specifically, this bill:

- 1) Revises the definition in current law of an e-bike so that such a bicycle is one equipped with both pedals and a motor that is not capable of exceeding 750 watts of peak power, instead of a bicycle equipped with both pedals and a motor that does not exceed 750 watts of power, as per current law, but provides that a cargo e-bike may be equipped with an electric motor with a maximum continuously rated power of 750 watts.
- 2) Revises the definitions in current law of class 1 and class 2 e-bikes so that a legal e-bike of either class is one for which the electric motor ceases to provide assistance when the e-bike reaches 16 miles per hour (mph), rather than 20 mph as per current law.
- 3) Exempts from the power and speed limitations, described above, an e-bike manufactured before 2027 if the e-bike meets legal requirements for the relevant class of e-bike at the time of manufacture and provides such an e-bike retains its classification.
- 4) Empowers a peace officer to confiscate an e-bike-like device with a motor that is capable of exceeding 250 watts of continuous power.
- 5) Prohibits (a) a manufacturer of an e-bike from (i) equipping any device labeled as an e-bike with a motor that is capable of exceeding 750 watts of peak power and (ii) equipping any device labeled as a class 1 or class 2 e-bike with a motor capable of exceeding 250 watts of continuous power or that is capable of providing assistance to reach speeds greater than 16 mph and (b) a retailer from selling or advertising a device labeled as an e-bike, or as a class 1 or class 2 e-bike, that is capable of exceeding 750 watts of peak power or capable of exceeding 250 watts of continuous power, as applicable.
- 6) Makes a person who violates the prohibitions against manufacturers and retailers described above liable for a civil penalty not to exceed \$15,000 for a first violation and \$50,000 for each subsequent violation and entitles a prevailing plaintiff—meaning the Attorney General (AG), a city attorney, a county counsel, or a district attorney—to reasonable attorney’s fees.

FISCAL EFFECT:

Ongoing cost pressures of an unknown amount, potentially in excess of \$150,000, to the courts in additional workload by authorizing a new civil action to enforce prohibitions against e-bike manufacturers and retailers that may be filed by the AG, county counsel, or city attorney (General Fund (GF) or Trial Court Trust Fund (TCTF)). It is unclear how many civil actions may be filed statewide and how much court time may be needed to resolve each case, but it generally costs approximately \$1,000 to operate a courtroom for one hour. Although courts are not funded on the basis of workload, increased pressure on staff and the TCTF may create a demand for increased court funding from the GF. The state budget provides annual GF backfills to the TCTF to offset revenue reductions, totaling approximately \$117.3 million in fiscal year 2025-26.

COMMENTS:

The popularity of e-bikes has grown tremendously in recent years. Some sources report that annual e-bike sales exceed that of new cars. Not surprisingly, as e-bikes have become prevalent, so have conflicts between e-bike riders and other users of the road (and sidewalk, and bike path, and trail, and seemingly any other public space.) So, too, have injuries attributed to e-bikes grown.

But not every e-bike is an e-bike; at least, not as California law defines that term. According to California law, an e-bike is a two-wheeled or three-wheeled vehicle with pedals and an electric motor that produces no more than 750 watts of power. California law sorts e-bikes into three classes, as follows:

- **Class 1 — low-speed pedal-assisted electric bicycle.** The motor provides assistance only when the rider is pedaling and ceases to provide assistance when the e-bike reaches a speed of 20 mph.
- **Class 2 — low-speed throttle-assisted electric bicycle.** The motor may provide assistance even when the rider is not pedaling and ceases to provide assistance when the e-bike reaches 20 mph.
- **Class 3 — speed pedal-assisted electric bicycle.** The motor provides assistance only when the rider is pedaling and ceases to provide assistance when the e-bike reaches 28 mph.

Any vehicle that does not meet the definition of e-bike provided in California law is not considered an e-bike in California, as far as the law is concerned. This includes a bicycle-shaped device with an electric motor capable of exceeding the speed limits described above. It also includes a device that, when sold, conformed to California law's definition of an e-bike but was subsequently modified—for example, the speed governor hacked to allow faster top speeds—so that it no longer meets the e-bike definition. Such electric devices may be many things, but, according to California law, they are not e-bikes. Many, or most, such devices require a license to operate and are subject to registration and insurance requirements.

“E-bikes” that are not e-bikes are common. The Mineta Transportation Institute (Mineta Institute) at San Jose State University studied e-bikes at the direction of legislation (SB 381

(Min), Chapter 869, Statutes of 2023). In a survey of middle and high schools in Marin and San Mateo counties, the Mineta Institute observed that 88% of the e-bike-like devices at Marin schools and 87% of such devices at San Mateo schools did not meet the state's definition of e-bike. It is not clear if these students, or, more likely, their parents, knew they were buying devices that were not legal e-bikes and illegal for them to ride on California public roads.

Noting what the author calls "a dramatic rise in e-bike-related accidents resulting in severe trauma as a result of the speed and power of the device," the author intends this bill to "ensure e-bikes are properly classified while improving safety for riders, drivers, and pedestrians." Regarding current limits on e-bike motor power, the author sees a "loophole" that allows manufacturers "to sell high-powered devices."

AB 1557 is supported by medical associations, automobile clubs (AAA), several local governments and the California Police Chiefs Association, the latter of which writes:

e-bike incidents are becoming more frequent and more severe, particularly among younger riders...A key driver of this issue is a gap in current law regarding how e-bike motor power is regulated. While California law limits e-bike motors to 750 watts, it does not specify whether that limit applies to peak power or continuous power...This has led to the proliferation of e-bikes that, in practice, operate more like motor vehicles than bicycles. Stronger motors enable faster acceleration and higher top speeds than originally intended under California's e-bike framework, increasing the risk of serious collisions and reducing rider reaction time... AB 1557 represents a thoughtful and practical reform that responds to the evolving realities of e-bike technology...By closing regulatory gaps, improving clarity, and reinforcing appropriate safety limits, the bill will help reduce injuries, support enforcement efforts, and enhance public safety across California communities.

Many e-bike manufacturers disagree. So do several organizations that advocate for those not travelling by car, such as the California Bicycle Coalition, Streets for All and Streets are for Everyone, which together contend the bill "does not adequately target the primary and well-documented source of these risks" and "risks imposing unnecessary constraints on lawful, widely used electric bicycles that provide substantial public benefits." The three organizations go on to assert (with emphasis in the original):

[The Mineta Institute] **report clearly identifies higher-powered, motorcycle-like devices, often referred to as "e-motos," as the central concern rather than traditional e-bikes that comply with existing law.** The rapid proliferation of unsafe, high-powered two-wheeled devices on our streets, particularly those that blur the line between electric bicycles and electric motorcycles, poses real and growing safety risks. **These devices are widespread and found at small businesses and major retailers like Costco...**The report also repeatedly makes the point that the lack of data broken down by classification, let alone legal vs non-legal device, makes it nearly impossible to evaluate and make recommendations around the current classification system...While we share the

Legislature's commitment to improving safety and addressing emerging risks, AB 1557 requires targeted amendments to ensure it addresses the right problem without undermining the benefits of e-bikes.

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