

AB 544: E-Bike Lights

Assemblymember Laurie Davies

IN BRIEF

AB 544 would require an electric bicycle during all hours to be equipped with a red reflector or a solid or flashing red light with a built-in reflector on the rear that is visible from a distance of 500 feet to the rear when directly in front of lawful upper beams of headlamps on a motor vehicle.

THE ISSUE

Since their introduction to the market, electric bikes (e-bikes) have provided countless Californians new freedoms and means of transportation around cities and towns. In addition to their accessibility, these products have also proven to be environmentally friendly and cheaper alternatives to diesel-powered cars.

Unfortunately, while these products have made traveling relatively easy, they have also been shown to be dangerous for those untrained or unprepared on how to operate them. According to a study by the United States Consumer Product Safety Commission's National Electronic Injury Surveillance System (NEISS) looking at accident data from 2007-2017 there were 3,075 e-bike injuries, or 0.13 per 10,000.

Motor vehicles rated for highway use must have certain safety features, like headlights and brake lights, turn signals, mirrors, and a horn. However, e-bikes don't need any of these, making them harder to spot and more dangerous for riders. According to a study done by the U.S. Product Safety Commission, "In 2017, there were approximately 34,000 national ER trips related to a micromobility device, I.E an e-bike. In contrast, there were about 77,200 related ER trips in 2021, an increase of 227% over five years.

It is time California law be updated to ensure e-bikes have similar safety requirements to that riders and motorists are safe when they are in use.

CURRENT LAW

California Vehicle Code 21201 requires a bicycle, as defined, operated during darkness on a highway, sidewalk, or bikeway to be equipped with, among other things, a red reflector or a solid or flashing red light with a built-in reflector on the rear that is visible from a distance of 500 feet to the rear when directly in front of

lawful upper beams of headlamps on a motor vehicle. Existing law defines an electric bicycle as a bicycle equipped with fully operable pedals and an electric motor that does not exceed 750 watts of power and categorizes electric bicycles into 3 classes. A violation of the provisions relating to the requirements for equipping a bicycle or an electric bicycle is punishable as an infraction.

THE SOLUTION

AB 544 would improve the safety and operation of electric bicycles by requiring them to be equipped with specified safety features.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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