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AB-544 Electric bicycles: required equipment. (2025-2026)

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Assembly Bill No. 544

CHAPTER 36

An act to amend Sections 21201 and 21212 of the Vehicle Code, relating to vehicles.

[Approved by Governor July 14, 2025. Filed with Secretary of State July 14, 2025.]

LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL'S DIGEST

AB 544, Davies. Electric bicycles: required equipment.

(1) Existing law requires a bicycle 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 "bicycle" for these purposes to, among other things, include an electric bicycle. 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.

This bill 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. By expanding the requirements for equipping an electric bicycle, the violation of which would be an infraction, this bill would impose a state-mandated local program.

(2) Existing law requires a minor to wear a properly fitted and fastened helmet when engaged in specified activities, including operating a bicycle, nonmotorized scooter, or skateboard or wearing in-line or roller skates and requires that the helmet meet the standards of the American Society for Testing and Materials or the United States Consumer Product Safety Commission. Existing law prohibits a record of a violation of those provisions from being transmitted to the court and prohibits the imposition of a fee if the parent or guardian of the minor delivers proof that the minor has a helmet that meets specific standards and has completed a bicycle safety course, as specified. Existing law makes a violation of these provisions an infraction punishable by a fine of not more than \$25, except as specified.

This bill would, for a violation of these provisions involving an electric bicycle, prohibit a record of a violation from being transmitted to the court and the imposition of a fee if the parent or guardian of the minor delivers proof that the minor has a helmet that meets the specified safety standards and has completed a specialized electric bicycle safety course. The bill would also specify that the specialized electric bicycle safety course developed by the Department of the California Highway Patrol satisfies the requirement that a person complete a specialized electric bicycle safety course. By imposing new requirements with respect to electric bicycles, the violation of which would be an infraction, this bill would impose a state-mandated local program.

(3) The California Constitution requires the state to reimburse local agencies and school districts for certain costs mandated by the state. Statutory provisions establish procedures for making that reimbursement.

This bill would provide that no reimbursement is required by this act for a specified reason.

Vote: majority Appropriation: no Fiscal Committee: yes Local Program: yes

THE PEOPLE OF THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA DO ENACT AS FOLLOWS:

SECTION 1. Section 21201 of the Vehicle Code is amended to read:

21201. (a) A person shall not operate a bicycle on a roadway unless it is equipped with a brake that will enable the operator to make one braked wheel skid on dry, level, clean pavement.

(b) A person shall not operate on the highway a bicycle equipped with handlebars so raised that the operator must elevate their hands above the level of their shoulders in order to grasp the normal steering grip area.

(c) A person shall not operate upon a highway a bicycle that is of a size that prevents the operator from safely stopping the bicycle, supporting it in an upright position with at least one foot on the ground, and restarting it in a safe manner.

(d) A bicycle operated during darkness on a highway, a sidewalk where bicycle operation is not prohibited by the local jurisdiction, or a bikeway, as defined in Section 890.4 of the Streets and Highways Code, shall be equipped with all of the following:

(1) A lamp emitting a white light that, while the bicycle is in motion, illuminates the highway, sidewalk, or bikeway in front of the bicyclist and is visible from a distance of 300 feet in front and from the sides of the bicycle.

(2) A red reflector or a solid or flashing red light with a built-in reflector on the rear that shall be visible from a distance of 500 feet to the rear when directly in front of lawful upper beams of headlamps on a motor vehicle.

(3) A white or yellow reflector on each pedal, shoe, or ankle visible from the front and rear of the bicycle from a distance of 200 feet.

(4) A white or yellow reflector on each side forward of the center of the bicycle, and a white or red reflector on each side to the rear of the center of the bicycle, except that bicycles that are equipped with reflectorized tires on the front and the rear need not be equipped with these side reflectors.

The reflectors and reflectorized tires shall be of a type meeting requirements established by the department.

(e) A lamp or lamp combination, emitting a white light, attached to the operator and visible from a distance of 300 feet in front and from the sides of the bicycle, may be used in lieu of the lamp required by paragraph (1) of subdivision (d).

(f) An electric bicycle shall comply with paragraph (2) of subdivision (d) during all hours.

SEC. 2. Section 21212 of the Vehicle Code is amended to read:

21212. (a) A person under 18 years of age shall not operate a bicycle, a nonmotorized scooter, or a skateboard, wear in-line or roller skates, or ride upon a bicycle, nonmotorized scooter, or skateboard as a passenger upon a street, bikeway, as defined in Section 890.4 of the Streets and Highways Code, or any other public bicycle path or trail unless they are wearing a properly fitted and fastened bicycle helmet that meets the standards of either the American Society for Testing and Materials (ASTM) or the United States Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC), or a standard subsequently established by those entities. This requirement also applies to a person who rides upon a bicycle while in a restraining seat that is attached to the bicycle or in a trailer towed by the bicycle.

(b) A helmet sold or offered for sale for use by an operator or passenger of a bicycle, nonmotorized scooter, skateboard, or in-line or roller skates shall be conspicuously labeled in accordance with the standard described in subdivision (a), which shall constitute the manufacturer's certification that the helmet conforms to the applicable safety standard.

(c) A person shall not sell or offer for sale, for use by an operator or passenger of a bicycle, nonmotorized scooter, skateboard, or in-line or roller skates, a helmet that is not of a type meeting requirements established by this section.

(d) A charge under this section shall be dismissed if the person charged alleges in court, under oath, that the charge against the person is the first charge against that person under this section, unless it is otherwise established in court that the charge is not the first charge against the person.

(e) (1) Except as provided in subdivision (d), a violation of this section is an infraction punishable by a fine of not more than twenty-five dollars (\$25).

(2) The parent or legal guardian having control or custody of an unemancipated minor whose conduct violates this section shall be jointly and severally liable with the minor for the amount of the fine imposed pursuant to this subdivision.

(f) A record of the action shall not be transmitted to the court and a fee shall not be imposed pursuant to Section 40611 for a citation for not wearing a properly fitted and fastened bicycle helmet pursuant to subdivision (a) if the parent or legal guardian of the person described in subdivision (a) delivers proof to the issuing agency within 120 days after the citation was issued that the person has a helmet meeting the requirements specified in subdivision (a) and the person has completed a local bicycle safety course or, if the violation involved an electric bicycle, a specialized electric bicycle safety course, which may include, but is not limited to, the electric bicycle safety and training program developed by the Department of the California Highway Patrol pursuant to Section 894 of the Streets and Highways Code, or a related safety course, if one is available, as prescribed by authorities in the local jurisdiction.

(g) Notwithstanding Section 1463 of the Penal Code or any other law, the fines collected for a violation of this section shall be allocated as follows:

(1) Seventy-two and one-half percent of the amount collected shall be deposited in a special account of the county health department, to be used for bicycle, nonmotorized scooter, skateboard, and in-line and roller skate safety education and for assisting low-income families in obtaining approved bicycle helmets for persons under 18 years of age, either on a loan or purchase basis. The county may contract for the implementation of this program, which, to the extent practicable, shall be operated in conjunction with the child passenger restraint program pursuant to Section 27360.

(2) Two and one-half percent of the amount collected shall be deposited in the county treasury to be used by the county to administer the program described in paragraph (1).

(3) If the violation occurred within a city, 25 percent of the amount collected shall be transferred to, and deposited in, the treasury of that city. If the violation occurred in an unincorporated area, this 25 percent shall be deposited and used pursuant to paragraph (1).

SEC. 3. No reimbursement is required by this act pursuant to Section 6 of Article XIII B of the California Constitution because the only costs that may be incurred by a local agency or school district will be incurred because this act creates a new crime or infraction, eliminates a crime or infraction, or changes the penalty for a crime or infraction, within the meaning of Section 17556 of the Government Code, or changes the definition of a crime within the meaning of Section 6 of Article XIII B of the California Constitution.