



Gearing Up for Stricter E-Bike Laws: A Playbook for Cities

Annual Conference 2026



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By: City of Carlsbad staff
July 2026

League of California Cities
Annual Conference and Expo

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Early efforts to address e-bike safety

Between 2019 and 2022, the City of Carlsbad experienced an alarming 233% increase in collisions involving bikes and e-bikes, coupled with significant community concerns about the reckless behavior of young riders. As is the case with many new technologies and cultural shifts, state laws had not kept pace, leaving Carlsbad police officers with limited e-bike enforcement options. City leaders needed to find an effective solution to this public safety crisis.

E-bike concerns were not new to Carlsbad. As with cities across the country, e-bike use had increased dramatically, especially among tweens and teens unfamiliar with the rules of the road. Carlsbad's hilly terrain made e-bikes especially popular. When more cars returned to city streets post-pandemic, conflicts emerged.

In early 2022, the City Council decided to make Carlsbad the first city in the region to pass its own e-bike safety laws, giving the Police Department greater latitude in citing reckless and unsafe behavior. The new law also let first-time offenders take a city-provided e-bike safety course in lieu of paying the fine, addressing community concerns about younger riders' lack of familiarity with basic traffic laws. Yet, in spite of these efforts, during the first summer season after COVID restrictions lifted, collisions involving bikes and e-bikes reached an all-time high.

Then, in August 2022, tragedy struck. Two riders tragically lost their lives within a 10-day period on Carlsbad streets, including a young mother riding with her toddler. The city was days away from the start of a new school year, which would put hundreds more e-bike riders on the road. The City Manager determined conditions of extreme peril imminently threatened public safety, circumstances that provided the authority to proclaim a local emergency on traffic safety.

The city's Emergency Operations Center was activated on Aug. 23, 2022. City staff were immediately redeployed to provide an unprecedented level of focus and resources to address this public safety threat, while engaging the entire community in the effort. Staff analyzed data to develop a heat map of high collision areas, which helped focus efforts in areas with the highest rates of collisions. Staff deployed message boards, increased enforcement and added green paint treatments to those locations as quickly as possible.

The City Council ratified the emergency on Aug. 30, 2022, and provided \$2 million in funding to the city's emergency response. The city launched a Safer Streets Together program, which followed the "three Es" approach to enhance traffic safety: education, engineering and enforcement.

Education

The city immediately launched a public awareness campaign, partnering with local schools to focus on educating parents and young riders. The local emergency declaration drew regionwide

and national attention, with the initial announcement generating nearly 100 news stories reaching more than 1 million people. As part of the Safer Streets Together program, the city held 32 traffic safety events at local schools, created 42 video public service announcements and held three parent-focused safety trainings.

Engineering

The city's Transportation Department was already evaluating city streets to make safety improvements, thanks to a mobility plan approved by the City Council in 2021. As part of the Safer Streets Together program, the city's Transportation team completed more than 100 road projects, added 43 green bike lane segments, adjusted 32 crosswalk signals in areas with high volumes of pedestrian traffic and advanced four Safe Routes to School plans.

Enforcement

The Carlsbad Police Department redeployed traffic enforcement officers to create a highly visible presence around schools in time for the first day of school. During the year-long traffic safety emergency, the Carlsbad Police Department made 284 DUI arrests and issued more than 8,000 traffic warnings or citations, across all modes of travel.

However, e-bike specific enforcement efforts proved more challenging as classification types, popularity and ridership continued to expand.

The emergency declaration ended in September 2023, at which time collisions involving e-bikes had dropped 18% over the course of the previous year. While the emergency itself was officially ended, much of the work identified in the Safer Streets Together plan continued, including efforts to explore legislation that could further enhance e-bike safety.

Carlsbad co-sponsors AB 2234, allowing San Diego County cities to establish a minimum age of 12 for e-bike riders

When the city asked for community input before launching the [Safer Streets Together program](#) in 2022, one of the top requests was to require licenses or establish a minimum age for riding e-bikes. At that time, licensing and minimum ages could only be enacted at the state level. While the local laws, coupled with the city's Safer Streets Together program, had made an impact, it was clear that legislative action was needed to support safer use of e-bikes in the city and across California.

The City of Carlsbad's legislative team worked with Assemblymember Tasha Boerner to sponsor e-bike safety legislation. Through the committee review process, Assembly Bill 2234 was narrowed to be a San Diego regional pilot program rather than a statewide requirement. The program grants cities within San Diego County, as well as the county in unincorporated areas, the authority to adopt an ordinance prohibiting children under 12 years of age from operating a Class 1 or Class 2 electric bicycle.

Provisions in AB 2234, which sunsets on Jan. 1, 2029, include:

- Any prohibition adopted must be phased in with a 60-day period during which violations result only in a warning. After that, violations may be cited as infractions punishable by a \$25 fine.
- Parents or guardians of minors in violation are jointly and severally liable for the fine.
- Fines may be waived if proof is provided within 120 days that the rider completed an approved e-bike safety and training course.
- Jurisdictions adopting such an ordinance must administer a public information campaign for at least 30 days before the prohibition takes effect and submit a detailed report to the Legislature by Jan. 1, 2028, outlining enforcement data, crash statistics and other required information.

In January 2028, participating cities will share their results of the new laws with the legislature, which will then decide next steps. That could include new legislation to expand the pilot program, change it or roll it out statewide.

Data informs a new 2026 City of Carlsbad e-bike ordinance

In spring 2025, the City Council voted to seek the public's input on prohibiting anyone under age 12 from riding e-bikes. The city determined that the [Traffic Safety & Mobility Commission](#) would hold a public hearing during a special meeting on Sept. 16, 2025, and the feedback would then be shared with the City Council.

To help inform the discussion at the commission meeting, city staff analyzed the latest local data, reviewed existing enforcement and education practices and conducted extensive community outreach.

Carlsbad collision and injury data

Staff reviewed historical collision data between 2022 and 2025, which shows:

- 204 total e-bike collisions
- E-bike collisions involving riders under age 12 occurred in 2022, 2023 and 2024
- 49% of e-bike collisions in this time period involved youth ages 12 to 17
- 42% involved adults
- 4% involved youth under age 12
- Riders under age 12 were at fault in 7% of the 127 collisions where fault could be assigned

A review of the city's collision data for the most recent three-year period revealed the following trends for e-bike riders aged 12 and under:

- 2023: 4 collisions, all involving minor injury, with 1 requiring a medical intake
- 2024: 4 collisions, all involving minor injury, with 1 requiring a medical intake
- 2025: 0 collisions involving injury

Review of enforcement and education practices

In addition to analyzing collision data, staff also reviewed current enforcement and education practices related to existing local e-bike laws.

Since adopting local regulations, the city has actively enforced its laws and adapted operations as e-bike rider behaviors have evolved. As of Sept. 16, 2025, when the city's Traffic Safety & Mobility Commission met to discuss the potential of adopting a minimum age for riding e-bikes, enforcement efforts had resulted in more than 180 e-bike citations and 230 warnings. Citations and warnings were issued for violations including running red lights, failing to stop at stop signs, riding on sidewalks and engaging in hazardous riding behaviors.

The city's enforcement strategy combines both routine patrols and targeted operations.

- Routine "enforcement blitzes" focus on high-visibility patrols in known problem areas, while "focused deterrence" operations target large groups of riders, high-speed violators and repeat offenders.
- Motor officers and field patrols provide daily enforcement coverage, with special attention given to schools, coastal areas and commercial zones.
- The city also monitors social media to identify planned group rides and habitual violators, allowing enforcement resources to be deployed proactively.

Education has been a key component of the city's approach. Current and previous efforts have included:

- Hosting more than 20 bicycle safety courses with over 1,500 students and parents.
- Working with school districts to develop bike safety or permit programs for students.
- Regularly sharing information on e-bike laws and safety tips through city communication channels.
- Distributed more than 100 helmets through an Office of Traffic Safety grant.

Community outreach

The city implemented a community outreach plan to notify the community and interested stakeholders, including parents of school-aged children, of the potential minimum age requirement and how to provide input. Outreach strategies included:

- School outreach, including emails for parents and flier distribution via education platforms
- Emails to interest lists
- City Manager's Update newsletters, news releases and social media posts
- Posters at city facilities
- Information at bike and e-bike safety classes led by the Carlsbad Police Department

The city received more than 550 emailed comments leading up to the commission meeting.

- Most comments expressed support for a minimum age of at least 12 years old
- Many requested the city consider additional rules and restrictions beyond what AB 2234 includes, such as licensing and insurance requirements for e-bikes and expanding the e-bike minimum age above 12.
- Some were opposed to the minimum age, requesting the city focus on education instead

In addition to recommending the City Council adopt an ordinance prohibiting children under age 12 from riding e-bikes, the commission also voted to recommend the City Council lobby for state legislation that would give cities more flexibility to adopt stricter rules.

Considering additional recommendations

After the City Council directed staff to seek the public's input on prohibiting anyone under age 12 from riding e-bikes, in summer 2025, the City Council also directed staff to develop recommendations for enhanced enforcement tools that would maintain public safety and address aggressive e-bike riding behavior, particularly among youth.

In December 2025, staff returned with those recommendations for additional new rules that could strengthen Carlsbad's approach and adjustments to clarify existing [Carlsbad-specific e-bikes laws](#).

After reviewing community input and recommendations from staff and the city's Traffic Safety & Mobility Commission, the City Council asked staff to draft an ordinance for their review in early 2026.

Carlsbad adopts stricter e-bike safety laws

On Feb. 24, 2026, the Carlsbad City Council adopted a local ordinance with key focus areas to address specific e-bike issues in the community, including:

1. **Minimum age to operate an e-bike.** Anyone operating a class 1 or class 2 e-bike must be at least 12 years old, as allowed by AB 2234.

2. **Consequences for reckless riding.** Safety is the city's top priority. When a minor breaks the rules and creates an immediate or substantial public safety risk, their e-bike may be impounded. The minor must complete an in-person safety course to retrieve the e-bike, and a parent or guardian must be present when the e-bike is released. The Police Department is authorized by the Vehicle Code to impound e-motorcycles, which are not street legal.
3. **Clarification on riding safety.** In 2022, Carlsbad became the first city in San Diego County to pass local e-bike safety laws. The city has gathered more data and community input as e-bikes have continued to gain popularity, and updated the laws to more clearly specify these details:
 - Riders must go at a safe speed for the conditions, factoring in weather, whether pedestrians are present and how quickly other traffic is moving.
 - Riders under 18 years old must wear a properly fitted and fastened helmet.
 - Only e-bikes designed for passengers can carry more than one rider.
 - Parents are responsible for knowingly allowing their children to commit violations.
4. **E-bike restrictions at parks.** E-bikes are prohibited in two city parks, based on service calls received by the Police.

Phased implementation plans prioritized education and warning periods before enforcement

After the new ordinance was adopted, the city took a phased approach to implementation to help raise awareness and focus on education before issuing citations.

- Feb. 24, 2026: City Council adopts new ordinance
- Feb. 25: 30-day public information campaign began to raise awareness
- March 26: New laws took effect, beginning with a 60-day warning period
- May 25: 60-day warning period ended

Since May 26, when the new laws took effect, the Police Department has continued to focus on education while issuing warnings or citations, or impounding e-bikes and e-motorcycles when appropriate. During the first six weeks following the end of the warning period, Carlsbad Police Officers:

- Conducted 93 education focused stops
- Issued 53 written warnings
- Issued 20 citations
- Impounded 40 e-bikes and e-motorcycles

In addition to the new laws, the Police Department launched an [online reporting portal](#) on June 17, 2026, to let residents report unsafe riding directly to the Traffic Unit. As of July 6, 2026, two and a half weeks after the portal was launched, the Police Department had received 12 community reports through the portal. The reports received so far have helped identify locations with ongoing reckless riding and provide leads on repeat offenders.

Sources and more information

[View Assembly Bill 2234](#)

[View an overview of the City of Carlsbad's e-bike laws](#)

[View the City of Carlsbad ordinance adopted on Feb. 24, 2026](#)

[View the Sept. 16, 2025, Traffic Safety Mobility Commission staff report](#)

[View the Dec. 2, 2025, Carlsbad City Council staff report](#)