



# Memo

**Date:** October 9, 2017  
**To:** Board of Park Commissioners  
**From:** Susan Golub, Manager, Policy Unit  
**Subject:** Allowing Electric Bicycles on the Burke-Gilman Trail

## **Requested Board Action**

There has been community and some City Councilmember interest in allowing electric-assist bicycles on Parks and Recreation's paved trails, specifically the Burke-Gilman Trail. Currently electric wheelchairs are the only electric powered use allowed. Staff is asking the Board for a recommendation about whether electric bicycles should be allowed on the Burke-Gilman Trail.

**Background:** The State of Washington has a specific definition for an electric-assist bicycle: the pedals must turn and the electric engine is limited to less than 1,000 watts and a maximum speed on a flat surface of 20 miles per hour. (See: [http://www.wsp.wa.gov/traveler/docs/equipmt/elect\\_bicycle.pdf](http://www.wsp.wa.gov/traveler/docs/equipmt/elect_bicycle.pdf)) The term electric-assist would *not* apply to electric scooters, motorcycles, Segways, electric skateboards or any of the new self-balancing electric people-movers.

While currently prohibited by the Park Code, there is a small population currently riding electric-assist bicycles on the Burke-Gilman Trail. We don't have any means of enforcing the prohibition against electric bikes on trails, nor enforcement of the existing rule that requires all bicyclists to travel at a "reasonable" speed (there is no set speed limit on the Burke-Gilman Trail).

**Pros:** Reasons to allow electric-assist bicycles on paved trails:

- **Promotes healthy exercise:** Some people may not be able to ride a bike at all without the boost of electricity to get them up Seattle hills. Permitting paved trail use may keep active those who otherwise might be sedentary.
- **Small engine size restricts speed:** Because of the engine size limit and speed restriction, electric-assist bicycles can't go superfast: the 20 miles per hour limit of the engine is slower than many of the commuters and bike racers on the Burke-Gilman Trail.
- **Code and Use Consistency:** Since there is virtually no enforcement of the ban on electric-assist bicycles, and the use appears to be policing itself well (we haven't had complaints of scooters or motorcycles on the trail), changing the Code to permit the use legitimizes what is already happening.

**Cons:** Reasons not to support allowing electric-assist bicycles on paved trails:

- **Could be counter to our mission of healthy people:** Does changing the Park Code provide a means to ride a bike when you can't navigate hills? Or does it give people an out from exercise and pumping or walking a bike uphill? The answer is probably both.
- **Adds potential for more pedestrian-bike conflicts:** Even at a maximum speed of 20 M.P.H., the pedestrian loses in a collision with a bicycle. Pedestrians already feel at risk on the Burke-Gilman Trail, as do many recreational bicyclists. Do we want to encourage more potential conflicts?

- Why change what seems to be working: Since there is no active enforcement of the ban on electric-assist bicycles, and the use seems to be limited, what can of worms might we be opening by going through the public process of changing the Code?

**Next Steps:** If the Park Board is interested in further discussion regarding allowing electric bikes on the Burke-Gilman Trail, the next step is to schedule a public hearing before the Board on the issue.

**Additional Information**

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