



CONSENT CALENDAR
May 31, 2022

To: Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council

From: Councilmember Rigel Robinson (Author), Vice Mayor Kate Harrison (Co-Sponsor), and Councilmember Sophie Hahn (Co-Sponsor)

Subject: Budget Referral: Purchase of Electric Bicycles for City Use

RECOMMENDATION

Refer \$25,000 to the FY 2023-2024 budget process to purchase electric bicycles, electric cargo bicycles, and any related safety, storage, or security equipment for use by employees on City business.

BACKGROUND

The City of Berkeley has a vested interest in encouraging our residents, visitors, and employees to shift towards using sustainable modes of transportation. The City's Climate Action Plan states, "Transportation modes such as public transit, walking and bicycling must become the primary means of fulfilling our mobility needs, and remaining motor vehicle use must be far less carbon-intensive. More active modes of transportation will become the mainstream when they are as convenient and cost effective as driving."¹

As one of the largest employers in Berkeley, the City of Berkeley should lead by example and provide our workforce with ample alternatives to driving. There are some trips conducted on City business that necessitate the use of cars or other heavy vehicles. However, there are also many trips that do not. City staff can currently use City vehicles to perform job duties that do not involve transporting supplies or large equipment — for example, conducting site visits and inspections; attending community meetings and City events; and doing in-person outreach to residents and businesses.

Electric bicycles are a great option for many of these use cases. In July 2021, Walk Bike Berkeley conducted an assessment that showcased how e-bikes could be used for City of Berkeley building inspections.² Their test run of a typical inspection route found that riding an e-bike instead of driving a car only added 4 extra minutes to a 51-minute route, with minimal exertion and no mid-route recharging necessary.

¹ <https://berkeleyca.gov/sites/default/files/2022-01/Berkeley-Climate-Action-Plan.pdf>

² Preliminary assessment of using e-bikes for City of Berkeley building inspections, Tom Lent. Walk Bike Berkeley, July 24, 2021, <https://bit.ly/BerkeleyMuniFleetE-bikeAssessment>

E-bikes require far less physical exertion than a human-powered bicycle, making them suitable for uphill rides and accessible to a wide range of bicycling abilities. Cargo e-bikes provide additional space for equipment, allowing employees to replace car trips even when transporting items that would not fit on a typical bicycle. Bicycling is also better than driving for situational awareness, community engagement, and delivering a high level of service during peak traffic times. E-bikes are 20 times more efficient than electric cars, using the equivalent of anywhere from 1000 to 4000 MPGe.³ Lastly, e-bikes are much cheaper than motor vehicles, costing as little as \$1,500 per bike. Therefore, with e-bikes, the City can achieve cost savings by reducing capital investment in vehicles while meeting our climate goals faster.

Berkeley has the fourth highest bicycle commute mode share of any city in the United States as of 2014.⁴ A significant percentage of our workforce already bikes, either to get to work or for other purposes. There is likely a readiness and eagerness among many City employees to switch to e-bikes for on-the-job trips. No employee would be required to ride a bicycle to carry out their job functions — this funding would simply provide the e-bike option alongside existing options.

Council previously referred to the City Manager to “prioritize municipal fleet modal shift to electric bicycles and other forms of zero-emissions mobility, where feasible, as part of ongoing efforts to achieve a zero-emissions fleet by 2030.”⁵ Funding a small number of e-bikes in this budget cycle could act as a pilot for interested employees, allowing the City to test how well e-bikes work for different uses across departments while simultaneously working towards a comprehensive assessment of our municipal fleet.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

\$25,000 from the General Fund.

ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

Aligns with the City’s Climate Action Plan goals to reduce the number of vehicle trips and encourage bicycling.

CONTACT PERSON

Councilmember Rigel Robinson, (510) 981-7170
Angie Chen, Legislative Assistant

³ Results to date from the E-bike Monitoring Project, Walk Bike Berkeley EBike 1000 MPG Project, <https://sites.google.com/view/ebikestudy/results>

⁴ <https://berkeleyca.gov/sites/default/files/2022-01/Berkeley-Bicycle-Plan-2017-Executive%20Summary.pdf>

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<https://records.cityofberkeley.info/PublicAccess/api/Document/AXPO34zYAp1UNrq3gLsfj8tV9L8YSr7bjBvMSz4KidtpxUddx%C3%89pZLY38Dp50JWSyHRY%C3%89guTOJaaM8Fv%C3%89pkooA6I%3D/>