



Agenda Item No. (7)

To: Building and Operating Committee/Committee of the Whole
Meeting of February 25, 2021

From: David A. Rivera, Bridge Captain
Steven W. Miller, Deputy General Manager, Bridge Division
Denis J. Mulligan, General Manager

Subject: **REPORT ON BICYCLE SAFETY STUDY FOR THE GOLDEN GATE BRIDGE**

Recommendation

This is an informational report only and requires no action.

Summary

The use of bicycles as a means of transportation for commuting and recreation has been on the increase for some time and a share of the recent growth is attributable to the rising popularity of electric bicycles (E-bikes) in private use as well as new for-profit bike share programs such as Uber's Bay Wheels and Lyft's Jump bikes.

Steady advances in energy storage and propulsion systems technologies have made lighter, speedier, longer range and more affordable E-bikes available to a broader market and they are being used for transportation and recreation in ways that exceed the capabilities of traditional bicycles.

As a transportation agency, the Golden Gate Bridge, Highway, & Transportation District (District) wishes to maximize the utility of alternative modes of transportation such as bicycling while maintaining sharp focus on our overarching responsibility of ensuring maximum safety for all persons who use the Bridge for transportation, tourism, and recreation. In support of these goals and in light of the relatively new phenomenon of E-bikes at the Golden Gate Bridge, staff has engaged in a review of our bicycle safety policies and current conditions for bicyclists and pedestrians at the Bridge.

The following background highlights key findings of the review along with recommendations for safety enhancements going forward.

Background

Enhanced bicycle and pedestrian safety on and about the Golden Gate Bridge and its approaches has been the focus of numerous safety campaigns and projects over the years. These campaigns and projects have included such efforts as safety railings, improved signage, pavement markings, community outreach, traffic surveys, and traffic control, among others. While these campaigns and projects are credited with reducing the overall incidence of crashes and injuries on the sidewalks, it remains true that a person is more likely to leave the Bridge in an ambulance from the sidewalk than from the roadway.

In terms of liability, the District has successfully asserted the legal concept of design immunity when it comes to accidents occurring on the Bridge sidewalks. While it is the case that the Bridge dates in design to the 1930s and that the Bridge was never intended to carry the volumes of bicycle and pedestrian traffic experienced in modern times, the District continues to study and pursue safety improvements. This focus on safety, as well as the recent appearance of E-bikes, triggered District staff to undertake a broad review of sidewalk safety in 2019.

A primary product of this review is the attached *Bicycle Safety Study for the Golden Gate Bridge* (Study). The Study was a collaboration between District staff and an independent consulting group, Alta Planning + Design (Alta), to gather data and observations on current Bridge sidewalk conditions and use those data and observations to seek opportunities to increase bicycle and pedestrian safety while ensuring maximum utility and accommodation for bicycling on the Bridge for commute and recreational travel. As part of this effort, staff has engaged with the local bicycle community and vendors of bike share and rental bikes for feedback and recommendations during the process.

Key Findings

- A previous traffic survey (2015) observed peak daily totals of 8,147 pedestrians and 2,240 bicyclists using the East Sidewalk and 5,753 peak daily bicyclists using the West Sidewalk
- A speed survey conducted in June of 2019 estimated an overall average bicycle speed of 17mph on the west sidewalk and an overall average bicycle speed of 13mph on the East Sidewalk
- A review of sidewalk accident data for the period 2010-2019 revealed:
 - 241 documented bicycle collisions resulting in 258 injuries
 - 140 of the collisions (58 percent of total) resulted in at least one party being transported by ambulance to hospital
 - The most common type of bicycle collision on the Bridge sidewalks were solo bicycle collisions, followed by bike vs. bike, and then bike vs. pedestrian
 - Bicycle collisions were nearly equally distributed between East and West sidewalks
 - The highest number of collisions (10 collisions) occurred near light pole 26 on the West Sidewalk

Recommendations

The Study proposes specific recommendations in the following categories:

- Establish bicycle speed limits
- Continue signage and pavement markings delineating space
- Adopt master ordinance language permitting electric bicycles
- Continue to restrict other user groups and devices

Next Steps

Staff intends to engage in a public outreach (workshop) process over the coming months to seek stakeholder feedback on the Study findings and recommendations. Staff will return to the Board with a refined slate of recommendations inclusive of what is learned during the outreach process and recommend a formal public hearing to consider any significant changes to the existing Bridge sidewalk conditions.

Fiscal Impact

The public outreach phase will require minor expenditures for marketing materials, District staff time and fees for consultant services. These expenditures will be absorbed in the current Bridge Division's FY 20/21 Operating budget.

Attachment: Bicycle Safety Study for The Golden Gate Bridge

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