

LD 256 “An Act to Add Electric Bicycles to the Electric Vehicle Rebate Program”

Representative Zeigler, Senator Lawrence, and esteemed members of the Committee,
My name is Scott Vlaun, I am the Executive Director of the Center for an Ecology-Based Economy in Norway, Maine. I'm speaking today in support of LD 256.

For nearly ten years our organization has been raising awareness about twin crises of climate change and resource depletion that are already affecting our communities, as well as implementing various projects across the interrelated areas of Food, Shelter, Energy and Transportation to help adapt to and mitigate the crisis. We have always featured eBikes at our annual EV expo and have seen growing popularity of them in our community, but we are also aware of the financial barriers to ownership.

As I'm sure many of you know, transportation is by far the largest source of greenhouse gas emissions in our State, comprising over approximately 54% of total emissions. It is undoubtedly higher in our rural western Maine region where most people live farther than walking distance from any services, and our hilly, poorly maintained roads and sidewalks are less than conducive to safe walking, rolling or cycling. The issue is only exacerbated by the lack of public transportation.

To meet Maine's climate goals and build an equitable transportation system that meets the needs of all people, *active* transportation must play an important part. eBikes, especially in rural areas, provide a viable alternative to driving that is accessible to many more people than a traditional bicycle. To be clear, these are still bicycles, that provide healthy exercise, but with an assist to shorten distances and flatten hills. Counterintuitively, they also are safer on our rural roads that often have no or minimal shoulders, because the rider is travelling at a faster speed in relation to overtaking traffic, giving motorists more time to react. The same applies in downtown where I can easily keep up with the flow of traffic.

Personally, I have an 8.5 mile commute from my home to my workplace with one very long steep hill in the middle. I have travelled this route countless times on a traditional bike. Even on a super-light carbon fiber road bike, I still show up at my destination sweaty in need of a change of clothes and it is getting harder on my aging knees. On my class 3 electric cargo bike, my third eBike, I can ride it in my street clothes, in the same amount of time or even faster (around 25 minutes) and arrive invigorated but not sweaty and exhausted. My bike will also haul groceries, tools, haul trash to the transfer station and just about anything I would normally haul in my car. I can even haul a passenger on the back. I ride it throughout the year. I have eliminated thousands of miles of car travel on my eBikes and I'm much more likely to ride for utilitarian purposes than I would be on a traditional bike.

Make no mistake, most eBikes are not expensive toys. They are utilitarian machines that can provide reliable transportation to folks who can't afford to, or choose not to own a motor vehicle, as well as people that can't physically manage a commute on a non-electric bike. They can also take the place of a second car for families.

eBikes, especially in combination with a robust State active transportation plan and safe cycling education can and will play an important part of reducing vehicle miles travelled, increase equity in our transportation system, support community health, reduce wear and tear on our roads, and help Maine meet its critical climate goals.

I, and my organization, strongly support LD256, especially with amendments as suggested by the Bicycle Coalition of Maine to increase equity in the program. We encourage the committee to vote ought to pass on this bill.

Scott Vlaun
Center for an Ecology-Based Economy
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