

COMMUTE SEATTLE POLICY BRIEF: SEATTLE'S E-BIKE REBATE OPPORTUNITY



Photo credit: Tern GSD

Background

E-bike ridership continues to grow in Seattle. E-bikes make biking a easy commute option for more people by flattening hills and shortening travel times. With transportation being Seattle's top source of planet-warming emissions, e-bikes offer a more affordable solution than electric vehicles, without necessitating the same levels of charging infrastructure. E-bikes emit 97% less than electric vehicles and cost 40% less to operate. Seattle Commute Survey data shows that e-bikes appeal to a large segment of Seattleites, but affordability remains a significant barrier. Examples from Denver and elsewhere show the positive impact that e-bike rebates can have in changing behavior and promoting sustainable transportation.

Who Are E-Bike Riders in Seattle Today?

The 2022 Seattle Commute Survey asked 64,000 people who work in Seattle about how they move to and through the city. Our data found that e-bikes appeal to a wide segment of the population, and that affordability challenges remain. Specifically, e-bike commuters are:

- disproportionately **high-income**, highlighting the **affordability challenge**
- more representative of the population than pedal bike riders with **greater gender & race diversity**
- disproportionately **young**, reflecting future growth potential
- more **motivated by climate-impacts and health** when deciding how to get around
- far **less likely to drive-alone** for all trips



Denver's Success Story

In 2022, Denver launched a point-of-sale rebate for e-bike purchases. Denver residents can receive \$300 towards the purchase of an e-bike, or \$1,200 for low-income residents. An additional \$200 bonus is applied to purchases of cargo bikes. The success of Denver's program has inspired others around the country.

Key findings from Denver include:

- **4,739** vouchers were redeemed in 2022 for a cost of nearly \$4.8 million
- **71%** of recipients reported using their car less
- **100,000** vehicle miles were replaced every week, a 1,450 MT reduction in GHG
- **45%** of purchases were cargo bikes which replaced more car trips/week
- **Two-thirds** of funding went to low-income residents, who rode 50% more than higher-income residents

Policy Opportunities for Seattle

In 2023 the Washington State Legislature allocated \$5 million for a statewide e-bike rebate program that will provide \$300 towards the purchase of an e-bike, or \$1,200 for individuals making less than 80% of area median income. This is an exciting first step, and more opportunities remain:

- **Additional Funding:** Current funding for the statewide program is equivalent to the amount Denver exhausted in a single city in just nine months. Additional funding will be needed to meet demand.
- **Local Rebates:** Given higher costs and greater potential benefit in King County, additional funding could come from local governments. King County's 2023 Budget includes a feasibility assessment.
- **Cargo and Adaptive Bikes:** Bonuses for cargo-bikes and adaptive e-bikes will increase accessibility and multiply the impact of the rebate on reducing car trips.
- **Subsidize Accessories:** Rebates for accessories like child bike seats, bike locks, and helmets will allow more people to access the benefits of e-bikes.
- **Sales Tax Exemptions:** Exempting e-bikes and bike accessories from sales tax will further incentivize e-bike adoption, and would match existing tax exemptions for electric vehicles.
- **Retail Implementation:** The point-of-sale redemption process can be seamless with a wide-range of brick-and-mortar and online partner retailers.
- **Safe infrastructure:** Rebates must be paired with infrastructure investments in protected bike lanes, secure storage, and street-level bicycle parking rooms.
- **Bike Room Requirements:** Bike parking requirements for developments should reflect the boom in e-bikes and larger cargo bikes.

Contact Commute Seattle to learn more!

Noah An - Communications & Policy Director
noaha@commuteseattle.com
www.commuteseattle.com