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Subject: COTI Position on E-bikes on SUP

Date: May 31, 2024 at 5:22:35 PM EDT

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To: Vice Mayor Mike Miller

CC: The Sanibel City Council

From: Bill Millar, COTI President

Date: May 31, 2024

Re: COTI Position on E-bikes on the SUP

Thank you for giving COTI a chance to comment on the questions you raised at the April Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee about e-bikes on the SUP. We have a SUP Subcommittee chaired by Ed Holden that has been working on issues concerning safety on the SUP. While our work is not finished, I thought it would be good to give you our current thinking on e-bikes before the June 4 City Council meeting as I see the agenda includes a presentation from the Recreation Director on the results of a recent SUP use survey.

Below are COTI's answers to your questions, and attached is a draft interim position paper which contains some background on our thinking. We would stress that regardless of whether the rules on the use of the SUP are changed or not, we believe to improve safety on the SUP users must be educated about the rules and the rules must be enforced.

Thanks for your leadership on this issue, and let us know how we might be of further assistance.

1. Should we continue to allow Class 1 e-bikes on the shared-use paths?

COTI's answer: Yes.

2. Should Class 2 and 3 e-bikes also be allowed on the paths?

COTI's answer: No. The potential for serious crashes becomes too great.

3. Should e-scooters [electric personal assistive mobility devices] be allowed on the paths?

COTI's answer: No. The potential for serious crashes becomes too great.

4. Should the paths have speed limits, knowing that speed limits could cause some cyclists to move to the roads, creating safety issues?

COTI's answer: Yes. The safety of pedestrians including persons using wheelchairs and pedal bicyclists must be prioritized on the SUP.

5. If yes on speed limits in general, should different limits apply in different areas, for example, 20MPH on San-Cap, 15 MPH everywhere else?

COTI's answer: Different speed limits are ok if they are established after careful study and consideration of the safety of authorized SUP users.

6. Should we continue the current requirement that e-bikes riders have to be 18 years of age or older?

COTI's answer: Yes. If the age is lowered, then formal training and licensure requirements must be established.

May 31, 2024

Committee of the Islands (COTI)

Electric Bicycle (e-bike) or similar vehicle on the Sanibel (City) Shared Use Path (SUP)

Position Paper

Position

COTI approves the current legislation and prohibitions associated with e-bike operation on the SUP provided that safety, education and enforcement measures are taken to retain harmony with other modes of transportation currently in use. Should the Shared Use Path Master Plan (SUP Plan) prove inadequate in safety, education and enforcement, more extensive and aggressive measures should be taken within 6 months.

Background

The recent introduction of the e-bike to the Sanibel SUP disrupted the tenuous harmony among bicycles, pedestrian and approved electric devices like wheelchairs on the SUP. The original intent of the SUP was to establish pathways that could be enjoyed by pedestrians and bicyclists alike. Back in the early 1970s, four mothers formed the Sanibel Bike Paths Committee and rallied the community to sponsor a bike path to allow bike-riding children to safely navigate Periwinkle Way. Over the decades, this evolved into a large network of interconnected paved paths extending the length of the island.

The Sanibel Plan (Plan)

The Sanibel Plan, the Comprehensive Land Use Plan of the City of Sanibel, Florida provides guidance in the Transportation Element, section 3.3.3, linking the design and operation to Florida Statutes. The purpose of the Transportation Element, as identified by State statute, is to establish the desired and projected transportation system in the jurisdiction and plan for future motorized and non-motorized traffic. The Alternate Transportation Modes section solidifies the allowance for extensive use of non-vehicular transportation. "The City has an extensive system, more than 25 miles, of shared use path." This element also states "Planning for the future cannot afford to only react to the past," setting the stage to fortify the position that "Sanibel does not intend to hand over more and more of its living space to cars."

Summary of current regulations

Plan Objective 2, Policy 2.13 prohibits the use of mopeds and motorized scooters and requires enforcement. This needs to remain with the technology advancement of pedal assist designs that expands the opportunity to a population experiencing mobility challenges.

Only Class 1 e-bikes are permitted. Pedal assist technologies should remain capped at this level of advancement until the safety and operation safety risks are mitigated.

Riders must be 18 years or older. If this is changed to permit younger riders like other modes of transportation, adequate training and licensure should be developed.

Safety

The safe operation of any vehicle relies solely on the operator and respect for pedestrians is necessary. The Florida Department of Transportation's (FDOT) Target Zero program, Bicycle Safety, provides templates for embedding safety into traffic operations. Education and policing are necessary for e-bike safety. Improved safety can also come through better signage on the SUP and visible enforcement efforts of the rules.

Education

Education and training are essential to maintain awareness of a traveling population that varies throughout the days, weeks and seasons. Some education exists, but how effectively does it reinforce the e-bike-specific regulations? Routine interactions during bike rentals, police stops, and citizen polling should be increased and measures established to determine the effectiveness of current rules. Beginning with the Chamber of Commerce, every education, retail service and non-profit should have at least one event to promote the rules and regulations with rewards for active participation. One-time events like HOA meetings provide an opportunity to preach the advantages of safe operation and the ramifications of misbehavior. Online training material about proper use of the SUP should be developed and made available.

Enforcement

FDOT has a comprehensive evidence-based enforcement plan that applies data-driven tools to identify specific safety concerns. Collecting the appropriate data via programs established by law enforcement or a citizen surveillance approach similar to a Neighborhood Watch will compile information necessary to make informed enforcement decisions as part of a Sanibel SUP Enforcement Plan.

Technology can collect this information using handheld data-collection devices recording incidents or traffic patterns for analysis and corrective action. Fixed devices like cameras can be used to capture video files by incident analysis software.

In all cases, enforcement of existing rules and regulations needs to be amplified to ensure e-bikes do not contribute to unsafe situations.

Summary

The Plan is the foundation to build a comprehensive detailed safety program that starts with effective e-bike education and enforcement. This should start even before the plan is finalized to be the model program for SUP-wide safety upgrades. Technology will play an important role in providing meaningful and current data to support new safety programs. We cannot manage what we cannot measure so collecting data should begin now. Safety is paramount.