

Bicycling on Sidewalks

Seniors Commission
Pedestrian Safety Subcommittee
August 24, 2019

The Problems

The presence of bicyclists riding on sidewalks throughout Santa Cruz County poses a threat to senior pedestrians that discourages seniors from walking in our communities.

Bicyclists move faster than pedestrians and can appear before seniors can move out of their way. Bicyclists cannot stop in time to avoid a collision with pedestrians on the sidewalks when they are encountered unexpectedly. Bicyclists quickly overtake pedestrians from behind, before pedestrians can be aware of their presence. Bicycles have numerous hard metal protuberances, handlebars, pedals, derailleur gears and wheel attachments, that can cause serious injuries in a collision with pedestrians.

Sidewalks often have short and obscured sight lines, adjacent to buildings with doors that open directly onto the sidewalk, and at corners and intersections, where bicyclists often ride on the sidewalk to avoid traffic at the intersections. Pedestrians and bicyclists cannot see around obscuring hedges and fences at corners. When bicyclists ride through intersections on crosswalks, often against the flow of traffic, bicyclists place pedestrians, as well as themselves, at increased risk to being struck and injured.

Four incidents illustrate very close calls between bicyclists and pedestrians that fortunately did not result in collision and injuries. A senior couple walking on the sidewalk narrowly avoided being struck by a bicyclist approaching on the sidewalk at a corner obscured by vegetation. Another senior pedestrian had to step backwards quickly from the stairway onto a bridge to avoid being hit by two bicyclists riding on the very narrow sidewalk. In the third incident, a bicyclist and a pedestrian approached a corner obscured by vegetation and a passing bicyclist shouted at them to alert them to the presence of the other, thus avoiding a collision. Finally, a 101 year old women was forced off the sidewalk by a bicyclist riding on the sidewalk toward her.

Bicycle regulations in Santa Cruz County and municipalities

Local and state ordinances regulating bicycle riding on sidewalks in and around Santa Cruz County are inconsistent and contradictory.

Santa Cruz County Code has **no restrictions** on bicycling on sidewalks.

Santa Cruz City Code, 10.68.030, **Operation Upon Sidewalks Prohibited**, states: "No person shall ride a bicycle or electric bicycle upon sidewalks fronting and adjacent to commercial establishments, stores, or buildings used for business or commercial purposes. Every person operating a bicycle or electric bicycle upon a sidewalk where permitted shall yield the right-of-way to any pedestrians on such sidewalk."

The City of Capitola Municipal Code, 10.04.070 **Bicycles prohibited on sidewalk**, states: "No one may operate a bicycle upon a sidewalk."

The City of Watsonville Municipal Code, 4-1.02 **Bicycles prohibited on sidewalks**, states: "It shall be unlawful to ride a bicycle upon any sidewalk."

The City of Scotts Valley Municipal Code, 10.22.010 - Use of roller skates, skateboards, coasters, and similar devices restricted, states: "**No person riding in or on** or by means of roller skates or any skateboard, coaster, toy vehicle, **bicycle** or similar device, **shall go upon any roadway or sidewalk located in any city park**, unless the area is specifically designated for said devices and appropriately posted for the use."

California Vehicle Code 21100 states: "**Local authorities may adopt rules and regulations** by ordinance or resolution regarding all of the following matters: (h) Operation of bicycles, and, as specified in Section 21114.5 , electric carts by physically disabled persons, or persons 50 years of age or older, on public sidewalks."

California Vehicle Code 21200 states (a) **A person riding a bicycle** or operating a pedicab upon a highway has all the rights and **is subject to all the provisions applicable to the driver of a vehicle** by this division, including, but not limited to, provisions concerning driving under the influence of alcoholic beverages or drugs, except those provisions which by their very nature can have no application.

Rental Bicycles and Scooters

Threats to senior pedestrian safety posed by bicycling on sidewalks, have been significantly exacerbated with the addition of short-term rental bicycles (aka Jump Bikes) made available in the City of Santa Cruz. Bicyclists obtain these bicycles at various stations in the City of Santa Cruz and ride them to their destinations, where they are left to be picked up later by Jump Bike support staff.

Unfortunately, many of these rental bicycles are left in the middle of sidewalks or locked to street signs, where they create hazards for pedestrians and block pedestrian access to intersections and crosswalks. They are a particular hazard for those using mobility devices such as wheel chairs, mothers with children in baby carriages, and blind and visually impaired pedestrians. The handlebars of these bicycles stick out into the walkway, where they can catch and injure pedestrians unaware of their presence.

The Board of Supervisors is scheduled to consider a proposal from Public Works on proposed code revisions and a procurement process in support of "shared-mobility or mobility-as-a-service" (rental bicycles and/or scooters) using the public right-of-way. These documented threats to senior pedestrian safety posed by the presence of such devices on county sidewalks must be taken into consideration in the promulgating of rules and regulations for their use in the County.

Walkable Communities

The Sustainable Santa Cruz County Plan repeatedly emphasizes "Walkable Neighborhoods" as a desirable attribute of Santa Cruz County development. The perception of a "walkable neighborhood" is based to a large extent on the feeling of safety by pedestrians, especially senior pedestrians, while walking on the sidewalks of their own neighborhoods. The presence of bicyclists on those sidewalks, and impediments created by rental bicycles left on the sidewalk, discourage senior pedestrians from taking advantage of opportunities to walk to their local destinations.

Inconsistent regulations governing bicycles on sidewalks in the various jurisdictions of Santa Cruz County, coupled with lack of education for bicyclists on the rules of the road and applicable regulations, leads to confusion for pedestrians and bicyclists alike, that can contribute to the potential accidents.

It is in the best interest of Santa Cruz County residents and County officials to promulgate policies and regulations relating to bicycles on sidewalks that are consistent from jurisdiction to jurisdiction, and to educate the public about these rules and regulations.

Recommendation

We encourage the Board of Supervisors, in the interest of public safety and consistency with the Sustainable Santa Cruz County Plan, to review regulations concerning bicycling on sidewalks in the various jurisdictions in the County, consider additions to County Code to regulate bicycling on County sidewalks, as well as amendments to County bicycle ordinances to regulate shared-mobility or mobility-as-a-service devices on county sidewalks.