Washington State E-Bike & Electric Motorcycle Laws Quick Reference Guide

Sumner Traffic Safety Task Force – October 2025

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Key Distinction: *E-bikes* are treated as bicycles (operable pedals, ≤750W motor, classes 1–3*). Electric motorcycles* (e-motorcycles) are motor vehicles—no pedals or >750W, treated like gas motorcycles (RCW 46.04.330). Misclassification leads to enforcement issues amid rising complaints.

E-Bike Definition & Classes

Bicycles with 2–3 wheels, operable pedals, and electric motor ≤750W. Must have manufacturer label showing class, speed, and wattage (RCW 46.04.169, RCW 46.37.690).

Class	Motor Type	Top Speed	Key Rules
Class 1	Pedal-assist	20 mph	Allowed like bikes; any age.
Class 2	Throttle-assist	20 mph	Allowed like bikes; any age.
Class 3	Pedal-assist	28 mph	Age 16+; no passengers <16; speedometer required.

E-Motorcycle Definition & Requirements

Any 2–3 wheeled electric vehicle without operable pedals (or exceeding e-bike specs) is an e-motorcycle (RCW 46.04.330). Treated as full motorcycles:

- **License**: Motorcycle endorsement on driver's license (16+).
- **Registration & Insurance**: Required via DOL; license plate must be displayed (RCW 46.16A.200).
- **Equipment**: Headlight, taillight, brake light, turn signals, horn, mirrors, DOT-approved tires; emissions exempt as electric (RCW 46.37).
- **Helmets**: Required for riders & passengers <18 (RCW 46.37.530).

Where Can They Ride?

- **E-Bikes**:
    - **Roads/Bike Lanes**: All classes where bikes permitted; obey traffic laws (RCW 46.61.710).
    - **Shared-Use Paths**: Class 1 & 2 allowed; Class 3 prohibited unless adjacent to highway or locally permitted.
    - **Sidewalks**: Class 1 & 2 per local rules; Class 3 prohibited unless there is no alternative or locally allowed.

    - **Prohibited**: Limited-access highways; non-motorized natural surface trails unless signed open.

- **E-Motorcycles**:
    - **Roads**: Allowed on all public roads/highways (no bike lanes/paths unless signed). Obey traffic laws; no sidewalk use (RCW 46.61.705).
    - **Trails/Paths**: Prohibited on bike paths, shared-use paths, sidewalks, or non-motorized trails.
    - **Prohibited**: Bike lanes, sidewalks, limited-access facilities without motorcycle access.

Safety Requirements

- **E-Bikes**:
    - **Helmets**: Follow local bike helmet laws (e.g., King County: all ages). No statewide mandate (RCW 46.37.530).
    - **Age**: Class 1 & 2: Any age. Class 3: 16+ only.
    - **Equipment**: White front light, red rear light/reflector, side reflectors (dusk/dawn/night).
    - **Speed**: Obey posted limits
- **E-Motorcycles**:
    - **Helmets**: DOT-approved required for <18 (recommended for all).
    - **Age**: 16+ with motorcycle endorsement.
    - **Equipment**: White front light, red rear light/reflector, side reflectors (dusk/dawn/night), eye protection if no windshield.
    - **Speed**: Obey posted limits; lane splitting prohibited.

Enforcement Notes

- **E-Bikes**: Violations (no label, wrong path, underage on Class 3) = traffic infraction (base fine + up to $250 vulnerable user penalty).
- **E-Motorcycles**: Operating without license/registration/insurance = misdemeanor; equipment violations = infractions. Cite as motor vehicle; impound if unregistered.
- **Approach**: Verify pedals/label to distinguish; educate on differences to reduce complaints. Promote helmets for all.
- **Local Rules**: City code can have additional restrictions (e.g., sidewalk bans).