E-bikes and illegal e-bikes

Briefing for MSPs from Cycling UK in Scotland

E-bikes provide a healthy, low-cost and sustainable alternative to car travel, supporting everything from commuting and family transport to independent mobility and earning a living. With significant potential to improve public health, reduce emissions and tackle transport inequalities, e-bikes have an important role to play in Scotland's transport future.

Key points

- **E-bikes are covered by strict EAPC regulations** and any bikes which do not comply are illegal e-bikes and are classed as motorbikes and must be ridden accordingly. Road-legal e-bikes should not be confused with illegal e-bikes or electric motorcycles.
- **Police have the powers to seize illegal e-bikes** and have seized over 1000 illegal e-bikes and e-scooters in 2026. Stronger enforcement should target illegal vehicles, not penalise law-abiding cyclists.
- **E-bikes are treated as pedal cycles** which makes them an accessible, affordable and necessary form of transport to many people - including older and disabled people.

E-bikes in Scotland are safe

Standard, road-legal e-bikes conform to strict Electrically Assisted Pedal Cycle regulations. An EAPC e-bike must have:

- a maximum continuous rated motor power not exceeding 250W,
- pedals and motor assistance only while pedalling, and
- electrical assistance cutting out at 15.5mph.

EAPC compliant e-bikes are treated as pedal cycles and do not require registration, tax, insurance or a driving licence. However, by law riders must be over 14 years of age and all riders must follow the Highway Code rules.

E-bikes sold from reputable dealers are an incredibly safe and rigorously tested product. Cycling UK supports the industry's E-bike positive trust mark.

Illegal e-bikes and riding

Vehicles exceeding these EAPC limits are illegal e-bikes and generally fall under motor vehicle legislation - classed as motorbikes. Some electric motorbikes look similar to e-bikes and can be legally purchased but cannot legally be ridden on the roads unless registered and taxed, and the rider must have a UK driving license, insurance, and wear an approved helmet. Other e-bikes may be illegal because they have been modified or 'chipped' to enable the bike to move without pedal assistance or at a speed in excess of 15.5mph. These are modified e-bikes are also technically classed as motorbikes.

Police Scotland has the power to seize illegal non-EAPC compliant e-bikes and destroy them. 99 illegal e-bikes were seized during the week-long Operation Overlap in October 2026 contributing to the over 1000 illegal e-bikes and e-scooters seized so far in 2026

Cycling UK supports robust enforcement against illegal vehicles, rather than additional restrictions on compliant e-bikes. Negative publicity surrounding high-powered electric vehicles and illegally modified machines should not be conflated with compliant pedal-assist e-bikes. **Cycling UK urges that anyone**

communicating about illegal e-bikes or their use describe them as illegal e-bikes or illegally ridden motorbikes rather than as e-bikes.

E-bikes provide affordable and practical transport, changing travel behaviour

- E-bikes enable people to be physically active and travel actively. A 2022 systematic review of 14 studies found that e-cycling provides physical activity of sufficient intensity to deliver health benefits.
- E-bikes enable people to cycle more. A 2025 systematic review of ten Northern European studies found that access to an e-bike increased cycling by approximately 5km per person per day, while reducing car travel by 2.4km per person per day, compared with control groups.
- Cycling UK's 'Rural Connections' and 'Connecting Communities' have delivered over 1600 free e-cycle loans since 2022. Beneficiaries include:
    - Becks from Shetland who uses an e-bike to commute and to improve her mental health
    - Robbie from Moray who now commutes by e-bike instead of by car.
    - Tina, 68, from East Lothian who uses and e-bike to maintain her health and fitness, and regain independence for getting around her local area.

Who we are - We are the UK's cycling charity.
Our journey began in 1878, and we still ride towards the same goal.
We enable and inspire people from all backgrounds and abilities to experience cycling's joys and benefits. We speak up for all who cycle to make sure it's a safe and easy choice for everyone to travel, explore and have fun.
We are powered by our heritage and expertise, and the passion of our supporters, campaigners, partners and 70,000 members.