Travel Behaviour and Greenhouse Gas Impacts of the Saanich E-Bike Incentive Program

Final Report

Prepared for District of Saanich

March 2024
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Funding & Disclaimer

This research was funded by the National Science and Engineering Research Council of Canada (Alliance Grant #ALLRP 570926 - 21), District of Saanich, Community Social Planning Council (CSPC) of Greater Victoria, Capital Regional District (CRD), One Earth Initiative Society, and Vancouver Foundation. The views expressed in this report are those of the authors and do not represent the views of the project funders.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank the following people for offering valuable direction and advice on this project: Gurdiljot Gill, Elmira Berjisian, Fajar Ausri, Glenys Verhulst, Rebecca Newlove, Diana Gibson, Chelsea Power, Dagmar Timmer, and Matt Greeno. We would also like to acknowledge the time and valuable input from all the survey participants.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This study investigates the travel behaviour and greenhouse gas (GHG) impacts of the Saanich e-bike incentive program, which distributed 389 purchase rebates of $350, $800, or $1600 (income-conditioned) to eligible residents in late 2021 and 2022. A panel of 402 study participants (164 from the incentive program and 238 non-incentivized purchasers of conventional or electric bicycles from the region) was recruited and surveyed in three waves (near purchase, and then 3 and 12 months later) to study short- and long-term impacts of incentivized bicycle purchases.

We find that the program attracted a large portion of new or marginal e-bike purchasers (23% to 76%, increasing with rebate level). These purchasers were highly satisfied with their new e-bikes, and used them regularly (3 to 4 days and 30 to 70 km per week). The incentive recipients reduced their auto use by 49 km per week a year after purchase, due to direct substitution of e-bike trips and broader shifts in their weekly travel habits. Larger incentives were associated with greater auto travel reduction due to higher pre-purchase auto use. Income-conditioned incentives likely enabled low-income households to actualize latent preferences for less auto dependence.

The long-run reduction in GHG from travel for the Saanich e-bike incentive recipients averaged 16 kg CO₂e per week, increasing with rebate amount. The calculated marginal and non-marginal GHG abatement costs are $722 and $190 per tonne CO₂e, respectively, which is cost-competitive with other types of transportation subsidies, but unlikely to be cost effective on the international carbon market. GHG reduction is one but not the only benefit of increased e-bike adoption, which can also increase physical activity, reduce local air pollutant emissions, and reduce travel costs, among other benefits. Growing interest in e-bike incentive programs creates new opportunities to investigate these co-benefits, along with program effects in various scales and settings.