



The following statement was drafted, reviewed, and approved by the Bike The Woodlands Coalition Board of Directors in July 2021.

Permitting E-Bikes

Bike The Woodlands Coalition supports permitting class 1, 2, and 3 e-bikes on our shared-use pathways throughout The Woodlands. This position is supported by Texas state law¹ and aligns with policies seen in many other communities designated by the League of American Bicyclists as Bicycle Friendly Communities, including Houston (bronze status), Austin (gold status), and Boulder (platinum status).²

These other cities have embraced e-bikes as a valuable addition to their communities. For example, the Houston³ and Boulder⁴ bicycle share programs have added e-bikes for rental on their pathways. They recognize, as a Boulder County e-bike literature review determined, that “the electric-assist makes it possible for more people to ride a bicycle and generates more and longer trips. Many users feel safer riding an e-bike because of their increased confidence in getting through a wide intersection or navigating more challenging terrain.”⁵

Safety

It is critical to maintain the shared-use pathways in The Woodlands as a safe and enjoyable space for recreation, exercise, and transportation. The pathway system is a unique asset within the community and we should be encouraging residents and visitors of all ages and abilities to utilize it. Today, we see a mixture of strollers, skaters, runners, walkers (some with pets), and bicyclists on the pathways. To maintain safety, each individual user is responsible for their own safe behavior.

If e-bikes are permitted on the pathways, the expectations for personal responsibility and safe usage should remain unchanged. Just as it is incumbent upon drivers to behave safely on the roads, e-bike users should be expected to do the same on pathways.

¹ <https://statutes.capitol.texas.gov/docs/tn/htm/tn.551.htm>

² <https://www.bikeleague.org/bfa/awards>

³ <https://www.houstonbicycle.com/electric-bikes>

⁴ <https://boulder.bcycle.com/nav-2020/about/ebikes>

⁵ <https://assets.bouldercounty.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/e-bike-literature-review.pdf>

There are currently excellent expectations outlined on The Woodlands Township website:⁶

To promote a safe environment for all pathway users, The Woodlands Parks and Recreation Department recommends the following:

- *Show courtesy and respect to other pathway users at all times.*
- *Use the right side of the pathway.*
- *Pass other users on the left.*
- *Avoid putting yourself or others at risk.*
- *Keep dogs on a leash and clean up after them.*
- *Yield to wheelchairs, no matter who has the right of way.*

Guidelines for Bicyclists on Pathways:

- *Give audible warnings when passing pathway users.*
- *Ride at a safe speed.*
- *Helmets are recommended.*
- *Be predictable! Ride straight ahead.*

We believe a modification of the “safe speed” guidance to a 10-12 mph speed limit would explicitly set expectations to address pathway speed concerns. This change would align with recommendations from the Bicycle Pedestrian Master Plan⁷ and other comparable pathways that have explicit speed limits, including the Houston-based Spring Creek Greenway trail (10-15 mph), Austin pathways (10 mph),⁸ and Boulder pathways (15 mph).⁹

If a speed limit is established, it would be recommended to update the pathway stop signs to highlight the speed limit and other important safety policies and expectations. These updates could be combined with much-needed wayfinding improvements as outlined in the Bicycle Pedestrian Master Plan, Chapter 6, Wayfinding¹⁰ at an estimated cost of \$47-55K.

If an e-bike user prefers higher speeds, they may ride on the street, just as conventional cyclists may. However, we recognize that some users may not be comfortable riding on the street but desire higher-speed travel. Consequently, we encourage The Woodlands Township to move forward with infrastructure improvements as recommended in the Bicycle Pedestrian Master Plan, Chapter 5, The Pedestrian and Bicycle Network.¹¹ This includes on-street bicycle lanes, which can be designed to ensure comfort for all types of cyclists and improve safety for all roadway users. Helpful guidance on the design and development of such lanes can be found in the League of American Bicyclists' recommendations for protected bike lanes and cycle tracks¹² in our community. The addition of such improvements would help move our community from its Bronze status as a Bicycle Friendly Community to Silver status.

⁶ <https://thewoodlandstowship-tx.gov/279/Pathway-System>

⁷ <https://www.thewoodlandstowship-tx.gov/DocumentCenter/View/9180/Chapter-5-The-Pedestrian-and-Bicycle-Network>

⁸ <http://austintexas.gov/sites/default/files/files/Parks/Homepage/parkrules11-18-14.pdf>

⁹ <https://bouldercolorado.gov/transportation/electric-assisted-bikes-policy-review>

¹⁰ <https://www.thewoodlandstowship-tx.gov/DocumentCenter/View/9181/Chapter-6-Wayfinding-Program>

¹¹ <https://www.thewoodlandstowship-tx.gov/DocumentCenter/View/9180/Chapter-5-The-Pedestrian-and-Bicycle-Network>

¹² https://bikeleague.org/sites/default/files/bfareportcards/BFC_Spring_2020_ReportCard_The_Woodlands_Township_TX.pdf

In Chapter 7 of the Bicycle Pedestrian Master Plan¹³ and our bicycle friendly city report card,¹⁴ it is recommended that The Woodlands create a bicycle safety program. This would be another way to reinforce proper pathway safety behaviors through ongoing education campaigns. The program could include classroom lessons for Pre-K-12 students, activities integrated into community events (e.g. National Night Out, Community Safety Expo, Bike The Woodlands Day), ongoing social media campaigns by partner organizations (e.g. Bike The Woodlands Coalition), safety trainings for both motorists and pedestrians/cyclists (e.g. local police departments), and visitor education material (e.g. Visit The Woodlands).

Public Input

To gather feedback from residents, we suggest a combination of data-driven feedback methods kicked off with an 8-12 month pilot program allowing e-bikes on pathways, similar to the pilot program approaches employed in Austin (8 months),¹⁵ Boulder County (12 months),¹⁶ and the City of Boulder (12 months).¹⁷

A Boulder County literature review notably included the following insights: “Several studies show that trail users unfamiliar with e-bikes express a preference to not share the trail with them, but the majority did not notice that they were [already] sharing the trail with e-bikes. Similarly, once trail users were exposed to e-bikes, concerns about them decreased for many.”¹⁸ Therefore, to get the best feedback possible, residents should be given the opportunity to experience e-bikes first hand. This could be accomplished through designated demonstration days to test out e-bikes without purchasing one (e.g. National Night Out, Community Safety Expo, Bike The Woodlands Day).

While e-bike users are present on the pathways during the pilot period, we recommend gathering in-person feedback directly from users on pathways at peak times.

Interview questions could include: *Did you encounter an e-bike on the pathway? Was there a conflict on the pathway?* In addition, speed measurements could also be collected to determine the speed of bikers versus e-bikers.

The Woodlands Township Rangers often move around on foot or by electric golf cart. During this trial period, an e-bike could be supplied to the Rangers for their duties. This could be used to advertise the pilot program and also gather informal resident feedback.

Additionally, community input could be gathered through more traditional feedback methods, including public forums and public surveys.

¹³ <https://thewoodlandstowship-tx.gov/DocumentCenter/View/9182/Chapter-7-Programs-and-Policies>

¹⁴ https://bikeleague.org/sites/default/files/bfareportcards/BFC_Spring_2020_ReportCard_The_Woodlands_Township_TX.pdf

¹⁵ <http://www.austintexas.gov/page/e-bikes-and-e-scooters-austin-trails-pilot-program>

¹⁶ <https://www.bouldercounty.org/open-space/management/e-bikes/>

¹⁷ https://www-static.bouldercounty.gov/docs/E-bike_Info_Memo_Final_9-4-2013-1-201309191613.pdf

¹⁸ <https://assets.bouldercounty.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/e-bike-literature-review.pdf>

Moving Forward

Bike The Woodlands Coalition is interested and willing to assist in any way that may be helpful, including developing survey instruments, assisting with demonstrations, and helping to develop and share materials to advance youth and adult education about bicycle and pedestrian safety in our community. Please feel free to contact us at info@bikethewoodlands.org if you have questions regarding our comments above and if we can be of further assistance. Thank you for your consideration.

Kind regards,

Board of Directors, Bike The Woodlands Coalition



About Bike The Woodlands Coalition

As a non-profit organization, we are dedicated to building a community where bicycling is convenient and safe, connecting neighborhoods, business areas, parks, communities, and surrounding counties, and accommodating all facets of bicycling — fitness, recreation, and transportation — and riders of all ages and abilities.