





March 12, 2021

The Honorable Laura Friedman
 Chair, Assembly Committee on Transportation
 1020 N St, Room 110
 Sacramento CA 95814

Re: Support—AB 122 (Boerner-Horvath), Bike Safety at Stop Signs

Dear Chair Friedman,

The California Bicycle Coalition is pleased to sponsor Assembly Bill 122, the Safety Stop bill. On behalf of the undersigned organizations and our respective members across California, we submit this letter in strong support for the Safety Stop bill, AB 122. This much needed reform would authorize a person bicycling to treat a stop sign like a yield sign, giving right-of-way to other traffic at an intersection before proceeding safely through, but without the requirement to come to a full stop.

Bicycling is a key component of a sustainable transportation system, and the state should be doing everything in its power to encourage more people to bike in order to reduce driving and climate change impacts from transportation, improve public health, and improve air quality. Caltrans and local agencies have been investing significant resources in planning and building safe, connected, and protected bikeways on major streets, while also directing people bicycling onto side streets with slower, calmer traffic.

However, as bicycling continues to grow as everyday transportation for Californians, the main barrier people face is traffic danger on the road. Many people even choose to avoid the direct routes to their destinations, opting instead for side streets with less traffic, where they face frequent stop signs often placed deliberately to deter through automobile traffic. People on bikes desiring a reasonably convenient way to travel face two choices: legally use a dangerous, high-speed arterial; or use a quiet, safe side street and slow and yield carefully to get through intersections where you are legally required to come to a complete stop. For people who are tired after a long shift at work, or who may not be very athletic or fit, or whose only bike is old and inefficient, having to stop and restart repeatedly is not an insignificant deterrent to bicycling and research has found that it reduces the distance that people are willing to ride.

Studies indicate changing this law makes bicycling safer. It is well proven that bicycling away from high-speed traffic, as on a stop sign controlled side street, is much safer than bicycling on a higher-speed arterial. Two separate studies of Boise, Idaho, the capital city of the first state to implement a “safety stop” law, found a reduction in the frequency and severity of bicycle crashes after the law was implemented.

Recognizing the imperative of supporting convenient and safe bike travel, many communities have changed the law to allow people on bikes to treat stop signs as yield signs. California’s West Coast neighbors Oregon and Washington have already reformed their laws implementing Safety Stops. Idaho, Delaware, Arkansas, and Colorado have all passed versions of this law. Delaware, the state where the law has been in effect the longest after Idaho, saw a 23 percent reduction in crashes at stop sign controlled intersections. North Dakota, New Jersey, New York, Oklahoma, Utah and Virginia are all considering similar legislation this year.

Not only must we consider safety for all cyclists on the road, cyclists of color are often imposed with additional safety concerns. Studies and data show that there is rampant discrimination in who is detained and cited by law enforcement for bicycle infractions. Black people, and people of color, across California are disproportionately stopped and cited by law enforcement for vehicle code infractions, including when riding a bike. AB 122 will improve equity among California residents by providing clarity to the law and prohibit law enforcement from using harmless infractions as pretext to detain and cite, while also decreasing potentially lethal interactions with law enforcement. We must do all we can to protect our most vulnerable road users from a long history of over-policing and traumatic criminalization.

The Safety Stop does not change the normal rules of yielding at an intersection. People on bikes will still be required to yield to pedestrians and to other traffic in the intersection or approaching the intersection with the right-of-way. It simply legalizes common practice, which is to slow down as they approach an intersection, check for traffic, proceed if it is safe, and stop if it is not. In fact, drivers of vehicles often deliberately encourage people on bikes to continue past a stop sign without stopping. People on bikes are often prepared to stop, but the driver waves them through inappropriately. While polite, this leads to confusion that can be dangerous. It is better to change and clarify the law to reflect practice so that everyone knows what to expect for safety purposes.

A full stop on a bicycle requires significant extra work for the person bicycling to pedal back up to a normal riding speed. Therefore, a typical person bicycling safely will use reasonable judgment when there is no oncoming or crossing traffic at an intersection, and often roll through stop signs on side streets to maintain their momentum. Penalizing this safe bicycling practice with unnecessary enforcement at stop signs is counterproductive to the larger goal of increasing bicycling, and discourages people bicycling from using side streets if they are required to come to a full stop every block.

Transportation is in a period of flux as society moves away from motor vehicles and toward increased pedestrian, cyclist, and motor scooter traffic. Legalizing this safety stop for cyclists will make intersections much safer for cyclists, pedestrians, and motorists. AB 122 would make this reasonable practice of treating stop signs as yield signs while bicycling explicitly legal, ensuring that law enforcement do not unfairly penalize this behavior and discourage people from bicycling.

We urge your support of AB 122, the Safety Stop bill.

Sincerely,

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San Jose Bike Clinic

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