E-bikes combat climate change.

The Air Resources Board (ARB) distributes hundreds of millions of dollars each year to support the purchase of electric cars, plug-in hybrid cars, and hydrogen fuel cell cars. None of those dollars are allowed to support electric bikes, despite their many advantages.

• Electric bikes serve an important transportation purpose. Dozens of studies in the U.S. and Europe show that one-third to one-half of e-bike trips replaced car trips, including trips taking children to school or daycare. The average distance of those trips is nine miles.

• Incentives work. Like electric cars, e-bikes are prohibitively expensive for many Californians, especially low-income Californians. However, the necessary rebate to encourage e-bike adoption is very small; a relatively small public investment will go a long way. More than a dozen ongoing incentive programs including two in the United States are helping people switch from automobiles to e-bikes for many of their trips.

• Electric bikes have unique co-benefits. They make bicycling more accessible, as e-bike users are more likely to be older and female than regular bike users. Though it’s easy and fun to pedal an e-bike, their use results in more bicycling and greater health through physical activity.

• Cargo electric bikes offer an attractive alternative to gas-powered trucks or scooters. Models in use by UPS carry up to 400 lbs of cargo; some models carry as much as 750 lbs.

We propose two pilot programs for the 2019-2020 ARB budget to test incentives.

(1) Purchase incentives for deployment of electric bicycles to replace motor vehicle miles traveled, congestion, and emissions with a focus on travel between homes and transit connections, workplaces, and other regular commute destinations. Projects may include ancillary benefits such as subsidized helmets, safety classes, and verification activities, as necessary. At least 80 percent of the incentives shall be dedicated to low-income individuals, as defined.

(2) Technology development, demonstration, pre-commercial pilots, and early commercial deployments of cargo electric bicycles that reduce vehicle miles traveled, congestion, and emissions associated with moving cargo and passengers. Projects may include innovative cargo electric bicycle applications such as delivery, retail, and other service models.

Sources for all statistics cited on this page can be found at calbike.org/e-bikes.