

## EDITORIAL: Nanny State is circling irresponsible bike riders

There are two schools of thought on bicycle safety in California. One holds that the best way to make roads safer for cycling is to fill them with cyclists. The other is less idealistic. California roads, this argument goes, weren't built for sharing, and human bodies weren't built to withstand two tons of steel at 60 miles per hour on asphalt. Therefore, bicyclists should be shielded via bike lanes and protective gear.

State Sen. Carol Liu tends toward the latter viewpoint. On the heels of a new law requiring motorists to stay at least 3 feet from bikes on roadways, the La Cañada-Flintridge Democrat introduced a bill last week to fine bicyclists \$25 if they are caught riding without helmets. The law also mandates reflective clothing at night.

Bicycle advocates hope she'll backpedal. Helmets, they assert, are a big reason why American roads have so many fewer cyclists than Europe. Helmets feel clunky and flatten hair-dos and make bicycling feel like a production. State law already requires kids under 18 to wear them; shouldn't adults decide for themselves?

Liu's compelling retort is that 9 out of every 10 bicyclists killed in accidents nationwide in 2009 weren't wearing helmets. In 2012, the last year for which figures were available, California had 124 bike deaths, more than any other state.

Saving 90 percent of those lives would be an achievement. But is that achievement worth another new law and a regressive fine? Liu should look at helmet incentives first. And traffic authorities should do more to enforce existing laws.

As cycling has surged in California cities, motorists are more cognizant of alternative traffic. But urban streets like Fresno's have become an obstacle course of bicyclists ignoring stop signs, riding on sidewalks, pedaling down one-way streets the wrong way — and other dangerous and stupid things..

Nationally, more than a quarter of bicycle deaths involve drunk cyclists, a rate that hasn't budged since the 1980s, even as alcohol-impaired driving has fallen. We need to ramp up enforcement against these two-wheel scofflaws.

And before we impose \$25 fines that could disproportionately ding low-income cyclists, perhaps Liu should explore federal grants or cap-and-trade funding to expand helmet subsidies, the way municipalities subsidize composting and drought-tolerant landscapes.

Mandating helmets may be the only answer. But there's room for other approaches first. Let's put it another way: All of the cyclists who don't want a helmet law ought to ride more responsibly. This means stop blowing through every stop sign and red light in Valley.

If you're going to keep riding with the attitude of a spoiled 5-year-old — I'm special, traffic laws don't apply to me — then lawmakers have no choice but to go Nanny State and require helmets.