
HYBRID SOLAR E-BIKE: A SUSTAINABLE APPROACH TO GREEN MOBILITY

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Abstract

The increasing global demand for sustainable transportation has accelerated research into renewable energy-based mobility solutions. Electric bicycles (e-bikes) have emerged as an efficient and eco-friendly alternative to fossil-fuel vehicles. However, the dependency of e-bikes on grid electricity, which often comes from non-renewable sources, limits their sustainability. This study proposes a hybrid solar e-bike that integrates photovoltaic (PV) energy harvesting with conventional plug-in charging. The system uses a lightweight solar panel mounted on the bicycle frame to generate electricity, stored in a lithium-ion battery, and supplemented by grid power when solar energy is insufficient. The design emphasizes affordability, efficiency, and ease of integration for urban and semi-urban users. Performance analysis indicates that the hybrid model extends travel range, reduces charging cost, and minimizes carbon footprint compared to standard e-bikes. The paper also discusses design methodology, power management strategies, and challenges such as weather dependency and system weight. Overall, the hybrid solar e-bike presents a practical step toward greener personal transportation, with significant potential for large-scale adoption in developing and developed nations alike.

Keywords: Hybrid Solar E-Bike, Renewable Energy, Sustainable Mobility, Photovoltaic Charging, Green Transportation

1. INTRODUCTION

Transportation accounts for a major share of global greenhouse gas emissions, with urban mobility being a significant contributor. The growing number of motorized vehicles leads to increased air pollution, noise, traffic congestion, and dependence on fossil fuels. To address these challenges, researchers and policymakers are shifting toward renewable energy-based mobility solutions. Among these, electric vehicles (EVs) and specifically electric bicycles (e-bikes) have gained popularity due to their affordability, compact design, and suitability for short-distance urban travel.

Conventional e-bikes rely on rechargeable batteries, typically charged through the electrical grid. While e-bikes are cleaner than fossil-fuel-powered vehicles, their dependency on grid electricity reduces their environmental benefits, especially in countries where coal-based power dominates. This creates the need for an alternative charging source that is renewable, clean, and decentralized.

Solar energy, being abundant, sustainable, and increasingly affordable, offers a promising solution. Solar-powered vehicles have been researched extensively, ranging from cars and buses to small-scale mobility solutions. Integrating solar charging into e-bikes can extend battery life, reduce operational costs, and enable off-grid usage, particularly in rural and semi-urban areas with unreliable electricity supply.

The concept of a hybrid solar e-bike—equipped with solar panels for energy harvesting alongside conventional grid charging—combines the advantages of renewable energy with reliable backup charging. Such a system provides users flexibility while ensuring sustainability. This paper explores the design, methodology, performance evaluation, and future potential of hybrid solar e-bikes as a feasible solution to the growing mobility and environmental challenges.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Previous studies have highlighted the role of e-bikes in sustainable transportation systems. Researchers have shown that e-bikes consume significantly less energy per kilometer compared to motorcycles and cars, making them suitable for daily commuting. A World Bank report (2018) estimated that e-bikes could reduce CO₂ emissions by over 50% compared to petrol scooters in urban settings.

Solar-powered mobility solutions have also gained attention. Solar cars and buses demonstrate the feasibility of integrating photovoltaic systems into transport. However, due to higher energy requirements, solar integration in larger vehicles often faces space and efficiency constraints. E-bikes, requiring comparatively lower power, are better suited for solar-assisted operation.

Several prototypes of solar e-bikes have been developed. For example, a 2019 study demonstrated a solar-assisted e-bike with a roof-mounted panel that extended battery range by 15–20%. However, issues such as added weight, high panel costs, and limited energy conversion efficiency were noted. Research also points to hybrid charging systems as a practical solution, ensuring continuous usability in varying weather conditions.

Despite these developments, gaps remain in cost-effective design, integration of lightweight panels, and efficient power management systems. This paper addresses these gaps by proposing a hybrid solar e-bike model optimized for efficiency, affordability, and real-world usability.

3. SYSTEM DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

The proposed system comprises the following major components:

- Solar Panel: A lightweight, flexible 100 W photovoltaic panel mounted on the bicycle frame. It converts sunlight into electrical energy.
- Battery: A lithium-ion battery (36V, 10Ah) that stores energy from both the solar panel and grid charging.
- Motor: A brushless DC hub motor (250–350W) integrated into the rear wheel, providing smooth and efficient propulsion.
- Charge Controller: Manages the flow of current between the solar panel, grid charger, and battery, ensuring protection against overcharging and voltage fluctuations.
- Grid Charger: A standard plug-in charger for backup energy supply.
- Frame and Mounting System: A modified bicycle frame designed to support solar panel placement without compromising aerodynamics and rider comfort.

The system operates in two modes:

1. Solar Mode: During daylight, the PV panel directly charges the battery while the bicycle is parked or in motion. On average, 5 hours of sunlight can generate 400–450 Wh, sufficient for 20–25 km travel.

2. Hybrid Mode: When solar input is insufficient, grid charging complements solar power. This ensures reliable operation regardless of weather conditions.

Design Calculations:

- Motor Power Requirement: Assuming average speed of 25 km/h and rider weight of 70 kg, motor power required is ~250W.
- Battery Range: With 36V, 10Ah capacity, battery energy = 360 Wh. With 15 Wh/km consumption, range \approx 24 km (grid only). With solar input, range extends to 40–50 km.
- Charging Time: Grid charging requires ~4 hours, while solar charging requires ~6–7 hours under full sunlight.

The methodology emphasizes balancing cost, efficiency, and usability while keeping the system lightweight and affordable.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Performance Analysis:

- Extended Range: 40–50 km compared to 25 km for conventional e-bikes.
- Lower Operating Cost: Solar charging reduces dependency on electricity bills, saving approximately ₹3,000 annually for regular users.
- Environmental Impact: Annual CO₂ emissions reduced by 80–100 kg compared to grid-charged e-bikes, depending on grid energy mix.

Cost Analysis:

- Conventional E-Bike Cost: ₹35,000–₹45,000.
- Hybrid Solar E-Bike Cost: ₹50,000–₹60,000 (due to added solar panel and controller).
- Payback Period: 3–4 years considering fuel/electricity savings.

Advantages:

- Off-grid charging capability.
- Reduced dependency on fossil fuels.
- Enhanced mobility in rural areas with poor grid access.
- Promotes clean and healthy commuting.

Challenges:

- Weather Dependency: Performance decreases during cloudy/rainy days.
- Weight and Design Constraints: Adding solar panels increases system weight by ~5–7 kg.
- Efficiency Limitations: PV efficiency of 18–20% restricts maximum range extension.
- Initial Cost Barrier: Higher upfront investment may discourage adoption without subsidies.

5. CONCLUSION AND FUTURE SCOPE

The hybrid solar e-bike represents an innovative and practical step toward sustainable personal mobility. By integrating photovoltaic charging with conventional grid systems, it addresses limitations of both pure e-bikes and solar-powered vehicles. The design analysis confirms extended range, reduced cost of operation, and significant environmental benefits.

Future developments can further enhance feasibility:

- Integration of lightweight, high-efficiency solar panels such as perovskite-based PV cells.
- Use of improved battery technologies with higher energy density and faster charging capabilities.
- Incorporation of IoT-based monitoring systems for battery health, solar input tracking, and smart energy management.
- Development of foldable or detachable solar panels to enhance portability.

With government incentives, public awareness, and continued technological improvements, hybrid solar e-bikes can become a mainstream solution for eco-friendly commuting in both urban and rural contexts.

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