

Electric Vehicle Charging in Wales

Economy Infrastructure and Skills Committee Inquiry.

Sustrans Cymru

Sustrans is the charity making it easier for people to walk and cycle. We connect people and places, create liveable neighbourhoods, transform the school run and deliver a happier, healthier commute.

Summary

The advancement of Electric Vehicles (EVs) present an important opportunity to reduce some of the environmental and social impacts of motorised vehicles, powered by traditional combustion engines. However, EVs do have significant disadvantages, and Sustrans cautions policy-makers against a 'rush' to EVs.

Our overall position can be summarized as 'fewer cars, not newer cars'. Yes, electric vehicles will play a crucial role in the decarbonization of Wales, particularly in rural parts of the country. But EVs are not an environmental 'silver bullet' and still contribute to harmful levels of pollutions. Further, if Wales fails to tackle the amount of vehicles on our roads, issues like congestion, pavement parking, road safety, and declining levels of physical activity will remain unchallenged.

Sustrans would urge Welsh Government to be cautious about the levels of public subsidy given to this new technology. Whilst we would support investment in EV charging points, particularly in rural areas; there are more pressing and needed investments in transport that would deliver fairer outcomes.

Lastly, Sustrans remains concerned at the growing examples of poorly sited charging points, particularly in urban areas. Whether it be taking space away from pedestrians to widen roads, or illegal pavement parking, the 'space for people' is continually being encroached by the car and the need to provide space for motor vehicles. Welsh Government must not facilitate a situation whereby charging points take space away from people, obstructing pavements. Whilst this is a concern to the general population, it is of particular concern to individuals who experience mobility issues – be it wheelchair users, the blind and visually impaired people, or indeed parents or carers with prams.

If Welsh Government adopted an approach to transport consistent with the Well-being of Future Generations Act it would seek to promote walking more widely as the primary mode of transport for short journeys alongside cycling; followed by public transport; taxis and shared/pool cars; and finally privately owned cars. The majority of short journeys under 5 miles are still undertaken in the car, and the opportunity for significant modal shift from privately owned cars to more sustainable modes – ideally walking and cycling – still remains.

For some, the car will be a necessary mode of transport – even for shorter journeys – and here lies the opportunity to support the greater use of EVs. But for most, other more sustainable modes of transport should be encouraged and supported.

Evidence and Context

1. People in towns and cities across Wales are breathing in levels of pollution that are illegal and harmful for their health.
 - 1.1. This year the average concentration of carbon dioxide (CO₂) in the atmosphere has hit its highest level in 800,000 years.
 - 1.2. Emissions from transport in Wales have only decreased by 3 per cent since 1990.
 - 1.3. To date, decision-makers as well as policy in Wales has largely focused on tackling NO_x emissions. However, motor vehicles don't just emit pollutants (nitrogen oxide or NO_x) from combustion engines burning fuel; 45% of pollutants come from break and tyre dust.
 - 1.4. The World Health Organisation states that there is no safe limit for break and tyre Particulate Matter and research shows that these PMs are the most dangerous pollutant to our health.¹
 - 1.5. Whilst Electric Vehicles will be an important part of a decarbonised transport system, policy makers shouldn't see EVs as a 'silver bullet'
 - 1.6. This only goes to show that whilst Electric Vehicles have a role to play for people who live in rural areas or have mobility issues; they mustn't be seen as the silver bullet when it comes to decarbonising transport.
2. Modal shift from motorised transport to cycling and walking can have a positive effect on air quality as well as reducing congestion and improving public health through increased physical activity.
 - 2.1. Research by the Royal College of Physicians notes that continued focus on controlling urban air pollution through technical measures to abate vehicle exhaust provides less benefit for public health than focusing on measures that increase sustainable transport - active travel and public transport (where active travel is often part of the journey).²
 - 2.2. It is however important to realise that unless road space freed up by the shift to active travel is removed from use by the motor car it is likely to fill again due to release of suppressed demand for relocation.
 - 2.3. Active travel contributes more to the Well-being of Future Generation (Wales) Act's goals than any other mode of transport. It aids the economy by reducing congestion, currently estimated to cost Wales £2bn per annum, and by improving the health of the workforce. It contributes to resilience by reducing emissions, to equality by providing a low cost transport mode; it helps community cohesion by enabling people to interact more easily, similarly making it easier and cheaper for people to

¹ [http://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/ambient-\(outdoor\)-air-quality-and-health](http://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/ambient-(outdoor)-air-quality-and-health)

² Royal College of Physicians, 2016 Every breathe you take. The lifelong impact of air pollution. London: RCP. 7. Kubesch, N., de N

involve themselves in cultural activities; and it has a global impact by helping to combat climate change, and makes Wales a healthier country.³

3. A Decarbonising Transport in Wales report, published by the Institute of Welsh Affairs, argues that “it is only by changing its relationship with the automobile that Wales can hope to meet its environmental targets”. The report acknowledges that transport in Wales is dominated by roads, and that most emissions emanate from the private car.
 - 3.1. To combat this Welsh Government should introduce a default 20MPH speed limit in built-up areas, this will reduce emissions because it will be a smoother passage-through rather than a lot of accelerating and braking, as well as making our urban areas more pleasant to walk and cycle around.
 - 3.2. The deal with the UK Government has resulted in Welsh Government taking responsibility for rail infrastructure in Wales for the first time. This will allow greater flexibility and the possibility of greater uptake by people who wish to move away from the reliance on motor vehicle, in creating a truly integrated public transport and active travel system, people will find the decision to leave their car at home a much easier one.
4. Similarly, another recent paper, which modelled pathways to lower carbon emissions in Scotland, argues that energy consumption and pollutant emissions from transport are greatly influenced by lifestyle choices and socio-cultural factors. Policies to change travel demand patterns can be implemented sooner, and will impact more significantly, to achieve emissions reduction.
 - 4.1. If Wales is to make its contribution to worldwide efforts to stave off the very worst effects of climate change, we need to act fast on Welsh transport policy, and to urgently rebalance transport investment patterns.
 - 4.2. We need to prioritise demand management and behaviour change measures above our reliance on technological fixes, and to cease investment in transport solutions that serve an historic and damaging paradigm.

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³ https://www.iwa.wales/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/IWA_Decarbonising_Transport-4.pdf