



City chargers forward with plan to encourage electric vehicles

by Kate Cagle, *Santa Monica Daily Press* Staff Writer

Electric car drivers in Santa Monica can look forward to seeing the City triple the number of public charging stations in the next three years, now that the City Council has approved an aggressive plan to encourage drivers to shift to electric vehicles (EVs) to reduce carbon emissions in the city.

The plan focuses on expanding charging spaces away from the downtown area and into neighborhoods to encourage more apartment tenants to abandon their gas-powered cars.

The expansion will bring chargers to a crucial yet neglected market for electric cars – almost three-quarters of Santa Monicans are renters.

“We are moving forward on all fronts,” Senior Sustainability Analyst Garrett Wong told the Council Tuesday.

The \$2.4 million plan calls for expanding the network of charging ports from just under 100 to 300 by 2020 – they will be installed along curbs, hooked up to LED streetlights and placed in parking lots.

To encourage private development, the plan increases requirements for EV-ready parking spaces in new construction and offers rebates to support new infrastructure. For the first time, staff will explore fees to recoup the cost of electricity and maintenance to the city.

The plan has a long-term goal of 1,000 chargers by 2025.

The City Council hopes the expansion will encourage more residents to buy EVs – aiming to increase ownership from 2 percent to 15 percent by 2025, which would result in 9,000 fewer gas cars on the road. In emissions terms, it would save 26,000 metric tons of carbon dioxide.

“I just came back from the U.N. climate conference in Bonn.

I can't emphasize enough the importance of doing this fast and furiously," a jet-lagged Mayor Ted Winterer said at the Nov. 14 meeting. Earlier in the night he warned about the "imminent and dangerous impacts of too much carbon in our atmosphere."

The conference was the first time the U.S. had not paid to participate in the global climate talks. Instead, an alliance of local governments, businesses and universities attended the conference – the group, calling itself "America's Pledge," has an economy larger than Japan and Germany combined.

"I thought it was important to be there to take part in the U.S. presence and show the rest of the world that while the federal government is not pursuing these policies, that the measures various cities and states are taking will very much help us reach the standard set by the Paris Agreement," Winterer said, echoing the words of Governor Jerry Brown in Germany who reassured activists "we are doing real stuff in California."

The plan anticipates the introduction of lower cost, long-range EVs such as the Tesla Model 3, 2018 Nissan Leaf, and Chevy Bolt will increase demand for charging in Santa Monica. Cities and utility providers have developed rebate programs to encourage drivers to switch to electric.

The City plans to install new, smart charging stations to help city staff monitor usage and eventually develop a fee schedule for charging that will help pay for system maintenance.

The smart chargers will allow the City to charge penalty fees to drivers who leave their electric cars in parking spots after they have finished charging.

"We need people to move off of these chargers," Councilmember Sue Himmelrich said, who drives an electric car and charges it nightly at her home in the North of Montana neighborhood.

Himmerlich says she often charges her car while running errands around town. "It's really frustrating to know there's a charger there that's fully charged a car and you can't get to it."

The Office of Sustainability worked extensively with local group Drive Clean Santa Monica to draft the plan, which is organized by former City Councilman Kelly-Richard Olsen.

"This overall goal is unprecedented, and if achieved, it will be the most significant thing any City Council in the history of Santa Monica has done to reduce pollution in our community," Olsen said after the Council approved the plan.

“This is going to be an incredible challenge for the City. But, we are confident that under the City Manager Rick Cole’s leadership, his talented and dedicated staff can pull this feat off.”

The plan was passed by Winterer, Himmelrich, Councilmember Tony Vazquez, and Mayor pro-tempore Glean Davis.

Councilmember Terry O’Day excused himself from the discussion because he is Vice President at EVgo, an electric vehicle charging company. Councilmembers Kevin McKeown and Pam O’Conner were not present at the meeting.

The Associated Press contributed to this report.

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